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NWBC Takes Action following Roundtable on Access to Government Markets

*Key Issues and Trends Identified to Improve Federal Procurement
for Women-Owned Businesses*

Washington, D.C.—The National Women’s Business Council convened a roundtable discussion of government officials and women business owners in September to air issues and concerns for achieving the five-percent goal for federal procurement by women-owned businesses. The Council has just released the transcript and summary report of this Roundtable as well as an NWBC *Research in Brief* summarizing the issues raised at the roundtable and program recommendations.

The Roundtable brought together representatives from two key realms in the federal procurement arena: women business owners and officials from the federal Offices of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU). Participants identified problems and challenges and also suggested actions to increase the dialogue, share information more widely, conduct research and work together to increase to the number of federal procurement awards to women-owned businesses.

“The Council was pleased to have hosted this important discussion between federal procurement officials and members of the women’s business community. The discussion not only illuminated some of the reasons why the five-percent goal hasn’t been met, but promoted greater understanding of the challenges each side faces in working toward this goal,” said Marilyn Carlson Nelson, chairman and CEO of Carlson Companies and chair of the National Women’s Business Council. “We feel that the suggestions and actions from this Roundtable will improve procurement outreach and program efforts to better inform the women’s business community about what can be done to gain access to the federal marketplace.”

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(NWBC Takes Action following Roundtable on Access to Government Markets, p. 2)

While many issues were mentioned, three major ideas, themes and issues emerged:

- Failure of many federal agencies to meet the five-percent goal for contracting awards to women-owned businesses was identified as a major concern by the women-business owners. Ensuring compliance for inclusion of women-owned businesses by contractors and federal agencies was raised. While OSDBU offices provide oversight, each agency has its own methods for tracking and ensuring compliance.
- Frustration around finding the most efficient source of information about the process and requirements for doing business with the federal government seemed to be exacerbated rather than aided by the multiple sources of information available.
- Confusion as to the role of OSDBUs was seen as another issue. OSDBU representatives reviewed best practices of their offices and their goals for increasing the use of women-owned businesses in federal procurement.

The National Women's Business Council met twice after the event to discuss the Roundtable and determine future action. The Council agreed to increase communication about government procurement activities to the women business-owner community, pursue its research study to identify best practices within the OSDBUs, increase its involvement with the OSDBUs' women business-owner advocates and revise its womenbiz.gov Web site to ensure that it is robust enough to serve as the portal of choice for women business owners who desire to do business with the federal government.

The *Accessing Government Markets: An Issues Roundtable Discussion Summary Report* and the *Issues in Brief* are available on the NWBC Web site (<http://www.nwbc.gov/>).

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The National Women's Business Council is a bi-partisan federal government council created to serve as an independent source of advice and counsel to the President, Congress, and the U.S. Small Business Administration on economic issues of importance to women business owners. Members of the Council are prominent women business owners and leaders of women's business organizations. For more information about the Council, its mission and activities, contact: National Women's Business Council, 409 3rd Street, SW, Suite 210, Washington, DC 20024; phone: 202-205-3850; fax: 202-205-6825; e-mail: info@nwbc.gov, Web site: www.nwbc.gov