

WBE Conference Support



Executive Summary

WBENC provides its members two national networking and business development opportunities annually: Summit & Salute and National Conference & Business Fair. Each provides opportunities for Matchmaker meetings, networking, and informal gatherings. However, very little business gets done during the events themselves. Most corporate professionals are completely overwhelmed by the number of WBEs they meet. For that reason, business owners must have a strategic communications plan that incorporates a variety of tactics before, during, and after each event.

This eBook provides insight for WBEs into the mindset of supplier diversity professionals and corporate buyers. It provides practical advice and tactics to make the most of each WBENC event. And it outlines recommendations for staying top-of-mind with buyers over the course of the year between events.



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Setting Expectations

Before we get into the do's and don'ts of your WBENC experience, let's manage expectations. By knowing what to expect - and what not to expect - you will understand your target clients better and be able to set realistic goals for success.

What You Can Expect

Access to supplier diversity professionals that can be advocates for your company.

Opportunities to make yourself visible to these advocates through one-on-one meetings, at workshops, and through competitions at the events.

Building your network of Women's Business Enterprises (WBEs).

Preparation and follow up are as important as the event itself.

What You Should Not Expect

Making a sales pitch to buyers.

Introductions to business units from every supplier diversity person.

Immediate contracts, RFPs, and new business.

Supplier diversity people to educate you on the core business of their companies.

The focus of WBENC events is not sales but business development that can lead to sales. WBENC events offer a chance to build relationships with supplier diversity advocates for your company. These advocates are supplier diversity professionals from WBENC corporate members and they are looking for companies like yours. In order to transform your contacts into advocates, they will expect you to have done your homework before you approach them. You will need to know what they buy, how they buy it, and what your goal is for the next step in your interaction. Once you've done that homework, the next step is getting into the supplier diversity mindset.

The Supplier Diversity Mindset

To get into the supplier diversity mindset, put yourself in the shoes of a typical supplier diversity person. As a supplier diversity person:

- You are responsible for not only women owned businesses in your supply chain but also minority owned businesses, LGBTQIA businesses, disability owned businesses and veteran owned businesses. There are roughly 30,000 businesses in that combined network.
- You are on the road as much as you are at your home base travelling to meet suppliers at events hosted local, national, and global organizations.
- You are likely part of a small, even one-person team that covers supplier diversity for a large complex organization. Your department could be procurement or diversity or even HR.

As a supplier diversity person you can advocate for diverse suppliers by:

- Recommending suppliers for upcoming RFPs or bids.
- Introducing certified businesses to business units and buyers in the company.
- Helping to negotiate favorable terms once you have won business.

Now that you know a little more about your supplier diversity people, you can start to see them as advocates to cultivate for your business.

Remember:

- Do not expect that they will know your industry as well as you do.
- Be a resource for them. If you can provide them information that makes you stand out among those 30,000 suppliers, you will be in a great position to build relationships and develop them as advocates.

Tip

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To give you an example of do's and don't regarding supplier diversity, I borrow an example from Reggie Humphrey at General Motors who had two very different experiences at WBENC events. The first is a WBE who came up to him on the conference floor expressing her desire to work with Ford and the solutions she provided. Reggie pointed to the shirt he had on with the GM logo on the left shoulder. The woman continued and when she mentioned Ford again, he motioned to the Chevy Impala on the conference floor behind him. When she didn't take the hint, he brought her over to the Ford booth at the conference and made an introduction. He was good natured about her confusion, but that supplier will have an uphill road to getting past that first impression if she does want to work with GM. Another WBE came to the next WBENC prepared and impressed Reggie. This WBE noted that GM has a "Zero, Zero, Zero" mission – zero crashes, zero emissions, zero congestion – and went on to describe how her solution aligned with that mission. Demonstrating that she knew who she was talking to, what they wanted, and where she fit in made her stand out in the competitive market of diverse business owners.

Overview of WBENC

To be a knowledgeable supplier, the key is to prepare. This guide focuses on the two major WBENC National Events so you should understand what those events are and how you can make the most of each one. Keep in mind, the preparation you do for national events will also help you maximize your presence at regional and local events. The list of opportunities at these events is not inclusive and may evolve from year to year but the basics are below.

