

Latino Businesses in Oregon & MWBE Certifications: Understanding the Barriers Faced by Latino Business Owners in Applying for and Obtaining the MWBE Certification

Joanna Bernstein, Ph.D. student in Planning & Public Affairs, University of Oregon

Dr. Gerardo Francisco Sandoval, Associate Professor of Planning, Public Policy, & Management, University of Oregon

Executive Summary

This report focuses on the state of Latino businesses and the Minority and Women Business Enterprise Certification (MWBE), which is issued to qualifying businesses in the private, for-profit sector in the state of Oregon. Oregon's Latino population has been growing rapidly since the early 1990s, with Latinos now comprising 12.5% of the total state population (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). There has also been a rapid increase in the number of Latino businesses in Oregon, with the number of Latino-owned businesses increasing by 144% between 2002 and 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006, 2015). Despite the growth in Oregon's Latino population and business community, a relatively small number of Latino owned small businesses have the MWBE certification. Currently, only 1.2% of all for-profit businesses owned by Latinos in the state of Oregon have the MBE certification. This report's goal is to understand the specific barriers encountered by Latino business owners in Oregon when applying for the MBE certification. To do this, we spoke with government and non-government organizations that help business owners with the application process. We asked them where difficulties in the application process most frequently arise. We also conducted preliminary qualitative interviews with a select few Latino business owners that had already earned their MBE certification to help us document their experience with the application process.

The report identifies five key areas of opportunity surrounding the MWBE certification process that could be tailored to meeting the needs of Latino business owners:

- Centralizing and simplifying the application process
- Making accessing application assistance more immediate and equitable
- Increasing targeted outreach to the Latino business community in regard to the certification
- Collaborating with government contractors to make the RFP and budget proposal processes for the certified MWBE firms that compete for government contracts less time consuming and more accessible.

- Increasing opportunities for language access and bilingual/bicultural services in English/Spanish at all levels and phases of the MWBE outreach, application, and certification process

This report's also aims to create a foundation for further research on this important topic and investigate and develop potential state strategies for overcoming the barriers that Latino business owners face in obtaining their MBE certifications. With the ultimate goal of increasing their accessibility to resources that make the application process less daunting and navigable for more Latino businesses to earn the MBE certification.

Further research will include conducting more qualitative interviews with Latino business owners from various sectors who have their MWBE certifications and solicit input on specific ways to improve and simplify the application process. We will also speak to staff at COBID Oregon and solicit suggestions for improving and simplifying the application process. Finally, we will speak with other state departments such as ODOT and the Department of Education to understand their experiences with issuing contracts to MWBEs and get feedback on ways to improve and streamline RFPs and budget requests received from competing for MWBE-certified firms.

Introduction: MBE Certification in Oregon and the Latino population

Oregon is one of 38 states in the country in addition to Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico that offers the Minority and Women Business Enterprise Certification (MWBE) to qualified firms in the private sector. In Oregon, it is a singular certification with application criteria for both women and minority-owned firms coupled into one category. In some other states, the two groups are separated. The state issued MWBE certification help minority and women-owned businesses compete for government contracts that they otherwise would have struggled to attain or may not have been able to access. On the federal level, companies can get tax breaks for contracting with certified MWBE's.

Oregon's Latino population has been growing rapidly since the early 1990s, with Latinos now comprising 12.5% of the total state population (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). There has also been a rapid increase in the number of Latino businesses in Oregon, with the number of Latino-owned businesses increasing by 144% between 2002 and 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006, 2015). The increase in Latino small businesses in Oregon is partly driven by the rapidly growing Oregon Latino population (Dávila and Mora 2013). The University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth estimates that in 2013, the 483,761 Oregon Latinos had a buying power exceeding \$8.6 billion and projects that figure to grow to over \$11.9 billion by 2018 (Humphreys 2013). Latino buying power is growing at twice the rate of total buying power for all groups in

Oregon (Humphreys 2013). This significant buying power is fueling demand for Latin American products, Spanish-language services, and cultural practices associated with Latin American businesses (such as strong personalized customer-business relationships). Latino entrepreneurs are responding to this opportunity by starting and growing more businesses.

