



News Release

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New Reports Demonstrate Progress in Best Practices, Policy Development for Women's Entrepreneurship

Washington, DC – The historic growth of women-owned businesses in the United States has generated increased demand for the creation of innovative programs and policies to foster their growth. Today, for the first time, two new reports from the National Women's Business Council document this progress by examining current best practices in support of women's entrepreneurship and by recording the history of policies that have resulted in today's unprecedented 10.6 million U.S. businesses in which women are equal or majority owners.

"We are extremely pleased to announce the publication of these two reports, which have both documented and addressed some very timely and important questions about how to further the growth of women's entrepreneurship," said Marilyn Carlson Nelson, Chairman and CEO of Carlson Companies and Chair of the National Women's Business Council. "It is our hope that these reports will not only provide women business owners with comprehensive information about policies and programs for women's enterprise development, but that this information will be used to enlighten and inform future policy and programmatic action in the United States and in other countries."

The first report, "Best Practices in Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship: A Compendium of Public and Private Sector Organizations and Initiatives," profiles 24 selected organizations or initiatives that provide outstanding support for women-owned businesses and that have widespread impact throughout the United States. The report answers such questions as:

- Who helps women-owned businesses as they start up or as they become more established and seasoned?
- What associations can women entrepreneurs join to network and to grow their businesses?
- How can women-owned businesses obtain access to mentoring, education, capital, and markets to take their businesses to the next level?
- And what types of support are available from which kinds of organizations?

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The report contains a functional matrix that shows at a glance how the profiled organizations compare with each other in terms of the kind of support and assistance they offer to women entrepreneurs. It also contains short descriptions of 10 additional organizations or initiatives that did not fully meet the inclusion criteria for profiles but nevertheless offer important support to women-owned businesses. While the NWBC noted that it is extremely pleased to have been able to identify so many organizations that share a strong focus on and commitment to women's entrepreneurship, the report also includes several recommendations, including:

- That society must increase its recognition of the fact that maximizing opportunity and advancement for women is a *business* issue, just as fundamental as productivity, quality, or product development;
- That well-supported, timely, accurate, and reliable research is a driving force behind the expansion of public and private sector programs that advance women's entrepreneurship;
- That sustainable support for women's business development can best be achieved if there is active involvement not only from women business owners and their organizations but also from government and non-government organizations supporting enterprise development;
- That strong partnerships across organizations, working towards the same goal, will strengthen each group's efforts and avoid duplication; and
- That as the impetus for action and implementation of programs for women entrepreneurs has historically come from the women business owner community, it is very important for women entrepreneurs to continue to have a voice in public policy matters because having an official voice in government is important for advancing policy.

"Best Practices in Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship in the United States" represents a major updating and expansion of the 2000 report entitled "United States Case Study: Successful Public and Private Initiatives Fostering the Growth of Women's Business Ownership," published by the National Women's Business Council and the Interagency Committee on Women's Business Enterprise in 2000.

"Policy and Progress: Supporting the Growth of Women's Business Enterprise" is the second report recently published by the NWBC. The report documents the legal and policy changes that have had an impact on the growth of women's business enterprises over the past several decades and serves to benchmark the progress that has been made from a policy standpoint, including key programs, legislation and necessary precursors to entry. The report addresses such questions as:

- What impact have changing Federal policies and programs had on women's business enterprises?
- What has been the impact of broad societal changes on women's business ownership?
- What impact has the growing contribution of women's businesses to the economy as a whole had on Federal policies and programs?
- What policy barriers still remain, and what should the policy focus of the NWBC and women's business organizations be in the 21st Century?

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This report also includes policy recommendations for direction in areas that still need to be addressed by the Federal government and private sector, such as:

- Ensuring that the tools women entrepreneurs need are available and accessible from government, private sector and public-private partnerships;
- Providing increased visibility to not only comparative research on women's entrepreneurship, but also highlighting individual women business owners of achievement;
- Sharing best practices across borders (something already under way through such vehicles as the OECD and other international women's conferences and trade missions); and
- Continuing the development of gender disaggregated business data and analysis, especially concerning the impact of government programs on women-owned businesses.

“Perhaps most importantly, this report underscores that one of the most important obligations for the women's business community and its organizations is maintaining continued vigilance and visibility because, much like changing a business culture, leading societal change requires long-term effort,” said Carlson Nelson. “It is critical that women entrepreneurs continue to have a voice in public policy matters. One size does not fit all for small business owners and women business owners in particular – whether the issue is access to capital, access to markets, or access to training and technical assistance. Only through active advocacy can we ensure that progress continues.”

Both reports, “Best Practices in Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship in the United States” and “Policy and Progress; Supporting the Growth of Women's Business Enterprise” may be obtained at the Council's web site, 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. The National Women's Business Council is committed to conducting research on issues of importance to women business owners and their organizations; to communicating these findings widely; to connecting the women's business community to public policy makers; and to providing programs and platforms for change in order to expand and improve opportunities for women business owners and their enterprises. 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: nwbc@sba.gov; web site: www.nwbc.gov.