Summit and Salute

The first WBENC event happens in March and is called the Summit and Salute. The Summit and Salute essentially kicks off the supplier diversity conference season. The defining details are:

- Attendance: Around 1500 people attend including corporate members, WBEs, and partners. WBENC would like this to be higher, thus the breadth of activities and opportunities available here.
- Awards: WBENC's Top Corporations and WBE Stars are recognized at this event. While more people come to the national conference, there are often executives here to receive awards. WBE Stars are nominated by their regional partner organizations.
- Matchmakers (see below): A meeting between a WBE and a corporate member at the request of the corporate member.
- Meet and Greets: In addition to matchmakers, Corporate Members participate in informal "Meet and Greets" where WBEs can sit with a supplier diversity representative (or procurement or both) at a table with other WBEs to engage in conversation and start fact finding.





- WEInnovate: The WEInnovate program is a way for WBEs to pitch an innovative solution for specific challenges facing corporate members. The format is a "Shark Tank" like pitch and chance for Q&A. To be eligible, WBEs must apply in advance for the program and be registered for the Summit and Salute by the early bird deadline.
- Pitch Competitions: WBEs have an opportunity to pitch their business to the WBENC Community and to judges who then advance 4 finalists to pitch at the WBENC Top Corps Gala on the final night.
- Business Labs and Workshops: WBENC offers a variety of different educational opportunities. WBEs often present these and need to submit proposals well in advance of the registration deadlines to be eligible to present.

WBENC National Conference and Business Fair

The WBENC National Conference and Business Fair (NCBF) takes place in June and lands squarely in the middle of "conference season" (remember, supplier diversity people will be attending conferences for many other organizations, not just WBENC).

- Attendance: Usually between 4500-5000 people attend the conference.
- Business Fair: The main event at the NCBF is the business fair where hundreds of corporate members and WBEs have exhibit booths to give suppliers a chance to speak with them and let them know about their solutions.
- Business Labs and Workshops: WBENC offers a variety of different educational opportunities. WBEs often present these and need to submit proposals well in advance of the registration deadlines to be eligible to present.
- Matchmakers: A meeting between a WBE and a corporate member at the request of the corporate member.



What is a Matchmaker?

The defining characteristics of a WBENC matchmaker are:

- a) the WBE has provided information in a profile that the corporate member reviewed and
- b) the supplier diversity person reviewed that profile and selected the WBE for a one-on-one meeting for about 20 minutes.



A corporate representative may want to meet with you to discuss imminent opportunities or more likely, get a feel for your services for a future opportunity. It's OK to ask, "What in my profile made you select my company?" so that you can tailor the conversation toward what they are looking for.

While the WBENC system doesn't let WBE's schedule matchmakers directly with the corporate members, you are able to see the list of companies that are participating by logging in to the matchmaking software. You can reach out to your targets, thank them for doing matchmakers and request that they choose you for a matchmaker. Even if they can't accommodate you in the matchmaker meetings formally, they may have time outside of that to meet with you.

Do not limit your matchmakers to just these formal meetings. To quote from Sandra Eberhard from WPEO-DC, Host Council for the WBENC 2019 National Conference, "Everything is a matchmaker!" Even if you haven't been pre-selected for a set time to meet a particular corporate member, you will have opportunities at the receptions, during workshops, at the business fair and, a personal favorite, in the bathroom line to meet with people and develop relationships. Be poised to see these for the opportunities they are and make the most of them.

How do you know when a matchmaker is successful? The key is to have a clear path to success. If you have a concrete next step to the matchmaker such as proposing a pilot program, receiving an invitation to a supplier summit, or establishing yourself as a resource to the supplier diversity person, then you will be unstoppable.

To prepare for a WBENC event, it is critical that you do your homework in advance. Conferences are more fun when you are calm and confident that you are making the most of it, and you can be more productive when you're having fun, secure in the knowledge you are "doing it right." I encourage people to prepare a checklist of the following items to make sure they are on track at the event:

Pre-Conference Checklist:

Have you cleared adequate time in your calendar so you are not taking or making too many calls to the office?
Have you cleared time for follow up after the conference?

Which of your targets are coming?

Who is participating in matchmakers?

What is your agenda?

When are you available to meet?

Have you written down booth numbers and grouped targets together so you can maximize your time?

What is the critical thing you are offering?

What is your pitch to each company or target audience?

