



**WEConnect International Registration &
Certification of Women-Owned Businesses
Standards, Governance, and Processes**

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1.0 Purpose

This document provides an overview of the standards, governance, and processes of WEConnect International regarding the registration and certification of women-owned businesses.

More information about WEConnect International, including its mission, members and the benefits of certification, can be found at <https://www.weconnectinternational.org/en/womens-business-enterprises/certification#Countries>.

2.0 Registration Standard

The free Registration offered by WEConnect International allows women-owned and women-identifying businesses (WOB) to become part of the WEConnect International network without the certification process, provided they can demonstrate proof of their identity as women. To become a registered WOB, the following requirements must be met:

- complete the WEConnect Business Registration questionnaire;
- own 51% of the business;
- have the power to direct matters of management, policy and operations without restriction;
- must have primary power to direct the day-to day management of the business;
- make financial and legal decisions independently without substantial reliance on male owned or controlled resources.

To ensure the accuracy of registrations, WEConnect International reserves the right to request and review supporting documents.

3.0 Certification Standard

Businesses certified by WEConnect International must meet the standard that a woman, or a group of women, or women-identifying individuals, owns, manages, and independently controls 51% or more of the business, with proof of their identity as women (“Certification Standard”).

4.0 Certification Overview

WEConnect International certifies women-owned and women-identifying businesses in select countries. An updated list of countries can be found at www.weconnectinternational.org.

An application for certification is comprised of the following:

- completed questionnaire;
- supporting documentation;
- confirmation of payment of certification fee; and
- additional information and documentation, as requested.

Upon submission of the foregoing, a qualified assessor (“Assessor”) reviews the completed questionnaire and documentation. The Assessor then engages with the woman business owner(s) to review the information provided in the completed questionnaire and documents provided. Finally, the Assessor asks questions to assess whether the standards of certification are fully met and may request additional information and/or documentation to complete a review of the prospective business.

The Assessor summarizes his or her findings and makes a recommendation regarding the certification eligibility of the business to the WEConnect Certification Manager who, in turn, makes a final determination respecting the certification, or seeks additional input from the WEConnect International Certification Committee (“Certification Committee”) before making a final determination.

5.0 Certification Governance

WEConnect International is a non-profit member organization comprised of organizations seeking to buy more from women-owned businesses globally. The activities of the organization are overseen by the WEConnect International Board of Directors (“Board of Directors”) comprised of WEConnect International members meeting the criteria for Board of Directors membership. Please see more information at www.weconnectinternational.org. The Certification Committee is a committee that reports to the Board of Directors.

The Certification Committee’s mission is to ensure the certification process meets WEConnect International member expectations, is effective in ensuring compliance with the established Certification Standard and is efficient for the woman-owned businesses seeking certification. The Certification Committee meets as needed, but typically monthly.

Key responsibilities of the Certification Committee include:

- periodically reviewing certification processes and procedures to identify opportunities for improvement in terms of robustness and efficiency;
- considering proposed material updates to certification standards and processes based on member needs;
- supporting the Director of Certification in consideration of complex certification cases, including certification disputes, as needed;
- providing updates to the Board of Directors on issues pertaining to certification; and
- making recommendations to the Board of Directors on any certification matters requiring the approval of the Board of Directors.

6.0 Certification Eligibility & Documentation

The criteria and processes documented herein are used to determine whether an applicant business (“Applicant”) meets the Certification Standard.

WEConnect International will consider all information and documentation provided by the Applicant in considering whether the business meets the Certification Standard.

6.1 Basic Eligibility

Businesses will be considered eligible for potential certification if they are formed/have their principal place of business in a country for which WEConnect International provides certification, including women-identifying individuals with proof of their identity as women (refer to 6.3.1).

While other business types may be considered in consultation with the Certification Committee, the following business types will be considered eligible for potential certification:

- sole proprietorships;
- corporations;
- partnerships (general and limited); and
- limited liability companies.

Please note that WEConnect International does not certify social enterprises or non-profit organizations.

