

# STATE OF DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



## DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM

*Certified! What's next?*

A quick start guide to DBE Participation

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## Why become certified?

Many DBE firms have gone through the process of receiving their DBE certification only to find that the phone doesn't begin to ring the instant their names appear in the DBE Directory. Many firms go years without ever receiving a phone call. They know that if given the chance they can produce as good as, if not better than, anyone in their line of business. But the phone call hasn't come in so the chance isn't there.

As entrepreneurs you know as well as anyone that those phone calls are few and far between. Unfortunately, the same is true whether you are a certified DBE firm or not. As a newly certified firm you may find yourself looking forward to the promises of brighter and more prosperous futures only to see little change in the first few weeks, months, or even in the next year. This quick start guide will provide some valuable tips to making the most of your DelDOT DBE certification.

## What does the DBE program do for you?

The objective of the DBE Program is to insure nondiscrimination in the award and administration of DOT assisted contracts and create a level playing field on which DBE firms can compete fairly and participate equitably. We do this by setting **reasonable contract goals** that prime contractors (primes) **must make good faith efforts** to achieve. In other words, the federal government has entrusted DelDOT with money that they say must be distributed to a diverse business enterprise group. The DBE Program is designed to accomplish this task.

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### DBE PROGRAM

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- Goal Oriented
  - Marketing Tool
  - Helps You Get "in the Loop"
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How does this help you?

#### A Marketing Tool

When a goal has been established on a federal aid project the prime contractor must make every reasonable effort to meet those goals with firms that are listed in the DelDOT Unified Directory of Certified DBE Firms (Directory).

The Directory is a marketing tool. It is also the sole source for primes to choose a certified DBE firm. It should have all of your contact information, DBE certification number, and a description of the type of work that your firm can perform. If any of this information is inaccurate you may miss an opportunity. We do our best to include all of the information regarding your firm. **However, you should be sure to check your listing in the Directory to be certain that the information is accurate.**

The Directory also has a categorical listing that acts as an index. Be sure that your firm is listed in the proper category. Many times primes know which portions of the contract they are going to subcontract and will look for specific industries to do so. Again you may miss an opportunity if you are no listed correctly.

#### Getting in the Loop

As with most industries, many opportunities are offered to those that are “in the loop.” Prime contractors tend to stick with what they know works. They use the same contractors over and over again, which is good for those DBE firms that are “in the loop” and not so good for those who are struggling to get in.

#### **Business Networking**

The DelDOT DBE program is dedicated to creating an atmosphere for your growth. We have developed a supportive service program geared directly towards your business needs. Part of this initiative is bringing people in similar fields of business together to start the communications that can grow into lasting business relationships. We hold our own and promote other agency’s networking mixers for certified DBE firms and prime contractors to meet and discuss future opportunities.

## Training

We provide training in areas identified by certified DBE firms that provide the necessary knowledge to better serve the prime contracting community and the State of Delaware. It is to your advantage to be involved in as many of these functions as possible to increase your chances of participating on DelDOT contracts.

## Keeping You Informed

The DelDOT DBE Program has initiated various avenues to be sure that you can remain informed on many opportunities and activities. The DBE Bulletin Board is a web-based tool used to announce and promote a variety of small business events. Not only can you get information about DelDOT projects and events, but you can also see small business opportunities offered by other agencies in the Delaware area. It also provides links to DelDOT's other Civil Rights Programs, the online DelDOT DBE Directory, and many others.

## Doing Business with DelDOT

We have discussed what the DBE program does to help your business but you really need to know what you can do to better position yourself to take advantage of the program. This section will discuss the information that is available and what you can do with it to increase your participation level.

### Stay Informed

Be sure that you are registered as a contractor or as a consultant.

When you received your certification, you should have also registered as a contractor or consultant with the respective groups within DelDOT. **This is incredibly important.** Being registered makes sure that you receive the necessary information to be able to promote your services at the right time. If you have not registered or don't know if you are registered contact the DBE program (302-760-2035) right away.

## So you want to bid on a construction project?

Each week, DelDOT sends out advertisements for bid that you should be reviewing. These pieces of information are your first notifications of work that may be available to you. With them, you have the information you need to market your services as either the prime contractor or as a

subcontractor for specific line items. **Please reference attachment A for a detailed review of a DelDOT advertisement for bid.**

Once you have identified a project on which you can perform, you need to know 1) if you have the ability to bid on the project as a prime or 2) which items you wish to provide a quote on as a subcontractor. After you determine your level of participation (prime or sub), you need to make the next step to provide a proposal.

