

What are the benefits of the Business Opportunity Program?

The goal of the Business Opportunity Program is to maintain and advance the public welfare by ensuring that its expenditures promote the financial growth and stability of small businesses within the NEORSD contracting community. NEORSD endeavors to increase contracting opportunities for local small businesses under its Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Program, resulting in greater job availability and business growth for the local business community. In addition to contributing to the economic well-being of the region, bringing new firms into the pool of companies doing business with us enhances the competitive bidding processes and ensures that our customers are afforded the greatest value for their investment in the areas of goods, professional and contractual services, construction, and engineering.

What is the Small Business Enterprise Program?

The Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Program, referred to as the Business Opportunity Program, is a race- and gender-neutral contracting program for the benefit of all local small businesses that meet the requirements under the program. To be eligible for Business Opportunity Program certification, firms must have gross receipts that do not exceed the business size standards established by NEORSD and posted on the NEORSD internet site at <https://www.neorsd.org/opportunity>, relevant to the scope(s) of work the firm seeks to perform on NEORSD contracts. Additionally, a firm must maintain a functioning office within the NEORSD geographic and procurement markets and meet other program criteria as listed in the SBE program policy and certification application available at <https://www.neorsd.org/opportunity>.

What type of bidding opportunities are available to interested firms?

Under the Business Opportunity Program, certified SBE firms have the same opportunities as any other firm to submit bids or proposals in all areas of procurement: goods, professional services, construction, and engineering. Additionally, SBE firms receive credit for any self-performed work or services on projects containing SBE subcontracting goals.

What is the Business Opportunity Program?

The Business Opportunity Program is designed to promote opportunities for local small businesses and strengthen the regional economy under its race- and gender-neutral Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Program. You can find the specific criteria to become certified as an SBE in the Sewer District Business Opportunity Program application or you may call the Office of Contract Compliance at 216-881-6600 or email SBEcompliance@neorsd.org

Why would a firm want to become Business Opportunity Program-certified with NEORSD?

Eligible small businesses that complete the program application and are certified by NEORSD will have enhanced contracting opportunities. For purchases of goods and services under the NEORSD competitive bidding threshold, NEORSD will consult the SBE registry and reach out to those who are certified to provide needed services. Prime contractors and consultants will use the certification directory to identify subcontractors for NEORSD projects as they are required to meet project-specific goals for the use of

certified SBEs as subcontractors or sub-consultants. Only those SBEs that are certified under the NEORSD Business Opportunity Program will be counted towards fulfilling NEORSD SBE goals.

How long does my Business Opportunity Program certification last?

All Business Opportunity Program certifications remain valid for two years. All certified firms must complete a re-certification application before the anniversary date of the prior certification to avoid a gap in certification.

If a Business Opportunity Program firm is awarded a contract with NEORSD as a subcontractor or sub-consultant, who will monitor the use of the SBEs on the project?

The NEORSD Office of Contract Compliance (OCC) will track, monitor, and report the use of all projects with SBE goals. All certified SBEs must be and remain certified for the duration of the project.

If I complete the Business Opportunity Program application, does this mean I will be certified with other agencies such as CMHA, the City of Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, and RTA?

No. The Business Opportunity Program application is for the NEORSD program only. This application is not a part of any joint certification. However, if you are certified with following agencies listed below, the Business Opportunity Program certification process becomes easier.

The certifying agencies include:

- City of Cleveland
- Cuyahoga County
- Ohio Minority Supplier Development Council (Formerly NOMSDC)
- State of Ohio EDGE Program
- Unified Certification Program
- Women Business Enterprise National Council
- US SBA (8) Program

Does having a P.O. Box in the local area allow me to participate in the Business Opportunity Program?

No. Having a P.O. Box alone is not sufficient. Your firm must have a functioning office physically located in the Sewer District Metropolitan Statistical Area which consists of Cuyahoga, Ashtabula, Carroll, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark Summit, and Trumbull counties.