6.2 Key Certification Standard Criteria

The following section provides the standard criteria conditions:

6.2.1 Ownership

The Applicant must demonstrate that a woman/women or women-identifying individuals own 51% of the business, with proof of their identity as women. "Ownership" is determined based on title to, and beneficial ownership of, stock, membership interests, or other equity in a business. More specifically:

- the ownership of the business by the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must be real, substantial and beyond pro-forma ownership as reflected in its ownership documents;
- the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must share in all risk and profits commensurate with her(their) ownership interest;
- the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must not be minors and the securities/funds that constitute the majority ownership shall not be held in trust that she/they do not control; and
- the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must demonstrate they have contributed capital and/or expertise.

Ownership by a woman or women is considered as follows based on the business type.

Business Type	Ownership
Sole Proprietor	The woman owns 100% of the company assets.
Corporation	The women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must own at least 51% of each class of voting stock and 51% of the aggregate of all outstanding stock.
Partnership (General)	The women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must own at least 51% of the partnership interests.

Partnership (Limited)	The women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, own at least 51% of the general partnership interest and at least 51% control among the general partners. The women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must receive at least 51% of the profits and benefits generated by the business.
Limited Liability Companies	The women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must own at least 51% of membership interests and at least 51% of the management and control among the members. The women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must also participate in all risks and profits of the business at a rate commensurate with their membership interests.

Ownership in other business types will be considered, on a case by case basis, in consultation with the Certification Committee.

6.2.2 Management

The Applicant must show evidence that the woman owner(s) or women-identifying individuals manage the business, with proof of their identity as women. "Management" is defined as having the ability to control basic business functions and day to day management. This includes, but is not limited to, the ability to sign payroll checks and letters of credit, signature responsibility of insurance and/or bonds, authority to negotiate contracts and financial services.

The organization and governing documents (or other documents assessed as having equivalency) of the Applicant must support the case that the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, manage the business. Special attention will be given to:

- the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, having the power to direct or cause the direction of the management and policies of the business and to make the day-to-day, as well as major, decisions on matters related to policy and operations;
- the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, having the ability to hire and fire managers who are charged with running the business;
- the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, holding the highest defined officer position in the company; and
- the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, having operational authority and managerial control and oversight. Operational authority means the ability to operate the day-to-day activities of the business and can be evidenced by the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, having:
 - experience in the activities of the business;
 - responsibility for decision making;
 - technical competence in the activities of the business;

- sufficient knowledge of the business to manage and evaluate the work of subordinates; and
- managerial control whereby the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, make independent and unilateral business decisions necessary to guide the business.

6.2.3 Control

The Applicant must also show evidence that the woman owner(s) or women-identifying individuals have control of the business, with proof of their identity as women. “Control” is defined by having the power:

- to direct the management of the business as evidenced through the governance documents and actual day-to-day operation; and
- to direct or cause the direction of management or policies and the ability to make decisions on strategy and the direction of the business. There must not be any provisions which restrict the ability of the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, from exercising this control.

6.2.3.1 Governance

The organizational and governing documents (or other documents assessed as having equivalency) of the Applicant must be void of any provision that restricts the ability of the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, from exercising managerial control and operational authority of the business. Special attention shall be given to:

- the composition and functioning of the governing body of the business;
- the content of internal governing documents respecting the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, ability to direct the management and policies of the business; and
- the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, holding the highest defined officer position in the company.

6.2.4 Independence

“Independence” is defined as the ability to perform in the business’ area of specialty/expertise without substantial reliance upon finances and resources (e.g., equipment, automobiles, facilities) of males or non-woman business enterprises.

The following factors will be examined to determine independence:

- the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women, must have essential expertise and skills critical to the business’s operation;
- the woman owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of their identity as women, must be able to operate the business without substantial reliance on outside resources; and
- the woman owner(s) or women-identifying individuals with proof of their identity as women must control or cause to be controlled all major business decisions affecting the business.

6.3 Questionnaire and Documentation

To assess whether the business meets the Certification Standard, information via the completed questionnaire and supporting documentation must be provided.

The questionnaire includes basic and more detailed questions such as those relating to shareholders, voting, positions, and financial information.