Before you submit that bid or quote, it might be a good idea to determine whether or not your quote is comparable to other firms performing on DelDOT contracts. DelDOT provides access to bid tabulations (bid tabs) on the Internet. Follow the outline below to see the bid tabs:

Know How Much  
to Quote

Be sure you know how much others are charging for the items on which you want to submit a quote.

1. Log on to [www.deldot.gov](http://www.deldot.gov).
2. Click on [Doing Business with DelDOT](#)
3. Under the **Competitive Bids** heading, Click on [Project and Payment Tracking Information](#)
4. If you are interested in a specific project, enter the state project number.
5. If not, simply scroll down the page until you find the list of the latest projects.
6. The Bid Tabulation Report column is found on the right side of the screen.
7. Click on the icon to open the PDF file (some of the newer contracts will not have the bid tabs available as of yet.)
8. The first pages that you see list the items that were bid on the project.
  - a. These items are organized by item number.
    - i. A description of the item is provided along with the quantity of the item. Take note of the item numbers of particular interest to you. You will need to reference them later.

9. The last pages list the same item numbers and include the bid amounts of all bidders on the project per item number.
  - a. You should notice the columns are organized with the lowest bidder listed in column 1. The second lowest is listed in column 2 and so on and so forth.
  - b. Using the noted items of particular interest to you, you can now see how much other contractors are bidding on those specific items. (This is also referred to as determining the market rate.)

### Do you know what you are bidding on?

Know what you  
are bidding on

Be sure to review the  
Standard  
Specifications.

Now that you know which items you can provide on DelDOT projects and the market rate for those items, you need to know what will be expected of you should you win a bid for those items. DelDOT posts the Standard Specifications and Supplemental Specifications on the Internet. These specifications detail what is expected on each of the items that are listed on the bid tabulation that you reviewed in the process listed above.

The specifications are organized by divisions that are identified by the first three numbers of the item that you are interested in. For example, if you are interested in item #612021 – reinforced concrete pipe, 15”, class IV – you would want to review division 600 – sub-section 612 to determine the details regarding this item. Follow the outline below to see the Standard Specifications:

1. Log on to [www.deldot.gov](http://www.deldot.gov).
2. Click on **Publications & Forms**.
3. Under the **Manuals** heading, click on [Standard Specifications 2001](#).
4. Click on the division that your item is listed under.
5. Click on the sub-section identified by the first three numbers of your item.
6. The specifications should be listed and printable for review.

Note: If your item is not listed it may be a special provision for that contract only. Please contact the DBE program office to be directed to the appropriate person to answer any questions

regarding your item. **The Standard Specifications are available to purchase in hard copy if you do not have access to the Internet. Supplemental Specifications are included in each proposal.**

Do you want to bid as a prime contractor?

If you have identified a project that you can perform at least 51% of the work with your own forces, then you may be ready to bid as a prime contractor. Remember, this is a serious commitment with serious rewards and potentially serious consequences. Many small firms think that they are ready to be a prime contractor before they actually are. *Be Ready!*

If you think you are ready, you should seek advice from an accountant, a lawyer, an insurance provider, and a bonding agent. You will need to understand the payment process that DelDOT follows and what that may mean to your bottom line. You will need to understand the contract language and all of the things that you are agreeing to. A bonding agent will inform you of your bonding limitations and the consequences of having your bond pulled. Once you are comfortable with all of these things you may be ready to submit your bid. If so, the following check list will help you through the process:

**Note: These are general guidelines and should not be construed as an exhaustive list of all the necessary steps required when submitting a bid as a prime contractor.**

1. Review the advertisement for bid to understand the pre-bid requirements (if applicable) and the timeline in which to submit all of the required documents.
2. Purchase the bid documents from the Contract Administration section within DelDOT. (Contact the DBE program if you are not sure who to contact.)
3. Review the bid documents carefully and when you are finished, carefully review them again.
4. Make sure you visit the actual work site to familiarize yourself with; the distance and time needed to get to and from the job, equipment access, and potential storage and field office locations.

5. Complete the bid proposal forms provided in the bid proposal or complete the electronic bid tabulation provided on the disk supplied by DelDOT.
6. Be sure to include all of the required documentation i.e. certification, bid bond, any other required forms.
7. Be sure to seek the advice of professionals prior to submitting your final bid package.
8. Be sure to submit the bid package on time. Late proposals are always rejected.

### Not ready to be a prime but you know you can be a subcontractor?

Know Who to  
Contact

Be sure you know  
whom you are giving  
information to.

