

## #Rise2theChallenge Campaign

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### What is the “#Rise2theChallenge” campaign?

In honor of International Women’s Day, March 8, 2021, WEConnect International is launching its #Rise2theChallenge campaign for its over 110 global members. Organizations will have one year to publicly commit to a specific spend target and/or relevant project with women-owned businesses globally. This will help accelerate progress toward the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), Gender Equality, by 2030. Over the course of the next year, WEConnect International will track, aggregate and share the results—culminating in a celebration on March 8, 2022.

#### Can any company participate?

WEConnect International brings motivated, large corporate, multilateral and government member buyers together with qualified women-owned suppliers around the world. As such, the #Rise2theChallenge campaign is focused specifically on challenging these leading member organizations to continue their journey, because they have made the important step of committing to focus on global inclusive sourcing outside the United States by putting support in place to actively source from women-owned suppliers. For those organizations interested in becoming members, contact: VP of Member Development Michael Tobolski, [mtobolski@weconnectinternational.org](mailto:mtobolski@weconnectinternational.org). All organizations are encouraged, of course, to increase their spend and relevant projects with women-owned businesses.

#### Is there a requirement to meet a timeline for the actual commitment?

Yes. Member buyers have **one full year** from now through March 8, 2022, to publicly make their commitments.

#### Which organizations have agreed to participate? **Coming Soon**

#### Why is making a public commitment so important?

Progress toward SDG 5 can only be made with intentional and visible actions from senior leaders of large organizations supported by spend with women-owned businesses. For so many years, actions have been led by procurement and forward-thinking diversity, equality and inclusion leaders in organizations. Many organizations and governments have worked to raise awareness of the challenges diversity and inclusion are designed to solve, but there has been little change beyond the workforce. The general consensus is that meaningful change has been agonizingly slow for the majority of women around the world and one of the easiest ways to accelerate progress is for large buyers to proactively include more women-owned businesses in procurement opportunities, resulting in more spend with competitive women-owned businesses.

#### How do you plan to hold these organizations accountable?

Over the course of the next year, WEConnect International will track, aggregate and share the number of organizations committing to target spend with women-owned business and/or delivering relevant programs—culminating in a celebration on March 8, 2022. In addition, the services that WEConnect International provides to its members are designed to match buyer demand with the supply base in over 120 countries. Active members are consistently identifying Tier 1 and Tier 2 women suppliers (prime suppliers and their subcontractors) that can benefit from inclusive sourcing and are routinely sharing opportunities for women-owned businesses to compete for those opportunities. Members can deliver against their commitments by actively leveraging the support services available through their membership and contributing to programs that develop the capacity of women as suppliers.

**What benefits will organizations reap if they make such a commitment?**

Making a public commitment to gender inclusive sourcing elevates the visibility of their brand with their clients and with their own teams seeking to work for an organization that values inclusive growth and prosperity. These large organizations can help change the narrative at all levels on the importance of gender inclusive sourcing, while gaining visibility for their efforts to support the success of women business owners who ultimately deliver innovative solutions, provide jobs and support their communities and economies.

**You mentioned that “women-owned businesses earn less than 1% from large corporate and government spends with suppliers.” Why is that?**

This is the result of centuries of systemic inequalities for women the world over. While the U.S. made advancements in the 1970s through government requirements to include diverse suppliers in government bids and that spread across to corporate America over the last 50 years, slower progress has been made outside the U.S. The public and private sector has been critical to that progress by working together over this period to raise the awareness and provide solutions. Unfortunately, outside the U.S., the adoption of these proven approaches is lagging and to ensure success, governments need to do a lot more by updating their gender equality strategies and national budgets to better support women as business owners. Women business owners are uniquely positioned to deliver innovative solutions, create new quality jobs, grow the national budget and reinvest their wealth back into their families and communities. Increasingly, WEConnect International is helping governments with their inclusive sourcing strategies based on the lessons of the private sector. Governments collect taxes from all of their citizens, but rarely do they spend that revenue on women business owners capable of delivering competitive solutions.