To verify ownership, documentation is required, and the required documentation varies for each business type. While not an exhaustive list and understanding that terminology may be different in each country, the following is a guide:

Business Type	Documentation Supporting Ownership
Sole Proprietor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passport, birth certificate, or government-issued identification for all women on the application. Women-identifying individuals must also provide proof of their identity as women.• Most recent tax returns• Current profit and loss statement, or other applicable financial Documents• Business registration document if applicable• Bank account authorization
Corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passport, birth certificate, or government-issued identification for all women on the application. Women-identifying individuals must also provide proof of their identity as women.• Ownership structure• Resume/biography of owner(s) and senior management• Certificate of incorporation• Articles of association or equivalent document e.g. partnership deed or governance documents• Most recent tax returns• Current profit and loss statement and other financials• Bank account authorization

Partnership (General)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passport, birth certificate, or government-issued identification for all women on the application. Women-identifying individuals must also provide proof of their identity as women. • Ownership structure • Resume/biography of owner(s) and senior management • Articles of association or equivalent document e.g. partnership deed or governance documents
Partnership (Limited)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passport, birth certificate, or government-issued identification for all women on the application. Women-identifying individuals must also provide proof of their identity as women. • Most recent tax returns • Current profit and loss statement and other financials • Bank account authorization
Limited Liability Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passport, birth certificate, or government-issued identification for all women on the application. Women-identifying individuals must also provide proof of their identity as women. • Ownership structure • Resume/biography of owner(s) and senior management • Articles of Organization • Most recent tax returns • Current profit and loss statement and other financials • Bank account authorization

On occasion, given relative complexity of the business or typical documentation available in the country, additional documentation may be requested. Some examples include:

- organization chart for holding companies;
- loan documentation if shareholders have liens;
- lease agreements if the business shares space with another company; or
- lease agreements if the business leases equipment or other assets that constitutes more than 51% of the value of the business.
- Under specific circumstances, a medical letter might be necessary to offer proof for women-owned businesses requiring assistance due to special needs.
- The latest government-issued identification takes precedence over any other documents for identity confirmation.

7.0 Certification Process

The certification process is an in-depth review of the business seeking to be certified as women-owned, therefore, the WEConnect International certification process may take up to 90-days to complete, however, the average processing time is 30 days after an application and all of the required documentation is received. To ensure timely processing, applicants must upload all required documents and complete the certification interview within 30 days. The time starts upon submission of completed application including all supporting documents and proof of payment. It is the WOB's responsibility to make sure all documents are correct and uploaded, incorrect or incomplete documents will delay the process.

All required documentation must be uploaded, and the certification interview completed within 30 days of the initial contact from the WEConnect International Assessor. In exceptional cases, WEConnect International may extend the application deadline by up to 45 days to accommodate unforeseen circumstances for uploading documents or scheduling interviews. Applicants requiring an extension up to 90 days may do so by paying a \$100 fee. However, applications cannot remain open for longer than 90 days. Failure to submit required documentation or schedule and complete the interview within the approved timeframe will result in application closure and denial.

Following are the key steps in the certification process (which may be modified, although not materially, from time to time, to deal with practicalities):

7.1 Certification Process

1. Applicant completes questionnaire and provides required documents.
2. Applicant pays the certification fee. The fee is determined by the country of the Applicant's business and their most recent year's revenue.
3. Upon receipt of the application, documents, and payment, the Certification Manager, or designate assign an Assessor based on regional location.
4. Assessor confirms questionnaire is complete and required documentation is provided and seeks from Applicant additional information or documentation if any are missing.
5. Applicants must reply within (30) days of requests for information or documents from assessor or WEConnect International. If applicants are unresponsive to the request(s), the application will be closed, and the application fee will be forfeited.
6. Assessor completes review of application, guided by standardized assessment protocols and requests additional information and/or documentation as needed. Some examples include:
 - a. Quorum of Shareholders Meetings
 - b. Breakdown of Shareholding
 - c. Titles of Executives
 - d. Bank Account Signatories

Assessor will schedule and conduct an interview with the Applicant women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women,. Interview will be conducted virtually or in-person.

