



ASSOCIATION OF  
WOMEN'S  
BUSINESS  
CENTERS

# AWBC 2020 POLICY PRIORITIES

Women's Business Centers (WBCs) serve more than 145,000 entrepreneurs each year, providing training and one-on-one counseling nationwide. To serve the growing demand for services, the WBC program expanded from only four centers 30 years ago to 114 centers operating more than 150 training locations today. The program, however, needs modernization, streamlined reporting requirements and additional resources. The 116<sup>th</sup> Congress must support women-owned businesses:

## STRENGTHEN THE WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTER PROGRAM

Congress needs to take action on bipartisan legislation that modernizes the WBC program and brings it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. AWBC endorses and strongly supports H.R. 4405 which passed the House in 2019. We urge the Senate to take action on this bill, which:

- ✓ Establishes an accreditation process that ensures the integrity of the program;
- ✓ Increases individual grant level to \$300,000 to allow established and effective centers to leverage additional resources for greater impact, and facilitate an expansion of services to serve more constituencies including rural communities; and
- ✓ Provides financial flexibility for WBCs to raise additional funds from the private and philanthropic sectors; and allow for improved Small Business Administration (SBA) collaboration with WBCs and their association.

## INCREASE FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTERS

**Our centers leverage federal dollars into more than \$50 million for entrepreneurial programming. The return on federal investment is \$46 for every \$1 of taxpayer dollars. Increased funding will maximize the impact of WBCs and for Fiscal Year 2021, we urge Congress to appropriate \$30 million.**

In addition, AWBC requests funding be appropriated for technical assistance grants for WBCs in federally declared disaster areas to provide support to get women-owned businesses back on their feet. Resources are also needed to create an accreditation program for WBCs. AWBC will use these resources to establish and implement evaluation criteria for accreditation, ensuring quality and promoting center improvements.

AWBC will also work with state governments to provide a match to federal funding with state funds.

## PROMOTE WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURIAL RESILIENCY

**Whether responding to natural disasters or to economic downturns, women-owned businesses have proven strong in the face of challenge. The government should ensure its programs are aligned and functional to support this important segment of the economy.**

### *Strengthen Entrepreneurial Disaster Assistance*

The Federal Emergency Management Agency found that nearly 40 percent of small businesses fail to reopen after being hit by a natural disaster. The Office of Disaster Assistance and the Officer of Entrepreneurial Development should develop ways that WBCs can support women-owned businesses in federally-declared disaster areas, either through disaster planning or direct loans to fund recovery.

### *Ensure Access to New Markets*

In order to scale the innovations of women entrepreneurs, access to markets must be prioritized. Leveling the playing field in the federal marketplace through the women owned small business (WOSB) can achieve this. Women's Business Centers are a natural fit to deliver WOSB certification and we believe centers can effectively deliver this service. Additionally, we want to ensure that women-owned American companies can compete in foreign markets. AWBC will begin recognizing an Exporter of the Year from amongst WBC clientele.

**About AWBC:** The Association of Women's Business Centers ([www.awbc.org](http://www.awbc.org)) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1998 to support the national network of Women's Business Centers (WBCs) with programming and advocacy.