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Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce Launches MBE and WBE Certification Initiative with October 29 Informational Workshop and Panel Discussion

Northampton, MA — [September 30, 2026] — The Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce (GNCC) today announced a regional initiative to increase the number of Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs) and Women Business Enterprises (WBEs) in Western Massachusetts certified through the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Office. The initiative begins with an informational workshop and panel discussion on Thursday, October 29, 2026, and is designed to help minority- and women-owned businesses understand the certification journey and how to pursue state contracts and partnerships with prime contractors and major grant recipients.

Informational Workshop and Panel Discussion: MBE and WBE Certification

Date	Thursday, October 29, 2026
Time	8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Location	Northampton Center for the Arts, 33 Hawley Street, Northampton
Featuring	Invited representatives from the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Office and panelists from locally owned, certified businesses
Purpose	To help minority- and women-owned businesses understand certification, ask questions, and hear firsthand experiences from certified business owners

Local business owners interested in learning whether certification is right for them are encouraged to attend. Invited representatives from the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Office will explain the certification process and answer questions, while featured panelists from locally owned, certified businesses will share firsthand perspectives on becoming certified and using certification to access new opportunities.

Only 172 Western Massachusetts businesses hold active MBE certification, representing 7% of certified MBEs statewide. Although women-owned businesses are among the nation's fastest-growing business segments, just 262 businesses in the region are certified as WBEs, or 9% of the statewide total. These figures highlight both the underrepresentation of minority- and women-owned firms in public procurement and the opportunity to expand contracting access and readiness across the region.

“Minority- and women-owned businesses have tremendous potential to grow by participating in the Commonwealth’s contracting ecosystem, whether as direct vendors or as subcontractors to larger firms. The limited number of certified diverse businesses in Western Massachusetts highlights both the need and the opportunity. GNCC is committed to advancing diversity, equity,

and inclusion as drivers of regional competitiveness and to helping historically underrepresented businesses pursue sustainable growth through state contracting,” said Vince Jackson, Executive Director of the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce.

Expanding Opportunities for Both Suppliers and Contractors

For minority- and women-owned businesses in Massachusetts, certification through the state’s Supplier Diversity Office can provide:

- Eligibility for state contracts
- Increased visibility to procurement officers
- Opportunities to serve as subcontractors to larger vendors
- Access to statewide business development resources

Contractors, developers, and major state grantees also benefit from a larger pool of certified MBEs and WBEs as they work to meet state spending targets with diverse and historically underrepresented businesses. A stronger roster of certified MBEs and WBEs supports compliance and strengthens the entire regional contracting network.

Large state-funded organizations, including human service providers, infrastructure contractors, and institutional grantees, will also benefit from a more robust MBE and WBE pipeline. GNCC’s initiative will help connect these organizations with qualified, certified minority-owned, women-owned, and diverse businesses.

Partnership with Common Capital

To reach and support eligible businesses, GNCC is partnering with Common Capital, a regional community development financial institution with deep experience serving underserved entrepreneurs.

“Supplier diversity is about more than creating opportunities, it’s about creating pathways for small businesses to grow, compete, and build wealth. At Common Capital, we believe that increasing access to contracts, just like increasing access to capital, strengthens businesses and builds a more inclusive and resilient regional economy,” said Raymond Lanza-Weil, President of Common Capital, Inc.

Partnership with the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce

GNCC is also partnering with the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce, whose Belonging in Business Initiative aligns closely with the goals of the MBE Certification Initiative. Through outreach, education, and relationship-building, the Amherst Area Chamber will help connect minority-owned businesses with the resources and support needed to pursue certification and expand access to contracting opportunities.

“Creating a more inclusive and welcoming business community is central to the Amherst Area Chamber’s mission. Through our Belonging in Business Initiative and our commitment to

supporting diverse entrepreneurs, we know that expanding the number of certified MBEs will help more business owners access opportunities for growth and long-term success. We are proud to partner with GNCC on this important effort to strengthen economic equity across our region,” stated Jacob Robinson, Executive Director of the Amherst Area Chamber.

A Regional Commitment to Inclusive Economic Growth

The GNCC initiative will include outreach, technical assistance, workshops, and one-on-one support to help eligible businesses navigate the certification process. By expanding the number of certified MBEs and WBEs, the GNCC and its partners aim to strengthen economic equity, broaden supplier diversity, and ensure that Western Massachusetts businesses are well positioned to compete for state and subcontracting opportunities.

Business owners interested in attending the October 29 workshop at Northampton Center for the Arts should register at northamptonchamber.com/events or contact the Greater Northampton Chamber for more information about participation, eligibility, and certification support.

For additional information about GNCC’s MBE and WBE Certification Initiative, contact:

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