Despite the rapid growth in Latino small businesses, however, many small business support organizations are unfamiliar with how to support this new community of entrepreneurs. At the same time, Oregon’s Latino entrepreneurs need additional support to ensure that their businesses reach their full potential. In Oregon, there are a total of 576 minority-owned businesses with the MWBE certification (COBID Oregon Business Database). Of those 576 businesses, 196, or 34% of all MBE certified businesses are owned by individuals who identify as Hispanic/Latino. The most common types of Latino owned businesses with the certification are in construction/contracting, media and marketing services, and translation and interpretation (see table 1 for complete information on Latino owned MWBE’s by type).

Table 1: Oregon Latino Businesses with MBE Certification by Type/Sector. Data Source: COBID Business Database

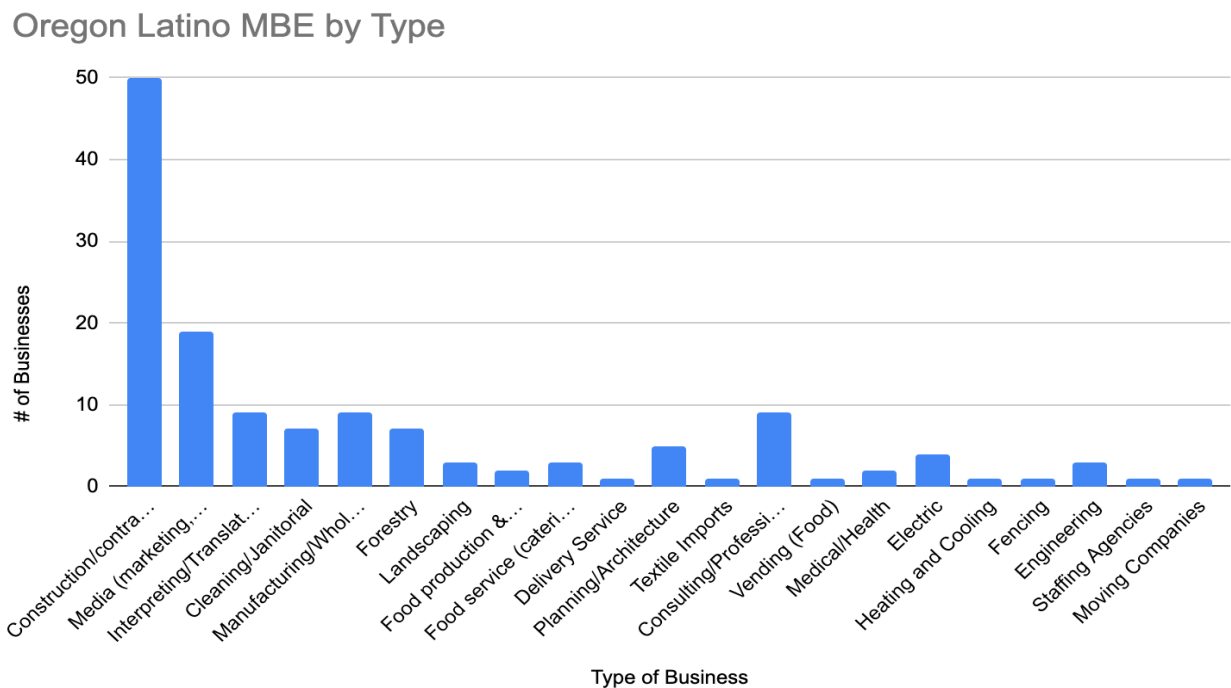
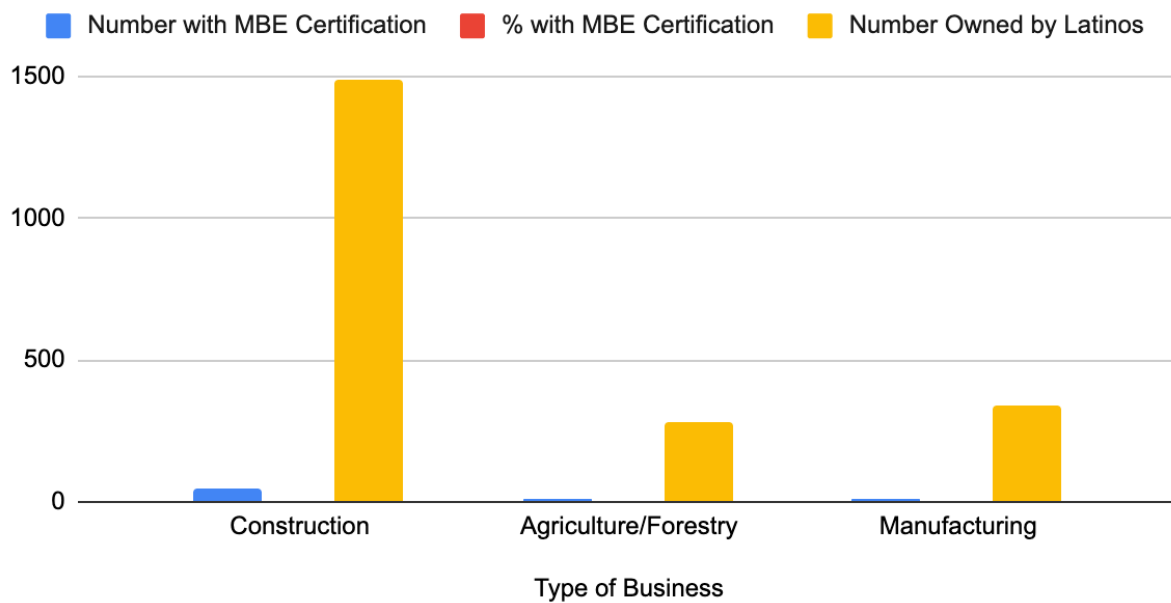