**Why does your campaign mention SDG 5?**

Gender equality is both a social issue and an economic opportunity. WEConnect International helps drive money into the hands of women business owners by enabling them to compete in the global marketplace. This important work supports the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), Gender Equality, to be achieved by 2030.

## **Do organizations need to separate out their individual commitments for women-owned businesses vs. minority-owned businesses?**

We recognize that many organizations make commitments to increase diversity and inclusion overall, including more than just women-owned businesses. We celebrate this commitment to diversity and accept that it may be difficult for an organization to distinguish among all types of groups that need additional focus now and into the future. Having said that, in general, women represent half the population of the world but win less than 1% of the total spend by large organizations in products and services. This is the gap we need to address with urgency and by focusing on women-owned businesses, most of the other underutilized groups also benefit since women typically represent almost half of all diverse groups.

## **Are there specific industries WEConnect International is most interested in?**

To make a match of a women-owned business supplier to a member buyer, they must be selling products and services found in business-to-business value chains. Consumer products are important when selling to retailers, but the majority of opportunities are going to be business-to-business. Within that framework all sectors are a target, but there are some solutions that can only be offered by very large organizations working at scale and this is where subcontracting plays an important role. WEConnect International's efforts have proven to be successful in manufacturing, agriculture, food & beverage, hospitality, pharma, technology and many other hard goods industries, as well as a wide array of professional services.

## **How many organizations are members of WEConnect International?**

WEConnect International has over 110 member buyers – and growing. Membership has grown by 10% annually over the last several years and each of these organizations has multiple buyers involved in the sourcing process, meaning there are thousands of buyers engaged in trying to find women-owned suppliers that meet their needs.

## **What are the benefits of membership?**

WEConnect International provides members with the global database and resources required to develop and leverage a diverse and inclusive global value chain. While there are many benefits, they are largely captured in three primary areas including:

- Finding and matching suppliers to meet their demand
- Growing global supplier diversity and inclusion impact through member sharing and best practices
- Localized implementation of education, training and support to bring it to life

As a result, the organization is respected as a one-stop shop, with high integrity and a reliable and cost-effective way to identify women-owned businesses in over 120 countries and gain access to WEConnect International certified women-owned suppliers in almost 50 countries.

## **What are the requirements of membership in WEConnect International?**

Members will benefit most when committed to supplier diversity and inclusion globally and have annual revenues over \$25 million. However, other than an expressed commitment to inclusive sourcing there are no other requirements.

### **What does WEConnect International do?**

WEConnect International is a member-led, global non-profit that brings motivated, large corporate, multilateral and government buyers together with qualified women-owned suppliers around the world. It works with over 110 multinational buying organizations, with over \$1 trillion in annual purchasing power combined, that have committed to sourcing more products and services from women-owned businesses based in over 120 countries. WEConnect International identifies, educates, registers and certifies women's business enterprises based outside of the U.S. that are at least 51% owned, managed and controlled by one or more women. WEConnect International provides certification in almost 50 countries that represents over 60 percent of the world's population. The organization's mission is to help drive money into the hands of women business owners by enabling them to compete in the global marketplace.

### **Where does WEConnect International provide support?**

WEConnect International is a global organization based in Washington, D.C., and has a presence across six continents serving women-owned businesses in over 120 countries and certified women-owned suppliers in almost 50 countries. In some cases, WEConnect International has local and regional resources on the ground to focus on outreach and certification in countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Japan, Singapore, the UK and Canada as well as Brazil, Mexico and the Caribbean. In other countries, there are local partner organizations that, in collaboration with WEConnect International, are helping to expand reach and maximize our collective impact.

### **Why is WEConnect International based in Washington, D.C., yet the vast majority of your work is outside the U.S.?**

To affect change and raise the importance of the narrative, Washington, D.C., offers a major hub of influence. WEConnect International works with U.S.-based institutions and governments as well as multilaterals, development banks and embassies all over the world to help countries advance their gender policies and also influence many large corporations that have made inroads into their U.S. supplier diversity and inclusion programs. However, the model of the organization is to have on-the-ground resources where needed to ensure outreach and relevance in key markets of opportunity.