



March 29, 2022

The Women's Business Center opening in Anchorage, Alaska, this week is more than the 141st such location backed by the Small Business Administration and providing women entrepreneurs resources to start and scale small businesses. "It will be a historical moment: the first time that every state in the country, as well as Puerto Rico, has access to services from counseling, accelerator programs and access to capital support and access to federal contracting support," said SBA Office of Women's Business Ownership assistant administrator Natalie Madeira Cofield.

The agency begins an online Women's Business Summit on March 29, with speakers that include Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland and women business leaders and senior government officials.

Ahead of the event, Cofield spoke with ICSC's Small Business Center about her office's history. "The Office of Women's Business Ownership was founded in 1988, and in that legislation, they removed any language that required women to have a male co-signer for any kind of financing, a loan, a mortgage," she said. "That was when it was no longer legal to ask a woman to have a male co-signer to have access to capital." Since then, the office has helped increase the number of women-owned small businesses in the U.S. They numbered 400,000 in 1972 and 12 million. The SBA broadly defines small businesses as those with fewer than 500 employees, and it counted 32 million such businesses in 2021. That indicates that women own more than a third of all U.S. small businesses. Women-owned small businesses also form the fastest-growing segment of business owners nationwide.

Women's Business Centers help women start and grow small businesses with training, mentoring, business development and financing opportunities tailored to the needs of the communities in which they're located. For example, the Idaho Women's Business Center is halfway through its 44x22 Rural Growth Initiative to offer small business education to all 44 Idaho counties by the end of the year. The program consists of initial training, and then a four- or six-week accelerator workshop on starting and running a business.

Chiropractor Lilliana Emmanuelli – owner of the Core Wellness Center in Nampa, Idaho, an agricultural hub with a sizable Latino population – said the training helped her pick a location and state her clinic's mission clearly. The native of Puerto Rico says her staff is all bilingual, an advantage for the many patients who speak Spanish as a first language. "I had a vision to provide the type of care I wanted for myself," she said in a video on the center's website. "I noticed that not too many chiropractors spoke Spanish and felt like we needed to do something different for the community, to make a little space, a haven, and have providers who feel like family and like friends."

While there's been enormous progress over the past 34 years, there's still more work to be done, said Renee Johnson, senior advisor for consulting firm Public Private Strategies. She noted the Biden administration has prioritized an increased aid for women- or minority-owned businesses because they remain underrepresented in many industries. She said women entrepreneurs, as well as business owners from other disadvantaged groups, should be prepared to pursue these opportunities actively after doing some research through the Office of Women's Business Ownership or other branches of the SBA. "They walk you through all of these things. Definitely take a look," Johnson said.

SBA Resources for Capital and Advice

- Office of Women's Business Ownership: provides training in finance, management and marketing and offers access to SBA financial and procurement assistance programs.
- Lender Match: connects business owners to prospective lenders who will review business plans and financial projections and reply within two days.
- DreamBuilder: a partnership with the SBA that offers online courses in English and Spanish that help entrepreneurs plan the initial financing for new businesses.
- Local advisory services: pairs aspiring entrepreneurs with experienced business advisors in their communities

Small Business Center

ICSC champions small and emerging businesses in getting from business plan to brick-and-mortar.

[Learn more](#)