Table 2: Oregon Latino Owned Businesses in Key Sectors with MBE Certification by # and %. Data Source: COBID Business Database

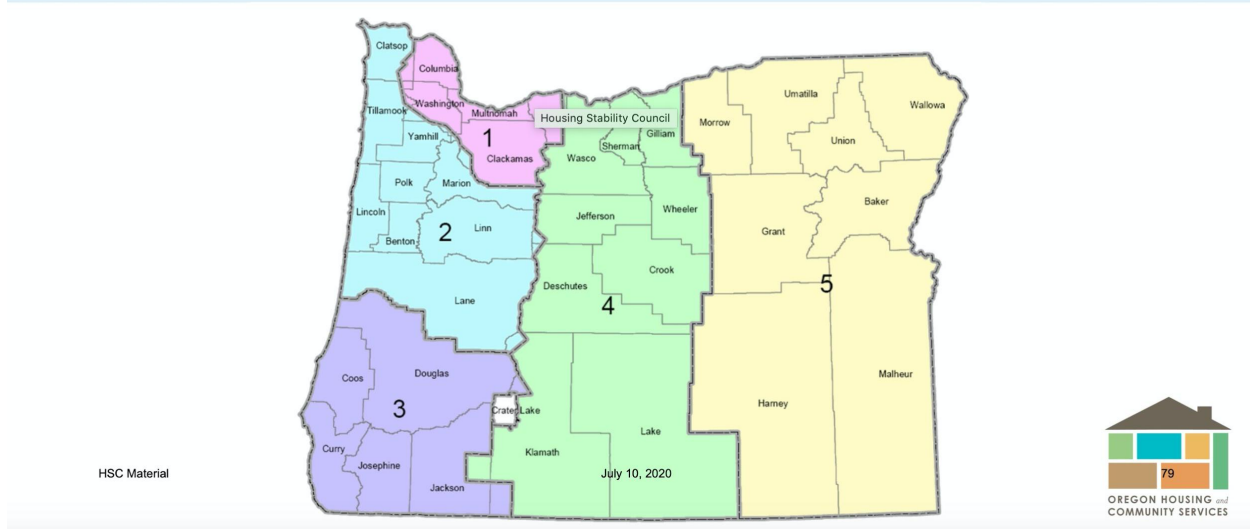
Number with MBE Certification, % with MBE Certification and Number Owned by Latinos



While 34% of all certified MBE businesses owned by Latinos may initially appear as substantial, when we compare the number of Latino owned MBE certified businesses to the number of Latino owned businesses that are registered with the state of Oregon, we see that only 1.2% of all for-profit businesses that are owned by Latinos have the MBE certification (see table 2 above).

Many Latino businesses in Oregon would qualify for the MWBE Certification but are not currently certified. The small number of certified Latino businesses is presumably due to lack of knowledge of the program’s existence, potential barriers faced during the application process, or both. The Sandoval and Macfarlan report, ‘Supporting Latino Small Businesses in Oregon,’ showed that Latino entrepreneurs in Oregon face numerous challenges that make starting and growing business more difficult for them than average non-Latino entrepreneurs, such as lack of access to financial capital, lack of formal business training, and linguistic/cultural barriers. The distribution of Latino owned businesses with the MWBE certification throughout the state is uneven. The state divides Oregon into five geographic regions. In region 4, there are only 3 Latino owned MWBE certified businesses, all of which are located in Deschutes County. In region 5, there is one Latino owned certified MWBE in Grant County and 1 in Umatilla County.