Participating in a WBENC Event

Once you have prepared for the event you can follow your plan while still leaving time open for spontaneous opportunities that spring up.

- Make yourself available for after reception dinners or morning breakfasts – or invite people yourself.
- Take notes on the formal and informal meetings you have so you can follow up properly
- Take advantage of the conference materials. Download the app and read the materials. At the Summit and Salute, instead of the agenda (which was in the app) WBENC provided the “Opportunities Almanac” which listed corporate members and what goods and services they were looking for. Companies who reviewed that before Meet and Greet and Matchmakers were well prepared for their later meetings.

Engaging After a WBENC Event

A good rule for follow up is that no one can be mad at an email every 6 weeks. Follow up immediately with those companies who asked for something specific and time sensitive. For the others, don't be afraid to craft your follow up based on your conversation and take time with it. Also, use your regional partner organization (RPO) and WBENC resources to see where else you might have a chance to meet them, outside of another national event.

- Register in their corporate supplier diversity portals if you haven't already
- Respond to requests! If they do send you an opportunity, even if something isn't right for you, make sure to respond to let them know why.
- Be a resource for the supplier diversity person. Share your knowledge and expertise in such a way that it helps them to advocate for you.
- Take good notes and have a system for keeping track of your contacts. All of the information you gained prepares you for your next event. By keeping up with your contacts, you are doing your preparation for your next event, matchmaker, or meeting.

Frequently Experienced Challenges

You may be thinking, "I DO all this and it doesn't work." I would challenge you to think about one of these items you can do better and focus on that. Here are some typical challenges that WBEs face and how they overcame them.

My business is not big enough to get a matchmaker.

In my second year of business as a one-person shop I had 10 matchmakers at the national conference. Of those, two sent RFPs and I ended up doing work for two of those companies I met with. The rest were just getting a sense of my services but I was able to continue to build those relationships. Don't let size deter you but be realistic about your niche and where you can add value.

I've been certified for years and never got a matchmaker.

One of my clients had been attending the national conference for over 10 years and never got a matchmaker. By focusing on the one thing she could offer and requesting matchmakers with target companies, she had 3 matchmakers at the conference in Detroit in 2018.

I've had matchmakers before and then it never goes anywhere.

One of my clients had no trouble making connections. By pursuing her targets strategically, she was able to close a relatively new WBENC member and a large "big social" company.

I never have enough time to properly follow up.

Patient persistence will help you follow up the right amount. What is the right amount? You want them to remember you fondly. Too much follow up and they'll remember you, but not warmly. Too little follow up and they won't remember you at all. My rule of thumb is that no one can get mad at you for an email every six weeks. Schedule time for follow up before you even attend the conference and regular reminders to check in on those contacts after that. Business development is a marathon, not a sprint.



Cassandra Bailey

Cass (Oryl) Bailey is the president and CEO of Slice Communications. She believes that integrated public relations, social media, and email marketing efforts are critical for growing businesses looking to accomplish their business goals.

Cass brings a wide variety of experiences to the communications strategies she develops for the firm's clients. With a background in international politics, economics, and philosophy, communications has become her passion and she has been tapped by various industry associations and the media to share her insights and experiences in the field. She is also the host and emcee for Mashable's Social Media Day in Philadelphia, one of the largest events of its type in the United States.

She is deeply involved with her community, serving as Marketing Communications Chair for both the Entrepreneurs Organization of Philadelphia and the Business Leadership Forum at The Union League of Philadelphia, Executive Committee Member of the Small Business Board at the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, Chair Emerita of the Board for Tree House Books, and Secretary Emerita of the Board for Hopeworks 'N Camden. Cass graduated from The Catholic University of America with a degree in international politics, economics and philosophy.



Liz Whitehead

Liz Whitehead, CEO of 12PointFive is an executive with over 15 years of experience helping companies achieve their diversity and inclusion goals both domestically and internationally. Her clients include Fortune 500 companies and small to medium sized businesses.

12PointFive drives successful diversity and inclusion initiatives for clients to achieve D&I goals. For employees and staff of medium to large organizations this includes: development of diversity and inclusion training, facilitation, and innovative procurement events. For small business owners this includes one-on-one consulting and capacity development. The keys to the 12PointFive approach are engaging content, interactive sessions, opportunity development, hands on support and coaching, and measurable results.