

BUSINESS CERTIFICATIONS FOR DIVERSE ENTREPRENEURS



Navigating certification programs can provide valuable pathways for businesses owned by minorities, women, and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.

This guide introduces **three key certifications**, each designed to open doors to new contracting opportunities, training, and support networks for qualified small businesses.

DBE

The **Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)** program, which is federally funded and run by IDOT's IL-UCP, offers a single certification that grants businesses access to federally funded projects statewide.

Who accepts this? The DBE is recognized by most corporations, agencies, and organizations throughout the state, as well as nationally.

What are the requirements? At least 51% owned and controlled by individuals who are socially/economically disadvantaged.

Where can I get it? You can apply through one of the following agencies: IDOT, Pace, Metra, CTA, or the City of Chicago.

BEP

The **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)** is a state certification program, facilitated by the IL Commission on Equity and Inclusion (IL CEI).

Who accepts this? The BEP certification is recognized by many IL municipalities and organizations, aligning with their supplier diversity initiatives.

What are the requirements? Must be at least 51% owned and controlled by a minority, woman, or person with a disability, with an owner who is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, and have annual gross sales under \$150 million.

Where can I get it? You can apply through the IL CEI directly.

***Note:** BEP also offers a **fast track certification** for businesses who already have the DBE certification, or a certification through one of its partner organizations.

SBA 8(a)

The **US SBA's 8(a) program** is a certification program that helps socially and economically disadvantaged businesses gain federal contracting opportunities, along with training and support.

Who accepts this? The 8(a) certification makes your business eligible for exclusive federal contracts, including sole-source and competitive set-asides reserved for SBA program participants.

What are the requirements? To qualify for the 8(a) program, a business must be small, be 51% owned by socially/economically disadvantaged U.S. citizens, have a personal net worth under \$850,000, AGI under \$400,000, and total assets under \$6.5 million.

Where can I get it? Directly through the US Small Business Administration.