Regions



Given the concurrent growth of Latino owned small businesses in Oregon and the known barriers faced by both Latino entrepreneurs and non-Latino service providers that seek to support and help small businesses to connect and successfully work with one another, *the objective of this report is to understand what specific barriers Latino business owners in Oregon are confronted with when attempting to obtain the state-issued Minority and Women Business Enterprise Certification (M/WBE) Certification.*

The lack of employment options for Latinos in the U.S. with lower levels of education incentivizes many Latinos to start their own business to earn an income. The result is that many Oregon Latino business owners have low levels of formal schooling, English-language proficiency, and business skills (Toussaint-Comeau 2008). Previous research that has been conducted on this topic lends us an understanding of what barriers Latinos face when starting and attempting to grow their businesses. Understanding these general barriers will help us gain a more thorough understanding of the specific obstacles that Latino entrepreneurs face when applying for the MBE certification.

One of the most pervasive barriers that Latino entrepreneurs face when starting their small businesses is their lack of access to financial capital. This lack of access to financial capital is tied to the act of migration in and of itself. When moving to a new country, migrants lose “human and social capital gained abroad, such as foreign-earned credentials and an individual network of contacts and other business associates (Shinnar and Young 2008. p242).” Latino

entrepreneurs frequently have difficulty accessing capital from U.S. formal financing institutions resulting in the average Latino-owned business starting with under half the money as the average business (Robb 2013)

Another significant barrier that Latino entrepreneurs face when it comes to starting and growing their businesses is tied to historical distrust of formal institutions that many first-generation Latinos experience. This sentiment may originate in the deep distrust of banking and government institutions in Latin America (Delgado 2011). At the same time, while there is a wealth of existing business education programs in Oregon, many Latino entrepreneurs either are not aware of them or are not able to benefit from them due to a lack of “bilingual/bicultural capability” (Delgado 2011. p187)

In this report, we will gain an understanding of the specific barriers encountered by Latino business owners in Oregon when applying for the MBE certification by speaking with the organizations that help business owners with the application process and asking them where difficulties in the application process most frequently arise. We will also preliminarily interview a select few Latino business owners who have already earned the certification and document their experience and perceptions with the application process. *The larger goal of this report is to create a foundation for further research on this topic and to investigate and develop potential state strategies for overcoming the barriers that Latino business owners face in obtaining their MBE certifications, with the ultimate goal of increasing their accessibility to resources that make the application process less daunting and more navigable for more Latino businesses to earn the MBE certification.*

Section 1: Different Levels of MBE certification, Current Resources for Certification Available in Oregon, & How Other States with MBE Certifications Operate

State-level MBE Certifications in Oregon

MBE applications are submitted to and reviewed by the Certification Office for Business Inclusion and Development (COBID), which is part of Business Oregon, the state’s economic development agency. According to COBID, the primary goal of certification is to level the playing field by providing certified firms a fair opportunity to compete for government contracts regardless of owner ethnicity, gender, disability, or firm size.

For Latino and other minority-owned businesses in Oregon to apply for and obtain the state level MBE certification, they must meet specific requirement criteria. First and foremost, minority-owned businesses must be registered with the state of Oregon and also with the secretary of state. Businesses must have a three year average gross annual receipt of 23.98 mm or less, and they

must be for profit. The owner must be a citizen or lawful permanent resident and own and control at least 51% of the company. The owner must also control daily operations, make capital contributions, and have any proper personal licensing that is required for their profession. The owner must also have a sound overall understanding of managerial operations and technical competence related to their firm's services. During the application process, all communication must occur with the applicant/owner. Applications may take up to 90 days, and it is not possible to expedite them. Processing occurs on complete applications and in the order that they are received.

