



SBA 8(a) Certification Program for Economically Disadvantaged Individuals – Federal

If you're a small business owner who belongs to an underserved group, you may be eligible for certain business certifications that can help you access more government contracts and private-sector opportunities. The federal government's goal is to award at least 5% of all federal contracting dollars to small, disadvantaged businesses each year.

What are the Steps?

1. Determine if Your Business Qualifies
2. Prepare
3. Register on SAM.gov
4. Create Your Certify Account
5. Send a Message to the Small Business Administration (SBA)
6. Add Contributors
7. Edit Application Sections
8. Upload Documents
9. Submit Your Completed Application

The following information was sourced from the [Small Business Administration](#) website.

SBA 8(a) Business Development Program

The SBA has established a business development program, which is known as the 8(a) Business Development program. This nine-year program was created to help firms owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals that have been in business for at least two years and want to expand their footprint in the federal marketplace.

The 8(a) certification does not guarantee contract awards, but it is a dynamic tool to pursue and capture new opportunities from the government.

Certified firms in the 8(a) program can:

- Efficiently compete and receive [set-aside and sole-source contracts](#)
- Receive one-on-one business development assistance for the nine-year term from dedicated business opportunity specialists focused on helping firms grow and accomplish their business objectives.
- Pursue opportunity for mentorship from experienced and technically capable firms through the SBA Mentor-Protégé program.
- Connect with procurement and compliance experts who understand regulations in the context of business growth, finance and government contracting.
- Pursue joint ventures with established businesses to increase capacity.
- Qualify to receive federal surplus property on a priority basis.
- Receive free training from SBA's [7\(j\) Management and Technical Assistance program](#)



The 8(a) certification qualifies your business as eligible to compete for the program's sole-source and competitive set-aside contracts. The government authorizes sole-source contracts to 8(a) participants for up to \$7.5M for acquisitions assigned manufacturing [North American Industry Classification System \(NAICS\)](#) codes and \$4.5M for all other acquisitions. Entity-owned 8(a) program participants are eligible for sole-source contracts above these thresholds, but the Department of Defense requires approval of a formal justification if the 8(a) sole-source contract exceeds \$100M; all other federal agencies require approval for sole-source 8(a) contract actions that exceed \$25M.

8(a) program participants are eligible to compete for contract awards under other socio-economic programs or small business set-asides they qualify for.

Step 1: Determine if Your Business Qualifies

To qualify for the 8(a) program, businesses must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be a small business. To learn if your business qualifies as a small business, use the [SBA Size Standards Tool](#). By answering a few questions, the tool will help you establish whether or not your business meets this criteria.
- Have not previously participated in the 8(a) program.
- Be at least 51% owned and controlled by U.S. citizens who are socially and economically disadvantaged.
- Have a personal net worth of \$750,000 or less, adjusted gross income of \$350,000 or less, and assets totaling \$6 million or less.
- Demonstrate good character.
- Demonstrate the potential for success such as having been in business for two years.

Step 2: Prepare

- Visit certify.SBA.gov to utilize the *Should I Apply?* Tool
- Download and complete the [8\(a\) Initial Application Document Checklist](#)
- Reach out to your local [Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#) to learn more about the 8(a) Business Development Program.

Step 3: Register on SAM.Gov

- Visit SAM.gov and click "Create an Account" in the top right to create an Individual Account
- You will be issued a Unique Entity ID (UEI) once you register. Your UEI will be located on your entity registration record.
- Fill in all required fields and submit your information. Within 72 hours you will receive an email notifying you whether your account has been approved. Your application must be approved before continuing to the next step.

Step 4: Create Your Certify Account

- To register on [Certify](https://certify.SBA.gov), you must be the business owner.



Certifying Your Business - Federal

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- You will need your UEI number (see Step 3), Tax ID Number (TIN), Employer Identification Number (EIN) or Social Security Number (SSN), Marketing Partner Identification Number (MPIN) and company structure (e.g., corporation, LLC, sole proprietorship) to register and link your [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) profile to [Certify](https://certify.sba.gov).
- Watch your email for a notification from [Certify](https://certify.sba.gov) that your account has been created. The email link you receive will expire in 24 hours.

Step 5: Send a Message to the SBA

- Once you have been assigned an SBA analyst, you will be able to contact them by clicking the “Messages” tab found in the application menu on your application.
- This is the time for you to ask any questions about your application status.

Step 6: Add Contributors

- You may want business partners or board members to be able to contribute information on the application. You will need to provide them access by adding them as contributors.
- Contributors do not have access to the owner’s application information and contributors (where multiple) cannot see each other’s information.

Step 7: Edit Application Sections

- The application process allows you to review and make any changes you need before submission. Take the time to review and correct any information during this step.

Step 8: Upload Documents

- Document must be PDF files with the file named as follows: document title year (ex. W2_2021)
- Files must be 25MB or less
- Do not password protect any files you upload. Reviewers must be able to access the documents for review.

Step 9: Submit Your Completed Application

You will not be able to edit your application after submission unless SBA requests more information.

- Select “Sign and Submit” from the dashboard to send your application to the SBA. Your application can only be submitted when all sections have been completed.
- Watch your email for correspondence regarding your application.