The interview is thorough and covers the following, as applicable:

- verification of information provided in the application;
 - history about the start-up of the business or purchase of the business;
 - day-to-day responsibilities of the women owner(s) or women-identifying individuals, with proof of identity as women,;
 - decision-making; and
 - review of documentation.
7. Assessor will complete the standardized Assessment Form inclusive of their recommendation and submit it to the Director of Certification or designate.
 8. Certification Manager, or designate will review the Assessment Form and, as needed, review the application, make a final determination, or seek additional information from the Assessor which may result in additional

information or documentation from the Applicant.

9. Certification Manager, at his or her discretion, may seek the guidance of the Certification Committee.
10. Upon completion of review of application, Certification Manager, or designate, will advise Applicant of the outcome decision. If certified, certification will be provided. If certified denied, notice of decision, reasons for decision and instructions for appeal will be provided.

7.2 Applicant Appeal Process

Within thirty (30) days of receipt of denial, Applicant may appeal decision by sending a written appeal to appeals@weconnectinternational.org. If Applicant does not appeal decision within thirty (30) days, applicant may reapply, but only after six (6) months after initial application date. No refund of fees will be provided.

1. Applicant submits appeal to the Director of Certification providing reason for appeal. No additional documentation may be submitted.
2. All documentations and assessment materials will be provided to the Certification Committee to make the final determination.
3. Final decision will be conveyed to the Director of Certification who will advise Applicant. No further appeal may be made.

7.3 Disputed Certification Process

A third party may challenge the certification of a business.

1. Challenge must be made in writing and addressed to the Certification Team via WEcertification@weconnectinternational.org. Communication must detail the reasons for the challenge and provide evidence respecting the ineligibility of the certification.
2. The Certification Committee Chair shall assess the challenge to determine its credibility and within thirty (30) business days, will advise challenger of receipt of challenge, whether or not the challenge is deemed credible, and either advise the file is closed, or investigation will take place.
3. If challenge is credible, the certified business will be notified in writing that a challenge has been issued, protecting the identity of the individual disputing the certification. The correspondence will summarize the grounds and evidence presented for the challenge.
4. The certified business will be given the opportunity to refute the challenge in writing with evidence/proof of eligibility for certification.
5. The Certification Committee Chair, or designate, will review the information and documentation, and may seek the guidance of the Certification Committee and/or allow for a hearing to respond to the challenge.
6. Within thirty (30) business days of receipt of the response from the certified business or upon completion of the hearing, whichever is later, the Certification Committee Chair will make a final decision and inform both parties of the decision in writing.
7. If the decision is to revoke the certification, the decision may be appealed to the Certification Committee. During the appeal process, the certification will remain active.

7.4 60-Day Notice Policy

WEConnect International's 60-Day Notice policy provides a "grace period" for certified WBEs to come into compliance with WEConnect International WBE Eligibility Standards. This policy is not applicable for new applicants. A 60-Day Notice may be used in the following circumstances:

1. If there has been a change to the WEConnect International Certification Standards and Procedures that affects the eligibility of currently certified WBEs, those certified WBEs will be eligible for a 60-Day Notice.
 - a. WEConnect International will work to explain the change in the Standards and disclose which WBEs are eligible for a 60-Day Notice.
2. If a certified WBE implements a change within her business which effects the company's certification eligibility, the WBE will be eligible for a 60-Day Notice.
3. If upon recertification review, with no changes to the WBE's original application documentation, WEConnect International discovers that the WBE is not eligible for certification, that WBE will be granted a 60-Day Notice.
 - a. Applicants seeking initial certification may not be issued a 60-Day Notice. Any applicant that does not meet WEConnect International Certification Standards should be denied.

7.5 Decertification Process

A certified business may be decertified and suspended from eligibility of any certification benefits for any of the following reasons:

- the ownership of the business has changed and does not meet the eligibility criteria;
- the business is found to be engaging in business practices that circumvent the intent of certification; and/or
- WEConnect International discovers irregularities relative to the status of the business as per the result of a challenge.