Business owners must submit a comprehensive list of critical documents along with their application to be considered for the state level MBE certification. These documents include complete copies of all tax documents filed with the IRS (taxes for all affiliate businesses are also required); proof of licensing (i.e., CCB, engineering, electrical, etc.); resumes that must include the applicant's technical competence and experience related to the firm; valid proof of ethnicity/gender; valid driver's license, birth certificate, or passport (documents obtained through DNA analysis such as 23 and Me are not accepted); rental or lease agreements for office space and equipment used; list of employee salaries; bank authorization and signature cards; and documented proof of how the ownership was acquired for all owners. In addition to these mandatory documents that all firms must submit, some other businesses, depending on their specific nature, may be required to provide other additional materials.

Federal-level MBE Certifications

The Small Business Administration (SBA) has a program specifically to assist minority-owned and economically-disadvantaged businesses. It's known as the 8(a) Business Development Program and helps such firms with bidding for government contracts. According to the SBA, the goal of the 8(a) program is to help provide a level playing field for small businesses owned by socially and economically disadvantaged people or entities.

The government limits competition for specific contracts to businesses that participate in the 8(a) Business Development program. The benefits of this program include the opportunity to compete for set-aside and sole-source contracts in the program, getting a Business Opportunity Specialist to help navigate federal contracting, form joint ventures with established businesses through the SBA's mentor-protégé program, and receive management and technical assistance--including business training, counseling, marketing assistance, and high-level executive development.

The SBA defines a minority-owned business as one in which the majority (at least 51%) of the company is owned and run daily by a member (or collection of members) of four ethnic or racial groups: African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. To qualify for 8(a) status, you must also be a U.S. citizen.

The SBA will refer to a business' track record to see if they have the potential for success. Business owners need to be in business for at least two years before applying and submit income tax returns showing how much they have made (this requirement may be waived if business owners meet specific additional criteria). There is no fee to apply for the program. To do business with the federal government, business owners also have to register with the System for Award Management. Similar to the state level MBE Certification application, business owners must submit many additional tax and business identification documents with their request to be considered for admittance into the program.

Private Sector MBE Certification

Once businesses in Oregon receive their state-level MBE Certification, they can apply for an additional certification with the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC). The NMSDC has a vast list of corporate members looking to connect with MBEs and supply them with work contracts. One's company must be based in the U.S. to qualify for NMSDC certification. Additionally, at least 51% owned and run by one or more U.S. citizens who are members of a minority group. The Council defines that as having at least 25% Black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian-Indian, or Asian-Pacific heritage, which business owners must be able to document.

Business owners can apply for NMSDC certification through one of its regional councils. Certification will generally take between 45 and 60 days, and cost from several hundred to over a thousand dollars depending on where one's business is located and how large it is. If one's business is approved, they will be listed in both regional and national Minority Supplier Databases. They will also be able to take part in management training programs, qualify for special loan programs, and be able to attend specialized business opportunity fairs.

Federal Vs. State Vs. Private Sector Certification Accessibility

The main distinction between the Oregon-level issued MBE certification and the SBA's 8(a) program and the NMSDC's private sector MBE certification is that business owners have to be U.S. citizens to apply for the federal and private sector MBE certifications, but not for the state level MBE. Lawful permanent residents (e.g., green card holders) are eligible to apply for the state level MBE certification, but not for the other two. For this reason, the Oregon level MBE certification is by far the most accessible and inclusive of the three since many Latino business owners in Oregon have lawful immigration status but are not citizens.

Government Resources for MBE Certification in Oregon

The COBID office at Business Oregon, which is part of the state, offers some application assistance and targeted outreach towards the Latino community to encourage eligible entrepreneurs to apply for the MBE certification. The COBID office has two certification and compliance specialists, one of whom is bilingual in English and Spanish. The compliance specialists offer application assistance to eligible business owners both during the front and later end of the application process. They help business owners who are less technologically savvy navigate the web-based application. The web-based application is only available in English, but paper applications can be requested in other languages, one of which is Spanish. The COBID office conducts outreach to minority business communities via workshops held at various small business development centers that are situated within community colleges. The COBID office also has a history of doing educational workshops with other state agencies such as ODOT and the State Department of Education on how to solicit and issue contracts with MWBEs.

The handful of agencies that offer some level of direct application assistance to Latino and other minority business owners are either nonprofit organizations or private consulting firms.

Summary of Non-Government MBE Application Assistant Services in Oregon

Four organizations in Oregon offer direct MBE application assistance for Latino business owners. These include The Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, Avita and Associates, Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs (OAME), and GCAP: Government Contract Assistance Program.

The Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce offers assistance to Latino business owners. In contrast, the other three organizations listed above assist all ethnic minorities that own businesses and potentially qualify for the state MBE certification. They offer application assistance and technical assistance in both Spanish and English, free of charge. They have offices in Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington.

GCAP offers pro-bono one-on-one application assistance and counseling for business owners looking to obtain their MBE certification. They have two staff members dedicated to this process. Their services are offered in English. GCAP is administered by the Organization Economic Initiatives, Inc., an Oregon based private nonprofit organization. GCAP has different offices located throughout the state.

Avita and Associates is a private consulting firm in Portland, Oregon, that offers one-on-one business counseling and direct MBE application assistance. The initial consultation is free, but the services that follow need to be paid. Their services are solely offered in English.

The Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs (OAME) is a Portland based nonprofit that offers application assistance and technical assistance related to the MBE certification free of charge. They provide services in English, and when they encounter Spanish speaking clients, they refer them to a Spanish speaking small business certification specialist at the COBID office. OAME also offers education and orientation resources related to the MBE for minority business owners.

Government Resources for MBE Certification in Oregon vs. Other Cities & States (Maryland & Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)

In Oregon, the sole assistance that the state government offers in terms of application and certification assistance takes place within the COBID office and is administered by the small business certification. Compliance specialists, one of whom is bilingual in English/Spanish and has been with the agency for over 15 years. In other cities and states, different types of MWBE application assistance are available.

In Maryland, the state department of transportation, along with the Maryland-based Office of Small and Minority Business Policy (OSMBP), hosts monthly MBE/SBE Certification application assistance workshops. They are usually conducted in person but are currently being held online due to Covid-19. During the free workshops, businesses learn the benefits of certification, the application process, eligibility standards, and business development and marketing tips. Their workshops provide concurrent information on the MBE and SBE certifications as well as Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Airport Concessions Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (ACDBE) certifications.

In Pennsylvania, there is government agency level assistance for MBE certification application assistance available at the municipal and county level in the city of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County (which Pittsburgh is a part of) in the form of government-community organization partnerships. The Allegheny County Department of Equity and Inclusion works with local community organizations and local universities to provide free one-on-one counseling sessions with minority business owners looking to apply for and obtain their state-level MBE certifications. In Allegheny County alone, there are four different organizations and universities that offer counseling sessions. One of Penn State's branch campuses offers counseling sessions. All 4 of these community resources for certification assistance are located in predominantly African-American neighborhoods. The city of Pittsburgh is 22% African American. African-Americans are the most substantial population of color in both Pittsburgh and in Allegheny

County. Due to the area's demographics, it makes sense that the agencies and organizations that assist with MBE applications and provide business counseling are located in predominantly African-American neighborhoods.

Section 2: Identifying the Barriers/Challenges for Latino Businesses in Securing MBE Certified in Oregon

As a part of the preliminary research that we conducted for this report, we spoke with different Latino/business owners in Oregon – who have applied for and received their MBE certifications. Some of the business owners that we spoke with have the state level WBE (women-owned small business) and ESB (emerging small business) certifications in addition to their MBE. The business owners that we spoke with range from individuals in the forestry industry to interpretation/translation services to concessions and catering. We talked with business owners in different parts of the state, in both urban and rural areas. We spoke with men and women, all of whom are bilingual in English and Spanish, college-educated, and most of whom are first-generation immigrants whose parents were born in Mexico--except for one woman who was born in Mexico and came to the United States 20 years ago.

All of the business owners that we interviewed commented that the application process and the list of required documentation were daunting to them, even as educated, bicultural, and bilingual business owners. One business owner commented that the renewal process for the MBE certification was almost as exhaustive as the initial application process. As first-generation immigrants who grew up in households where their parents predominantly spoke Spanish and didn't receive much (if any) formal education in the United States, our the business-owners interviewed noted that for Latino business owners like their parents, the application process would be complicated to understand and to navigate.

Language was mentioned as one of the most pervasive barriers that these business owners said other, less formally educated or more monolingual Spanish members of the Latino business community, would undoubtedly face when trying to obtain the MBE certification. On the current Business Oregon website, where all of the MBE certification information and resources are located, the information and list of resources are only available in English. At the same time, amongst the small supply of organizations that offer application assistance for the MBE certification in Oregon, only 2 out of the 4, the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and COBID, have in-house Spanish speaking staff to offer application counseling and assistance. OAME refers Spanish speaking clients to the Spanish speaking small business certification specialist at the COBID office, which is part of Business Oregon.