For your convenience DelDOT has established an online viewing of all of the plan holders on a specific project. The list includes contact information for you to submit bids to. It is important to note that not all of the businesses on that list will submit bids as a prime and may actually be a competitor of yours. Be sure you know who is submitting bids to DelDOT as a prime. Follow the outline below to view the plan holder list:

1. Log on to [www.deldot.gov](http://www.deldot.gov).
2. Click on [Doing Business with DelDOT](#)
3. Under the **Competitive Bids** heading, Click on [Construction Projects](#) or [Material/Equipment Contracts](#)
4. The Plan Holder List column is found on the right side of the screen.
5. Click on the word [view](#) to open the list of plan holders for that project.
6. You can print the list for future reference.

If you don't have access to a computer at your office you can always contact DelDOT at 302-760-2031 for a mailing of the plan holders list or go to your local library to use their computer.

Now that you know the items on which you wish to bid, what DelDOT expects of those items, and whom you are going to submit quotes to, you need to prepare the quote accordingly. Be sure to include the following at a minimum:

1. Name, address, and all phone numbers. (Cell phones work well here)

2. **DelDOT DBE certification number.**
3. State contract number (see attachment A)
4. Federal Aid Number (if applicable, see attachment A)
5. **DBE Goal percentage (only found on Federal Aid Projects, see attachment A)**
6. Items on which you wish to bid (be sure to use the same quantities and units of measure (i.e. SF=square foot)
7. Total amount of quote (leave little up for questions)
8. Depending on your industry, you may want to include an expiration date for your quote. (Some industry prices fluctuate frequently)

You should be ready to fax or mail your quote to the prime contractors. Notice the bold, underlined items above. You are making the most of your DBE certification by letting them know that you are a certified DBE firm and this particular project has a DBE goal.

## Getting “In the Loop”

It’s not always easy to get “in the loop” as they say. Unfortunately, simply being listed in our directory will not put you in the loop. You are going to have to take advantage of opportunities to be where the people in your line of business are. Take advantage of our annual DBE networking mixer and other activities in the local area. Stay tuned into the various associations and public events that many primes are involved in. Proper use of the information gathered at these events can be powerful tools to getting “in the loop.” It may not be easy for you to be in those atmospheres due to time and other obstacles, but it may give you the advantage the next time you submit a quote. Most of all, sell yourself!

### Know who’s who

Working with new, unfamiliar people is risky business. People, in general, like to know what they are getting into when they enter into a contractual relationship with another party. Be sure you understand who the primes are and how they conduct business. Ask people in the industry about their relationship with the company you are considering working with. Many small firms simply

take what they can get and often find themselves on the losing side of an agreement. Be business savvy in your research and negotiations.

## Stay involved

Take advantage of the various training opportunities offered by our Supportive Services program. We coordinate training on topics from contract negotiation to workplace safety. This is not only a time to learn something but it is also a time to network with other small businesses. It just might be your next step to getting “in the loop.”

## Staying “In the Loop”

It may not be easy to get in the loop but staying there may be an even bigger challenge. Many small businesses take any and all of the work that they can get. This just might be a pitfall for you.

## Capacity

Be sure that you have the capacity to perform the entire project as outlined in your subcontract agreement. Stay within your area of expertise. Try not to take on things outside of your normal line of business. You may want to try and expand your business but be mindful of the long-term negative impact that sometimes follows major setbacks.

## Timeliness

Stay in touch with your schedule. Some firms overbook their calendar and quickly realize they are too busy to perform all of their commitments. In other words, they have spread themselves too thin to effectively complete all of their projects. These situations will eventually lead to a bad reputation that will knock you out of the loop that you have worked so hard to get into.

## Strong but flexible

Maintain a strong business approach to handling your contract agreements. You may find yourself in a disagreement regarding terms in your contract. You should be firm but negotiable. You can't allow other companies to dictate how you handle disagreements. At the same time, you should be able to negotiate a reasonable solution. You may develop a reputation of being too difficult to work with if you are too firm. And thus you again find yourself outside of the loop. On the other hand

you may find yourself out of business if you are too flexible. Always know the break-even points in any negotiation and, if possible, be ready to walk away. This is often the hardest part but you may find that it will save you more time, money and stress to just move on to something more in line with what you need.

## Ready, Willing and Able

Hopefully, this guide has provided the insight necessary to use your DBE certification to its fullest potential. You should have an understanding of what the DBE program is designed to do and what you can do to position yourself to participate at a high level on federal aid projects. The Delaware Department of Transportation remains focused on delivering an effective DBE Program for your continued growth and development. Please be sure to contact us using the information below if we can be of any additional assistance to you.

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