Within ten (10) business days of the decision to decertify a business, WEConnect International will notify the business of the decision and summarize the reasons for the decision. Any business that believes it has been wrongly decertified may appeal the decision pursuant to the Appeal Process.

8.0 Recertification Process

Certification is valid for three years from date of issuance.

Recertification process

1. Review and Update Company Information: Update all relevant sections within the Ariba application, including:
 - a. Business legal name, headquarters, and contact details
 - b. Ownership structure and percentages
 - c. Board of directors and key management roles
 - d. Operational information
 - e. Uploads of governing documents, if changed
2. Upload Documentation: Depending on changes since your previous certification, you may need to upload updated documents, such as:
 - a. Current share certificates or cap table
 - b. Articles of incorporation (or amended versions)
 - c. Operating agreement, bylaws, shareholder agreements
 - d. Trust documents (if shares held via trust)
 - e. Bank mandate/signatory letters; powers of attorney (if needed)
 - f. Proof of identification for woman owner(s)

- g. Updated financials (recent tax returns, balance sheet or profit and loss statement)
 - h. Organizational chart and management roster
 - i. Board/committee rosters and minutes showing appointments/resignations
 - j. Amended governance documents; reserved-matters lists
 - k. Management/franchise/licensing/loan agreements (with covenants as applicable)
 - l. Articles of Amendment (if filed for governance changes)
 - m. Latest BOI Report (if required)
 - n. Bank Authorization
3. Complete the Recertification Interview: A 30–45-minute virtual interview with the woman business owner(s) is required during each recertification cycle.
 4. Certification Review: After the interview and submission of required materials:
 - a. The file is assigned to a Certification Assessor
 - b. Director of Certification, or designate, reviews the recertification application, makes a determination about the recertification and advises the business of the decision. Possible decisions could be:
 - approved
 - request to provide additional information or clarification
 - denied and not eligible for re-certification
 5. The recertification approval process can take up to 60 days including release of the new certificate.

9.0 Certification Application Policies

The certification application is valid for a period of three (3) years. Prior to the initial certification expiration date, WBEs are required to complete a Re-certification process every (3) years.

1. Applicants are responsible for following-up with their certification application or recertification of certification.
2. Annually, all certified WBE's will be required to log in before the anniversary month stated on certificate to update information, failure to update information annually will invalidate certification status.
3. WEConnect International will transmit WBE recertification notifications to the WBE approximately 120 days prior to the certification expiration date. However, it is the WBE's responsibility to maintain current certification. The completed Re-certification Applications will be reviewed in order of receipt.
4. An assessment will be required every three (3) years. WBEs must complete a recertification application and submit appropriate documents and payment per section 8.0 above. Payment is determined on a sliding scale based on revenue.
5. A WBE that fails to submit all appropriate information/documentation for recertification within 30 days of their expiration date will have their status adjusted from "Certified/Qualified" to "Expired" and its name will be removed from the WEConnect International Certified Supplier List. The WBE will be notified in writing (via email) of its expired status. If a WBE cannot meet the deadline due to special circumstances, an extension of time may be granted at the WEConnect International discretion.
6. If by reason of a change to WEConnect International Standards and Procedures a currently certified company is no longer certifiable, a WEConnect International representative may grant the company a sixty (60) day grace period from the date of the WEConnect International's review to come into compliance with the changed standard and procedure.
7. Applicants are required to notify WEConnect International within thirty (30) days of any substantive change in ownership or control of their business under the penalties provided by applicable law.
8. Upon written request, an applicant may withdraw their application and supporting documentation

without cause or prejudice prior to the WEConnect International review.

9. Applicants are required to follow up on requests to withdraw their applications with WEConnect International at WECertification@weconnectinternational.org. No refunds will be issued under any circumstances, including for withdrawals. If the applicant has not heard from WEConnect International within thirty (30) days, the applicant is required to follow up again. If the applicant fails to follow up within this timeframe, the application will be closed and purged, and application fees will be forfeited.
10. No refunds will be processed for certification applications. The certification fee is charged for the application review process and administrative costs and is not a fee for, nor a guarantee of, certification.