MBE Certified Business Example 1: Food Business, Portland, OR.

Juan Carillo (pseudonym, all business owner's names are pseudonyms) has a food and catering business in Portland. Juan is a Latino business owner with an MBE certification that he has held since 2010. He commented that being savvy in accounting and financial literacy is an essential piece of being able to apply for and successfully obtain the MBE certification. Juan stated that he couldn't imagine how any business owner who did not understand and was not able to document their profits and losses properly would ever be able to comprehend the requirements for applying for the MBE certification. Interestingly, applying for the certification was not originally his idea. He was encouraged by non-profit organizations in the Portland metro area that work with Latino businesses to apply for the certification. He received a great deal of application and document preparation assistance from the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce. Juan said that preparing three years' worth of business-specific tax documentation--which the MBE application requires--was particularly time-consuming. According to Mr. Carillo, the HMCC is the most popular organization in the Portland metro area that helps Latino businesses earn their MBE certifications. He also mentioned the OAME as another leading organization that helps Latino small businesses secure their MBE certification.

Mr. Carillo said that he doesn't feel like there is any targeted outreach to the Latino business community about the MBE certification or how to obtain it. He only learned about the certification through the HMCC when they approached him individually and encouraged him to apply for it. According to Mr. Carillo, most of the Latinos that he knows get their information about business and advancement opportunities through mainstream media (Spanish language radio and TV) and social media (Facebook, Instagram) and right now it doesn't seem like those channels are being utilized to convey any information on the MBE certification or other SBA programs.

Mr. Carillo advised that other Latino owned businesses should only apply for the MBE certification if they have a designated staff person who can focus on the completion of not just the original MBE application, but the subsequent government RFPs and sample budget proposals that certified MBE's must submit to compete for government contracts after they are awarded their initial MBE certification. He said that for a business owner like himself with only a few full-time employees, finding time to complete the RFPs and budget proposals on his own is not realistic. He said to be truly competitive in the fight for government contracts amongst other Latino owned MBEs; he would need a designated staff member to deal exclusively with said contracts and proposals.

Business Example 2: Katarina Sanchez, Forestry Business, Douglas Country, OR

Ms. Katarina Sanchez is a 29-year-old first-generation Mexican-American business owner who runs and operates a forestry business in rural southern Oregon. She has owned her forestry

business for four years and has held her MBE certification for three years. She also holds the women-owned small business certification, which is also issued by the COBID office. Ms. Sanchez first learned about the MBE certification in an email that she received regarding a government contract for forestry work, for which she ended up applying. Ms. Sanchez is bilingual/bicultural and a college graduate. She majored in Spanish language and literature and minored in business. She grew up in an entrepreneurial environment with her mother in the restaurant business and considered herself to be ‘business-oriented.’ She also referred to herself as technologically savvy. She felt that the application process for the MBE certification was extensive and taxing but navigable and relatively easy for her to understand. She did the majority of the application on her own but did receive some assistance from GCAP. She learned about the services available at GCAP from the same email that mentioned the MBE certification. Ms. Sanchez noted that while the assistance and guidance regarding the application process that she received at GCAP was helpful, she felt they were understaffed and tended to lag in their response time to her questions and queries.

While Ms. Sanchez is fluent in English and didn’t need any Spanish language assistance with her application, she mentioned that had she needed help in Spanish; she would not have known where to find it. Ms. Sanchez knows other Latino business owners in Douglas County, and her overall impression is that most of them do not understand that the MBE certification exists. At the same time, given how exhaustive and time consuming the MBE application process is, she said that she isn’t sure how much some of the Latino small business owners in her area would benefit from applying for and obtaining the MBE certification.

The forestry industry in her area is sizable and continuing to grow. According to her, many owners of forestry businesses in Douglas County are Latino but that to her knowledge, most of them do not have the MBE certification. Ms. Sanchez openly acknowledged how her privilege made navigating the MBE certification process much less intimidating for her than it would be compared to other business owners in the Latino community -as the latter have not received as much formal education as she has. She recently renewed her certification and expressed a desire to help other Latino small business owners, especially women, earn their MBE certification.