How will I find out about bid opportunities?

You may visit the NEORSD Bids & Proposals webpage to learn more about competitive bidding and requests for proposal opportunities with the Sewer District. When you see a contracting opportunity that

you are interested in, please attend any pre-bid or pre-proposal conferences that are scheduled. You may also stop by our Purchasing Department to view project plans and specifications in person.

<https://www.neorsd.org/business-home/bids>

What is a pre-bid/pre-proposal meeting or pre-bid/pre-proposal conference?

NEORSD may hold a pre-bid or pre-proposal conference for projects advertised for bid or for which proposals are solicited under a request for proposal. Such conferences will be designated as either mandatory or non-mandatory and will provide the opportunity to ask questions about the bid specifications or request for proposal requirements. These conferences may include representatives from NEORSD and interested primes and subs. The pre-bid conference may provide subcontractors/subconsultants with the opportunity to meet prime contractors/consultants.

What if I am not able to attend the pre-bid conference?

If you do not attend a mandatory pre-bid or pre-proposal conference, your bid or proposal will not be eligible for contract award as a prime contractor or consultant. However, you will still be able to serve as a subcontractor or subconsultant to a firm serving as the prime contractor or consultant.

If you cannot attend a non-mandatory pre-bid/pre-proposal conference, visit Bids and proposals <https://www.neorsd.org/business-home/bids> and take the following steps:

Select the bid or request for proposal opportunity that interests you. Click on the download project related documents link or register to activate an account to receive documents via email.

For competitively bid projects, the Bidders List has contact information for individual firms that have already purchased plans.

How are NEORSD SBE goals calculated?

SBE goals are calculated based on availability of firms certified in the SBE program, taking into consideration the project duration, estimate and scope of work.

Will this SBE program change have an impact on my ability to work with NEORSD?

No. All certified firms will automatically continue to be listed as Small Business Enterprises (SBE) on the NEORSD BOP directory.

Will my firm be removed from a project because we are listed as MBE/WBE?

No. All firms will be listed as SBEs on the NEORSD BOP directory and NEORSD projects. Goals that were previously designated as MBE/WBE have been converted to SBE goals and added to any existing SBE goals.

Did I/Do I need to update my certification in B2G to reflect SBE?

No. The changes will be made by B2G. You need to take no action to remain certified if your certification is active.

How do I complete my audits in B2G?

The audit process in B2G remains the same. Nothing has changed.

Do I still have to submit Good Faith Efforts Forms?

Yes, you must still work with a NEORSD-certified BOP firm.

If I am a prime contractor, can I choose any SBE firm to work with as a subcontractor or subconsultant?

Yes, as long as it is a NEORSD-certified SBE *and* working within the scope(s) of work in which the firm is certified.

Will NEORSD continue to count MBE /WBE participation?

No. NEORSD will count SBE participation only. Firms previously certified as MBE/WBE were already considered Small Business Enterprises. Firms will continue to be certified as SBEs as long as they meet the SBE requirements.

How do we find out about upcoming projects with NEORSD?

All of our current projects open for bids or proposals are posted at <https://www.neorsd.org/bids>. Our Capital Improvement Plan can also provide insights regarding future design agreements and construction contracts in Engineering & Construction and our Regional Stormwater Management Program. Both sets of plans are posted at <https://www.neorsd.org/cip>.

Is my data safe using the third-party system B2GNOW?

B2GNOW is SOC 2 Type 2 certified company. A SOC report (System and Organization Controls report) is an independent auditor's evaluation of a service organization's internal controls, providing assurance to clients about data security, availability, processing integrity, confidentiality, and privacy. These CPA-issued reports build trust, help assess third-party risk, and verify a provider's commitment to best practices for handling sensitive data.

What if I am working on a project as a prime but I am certified as an MBE/WBE?

The firm will remain on the project as a prime and the certification will now reflect that you are an SBE prime.