Business Example 3: Rosamaria Mendoza, Consulting & Interpretation Business, Salem, OR

Rosamaria Mendoza is a Latina business owner of a consulting and Spanish/English translation and interpretation business in Salem. She has had the MBE certification for the past eight years and has had to renew it three times. She is college-educated, bilingual/bicultural, and originally from Mexico. She came to the United States 20 years ago. Her overall experience with obtaining and utilizing her MBE certification has been overwhelmingly daunting and lackluster. She described the initial application process as time consuming and exhausting. Her husband, who is Caucasian and was born in the United States, helped her with the application. She said that

without his help, there is no way she would have been able to complete the application on her own and organize and submit all the supplemental tax documents and other required paperwork.

Ms. Mendoza learned about the MBE certification from a colleague of hers who worked with the State of Oregon on one of their human rights initiatives. She had never noticed any information on the MBE certification advertised or promoted through any other avenues other than her personal and professional networks. She mentioned that the Business Oregon website that outlined all of the requirements and instructions for submitting the required documents was hard for her to understand and navigate. The website is currently only available in English, which Ms. Mendoza views as a problem and a significant barrier for monolingual Spanish speaking entrepreneurs. We know from previous research in the Sandoval and Macfarlan report on Latino small businesses in Oregon that there are many Latino business owners in Oregon who, despite their levels of formal education and business experience in their home countries, still feel more comfortable conducting business matters in their first language.

Ms. Mendoza has had to renew her certification three times since she originally obtained it. She said that the renewal process is time-consuming and as taxing as preparing the initial MBE application. Since she has had her certification, she has only been able to win two government contracts, both of which were paid to her at a lower rate than her non-government contracts. She commented that when she compared the amount of time she had to personally dedicate to locating a contract that she could compete for and then applying for it to the number of dollars that she was paid by the government contractor, she estimates that she either broke even or lost money.

Section 3: Key Findings & Next Steps for Research

The preliminary research and informal interviews that were conducted for this report surrounding the experiences of Latino small business owners in Oregon and the state level MBE certification highlighted specific barriers and findings pertaining to the access, navigability, and understanding of the application process. Overall, the Latino business owners that we spoke with felt that the State of Oregon, as a government entity and body, should be more directly involved in the MBE application and certification process.

We have identified five key areas of opportunity surrounding the MWBE certification process that could be tailored to meeting the needs of Latino business owners:

- Centralizing and simplifying the application process
- Making accessing application assistance more immediate and equitable

- Increasing targeted outreach to the Latino business community in regard to the certification
- Collaborating with government contractors to make the RFP and budget proposal processes for the certified MWBE firms that compete for government contracts less time consuming and more accessible.
- Increasing opportunities for language access and bilingual/bicultural services in English/Spanish at all levels and phases of the MWBE outreach, application, and certification process

To move forward and improve upon the 5 issue areas listed above and develop thorough and specific recommendations about the MWBE outreach, application, and certification process, further research on this topic will need to be conducted. The ultimate goal of the next phase of our research is to develop programmatic and policy-based recommendations that will help more Latino small business owners in the State of Oregon earn their MWBE certifications.

The next phase of our research will include, but is not limited to, the following steps and action items:

- Conduct more qualitative interviews with Latino business owners from a variety of sectors who have their MWBE certifications and solicit input on specific ways to improve and simplify the application process
- Follow-up with COBID Oregon and inquire about suggestions for improving and simplifying the application process
- Speak with other state departments such as ODOT and the Department of Education surrounding their experiences with issuing contracts to MWBEs and get their insight on ways to improve and streamline RFPs and budget requests received from competing for MWBE-certified firms
- Reach out to the Small Business Development Centers situated within the community colleges and get their feedback on ways to improve the outreach process to the Latino and monolingual Spanish speaking community surrounding the MWBE certification
- Follow up with nonprofits that offer direct application assistance such as OAME and the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and get their feedback about ways to centralize and improve the MWBE application and certification process
- Investigate and develop strategies for certifying more Latino-owned MWBEs in the Central and Eastern part of Oregon

In sum, there is excellent potential to increase the rate of MWBE certification for Latino small businesses in Oregon. Latino small businesses are transforming Oregon's business climate and supporting them in securing government contracts is an important tool to sustaining these emerging small businesses. State agencies are also interested in allocating more contracts to MWBE businesses, but these agencies are having a difficult time finding businesses with an

MWBE certification to meet their needs. Hence the demand for MWBE businesses in Oregon is strong - but we need to figure out strategies that will increase the supply of these important businesses.

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