



2014 WIPP Legislative and Regulatory Successes

Sole Source Authority for WOSB Procurement Program

Improving the WOSB Procurement Program was the top priority for WIPP in 2014, making for an enormous victory when legislation was signed into law granting sole source authority to contracting officers in the program. Contracts under the caps of \$4 million and \$6.5 million (for manufacturing) can be awarded to a qualified woman-owned firm without competition. This change will vastly improve the WOSB Procurement Program and bring parity to small business contracting programs, as WOSBs were the only group lacking this contracting tool.

Achieving this success in 2014 took the entirety of the year. It relied on top-tier advocacy to House and Senate leaders, including the Chairs of four Committees, and the support of a Cabinet official and the Administration. Legislation was introduced in the House and Senate to address the issue, which was finally included in the annual defense spending bill. The issue of sole source authority in the WOSB Procurement Program was included in multiple WIPP testimonies in 2014 and the subject of a Senate hearing. Finally, sole source authority was a key tenet of [21st Century Barriers to Women's Entrepreneurship](#), a Senate report detailing barriers facing women entrepreneurs.

The addition of sole source authority ties into a more than decade long effort to implement and improve a program that can provide women business owners with access to the federal marketplace. Since our founding in 2001, WIPP led the campaign to ensure the program served women entrepreneurs. It took eleven years for the program to be put in place in 2011. Since then, WIPP has focused on statutory and regulatory changes that would make the program function effectively. This includes the removal of dollar caps on program awards achieved in 2012 and made effective in 2013. The final, and most difficult, challenge was gaining the authority for sole source contracts in the program. WIPP continues to support women contractors and would-be contractors beyond advocacy with its ChallengeHER and Give Me 5 educational programming.

This year alone, WIPP successfully engaged 15 of its Coalition Partners to advocate for sole source authority. Work is already underway to ensure that regulation implementing this change is effective and timely.

Improving Women's Access to Capital

In its most recent [Annual Report](#), the National Women's Business Council considered the issue of capital access a pillar of women's entrepreneurship, noting that "getting more capital in the hands of women entrepreneurs will grow the economy and create jobs." Yet, the Senate report (above) found that while women receive 16% of conventional small business loans, they only receive 4% of the total dollar amount of these loans given out. This disparity prevents women business owners from accessing the appropriate capital to help run their businesses.

WIPP took this message to Capitol Hill seeking legislative solutions. Working closely with Chair Cantwell (D-WA), legislation was introduced with changes to improve women's access to capital through the SBA loan programs. Chief among them was the Microloan Program, which makes 47% of its loans to women-owned businesses. It also extended the fee waiver on SBA 7(a) loans below \$150,000. Congressional pressure on the issue led to increased funding for the Microloan Program in the FY2015 funding bill. The legislation also included a directive to the SBA to review the program and recommend improvements—a provision also included in the funding bill.

Changes to other SBA lending programs, including fee waivers for veterans and their spouses for loans under \$150,000, add to 2014 results increasing the availability of capital to entrepreneurs. WIPP worked alongside its Coalition Partners to secure these changes.

Modernizing the Women's Business Center Program

According to a recent FIELD study from the Aspen Institute, 88% percent of businesses that receive training and business assistance are still in business after five years, compared to the overall five-year business success rate of less than 50%. Women's Business Centers (WBCs) are an effective tool to provide that training. On average, WBCs serve more than 130,000 women business owners annually at a nominal cost of \$137 per entrepreneur. Despite their success, the WBC Program, which oversees the network of more than 100 centers nationwide, has not been updated in many years and is at a disadvantage to other SBA resource partners. The Program is hampered by outdated rules and while the number of women seeking training has grown, government support has remained static. For this reason, WIPP advocated to make improvements to the WBC Program.

For the first time ever, WIPP was successful in pushing for an increase for WBC funding above the program's authorization to \$15 million for FY2014, a 7% increase over last year. To address the programmatic issues with the WBC program, WIPP was instrumental in the introduction of legislation to modernize the program and bring it into the 21st century. The bill would have reauthorized the WBC Program through 2019, nearly doubled program funding, nearly doubled the maximum grant award, and directed the SBA to establish comprehensive regulations for the WBC program and require public comments. Additionally, it would have reinstated the program's match-waiver authority and removed onerous restrictions that constrain fundraising.

WIPP joined with its coalition partner, the Association of Women's Business Centers in its advocacy efforts. By laying the groundwork and securing the introduction of legislation that would make these important changes, WIPP is well positioned to hit the ground running in the new Congress.

Tax Credits and Deductions Extended

Congress extended tax credits important to WIPP members for another year, including increased Section 179 expensing and bonus depreciation. WIPP actively participated in Congressional small business tax forums as well as communicated the importance of these items to the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees.

Small Business Contracting Improvements

Federal contracting reforms, including increased transparency for bundled/consolidated contracts, limitations on the use of reverse auctions, and design-build competition costs, were all enacted in 2014. These changes are part of WIPP's commitment to make the federal marketplace fair and accessibly for women business owners. WIPP testified before the House Small Business Committee, sent letters of support, and actively engaged other Coalition Partners for these changes

In addition, WIPP was a founding member of the Coalition for Commonsense Contracting – an advocacy coalition focused on mitigating and limiting the negative impacts of federal strategic sourcing on small businesses doing work with the federal government.

Affordable Care Act Fixes Introduced

In accordance with WIPP's position on the Affordable Care Act, bills were introduced to improve the implementation of healthcare reform. Legislation introduced by Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) and Representative Daniel Lipinski (D-IL-3rd) received attention and support from additional Members of Congress. The bill, the *Forty Hours is Full Time Act*, would define full-time workers as those working 40 or more hours per week. Representative Charles Boustany (R-LA-3rd) introduced another important change, the *Small Business Healthcare Relief Act*, which would allow small businesses more flexibility in reimbursing employees for healthcare expenses. The introduction of these bills is critical to ensuring that improvements in healthcare reform implementation can be addressed in the next Congress.

Built Strong Relationship with New Small Business Administrator

President Obama announced a new SBA Administrator in 2014: Maria Contreras-Sweet. As the head of the agency overseeing many of WIPP's priorities, building a strong relationship was critical. Beginning with ChallengeHER events across the country, WIPP worked closely with the new Administrator and has become a partner in SBA policies affecting women entrepreneurs.

Administrator Contreras-Sweet has been an ally to WIPP by including women business owner issues in her first public speech on SBA priorities, using a ChallengeHER forum for her first speech outside Washington, speaking at the WIPP Annual Meeting, and, most critically, staunch support for the addition of sole source authority to the WOSB program.

Continued Reporting and Responding to New Regulations

This year federal agencies issued more than 10,000 regulations. WIPP monitors these regulations for impacts to the women's business community. WIPP also regularly comments on proposed rules from federal agencies with input from affected WIPP members. In 2014, WIPP commented on rules affecting capital access with the Small Business Administration and contracting reforms with the Department of Defense.

In addition, WIPP continues to urge the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to promulgate final rules to pave the way for equities crowdfunding, which has the potential to drastically improve capital access for women-owned firms seeking to raise up to \$1 million.

Roundtables and forums at various agencies to discuss women's entrepreneurship, small business policies, upcoming regulatory actions, and other issues are avenues where WIPP shares its views with the Administration. In 2014, WIPP participated in half a dozen SBA roundtables including testifying to the National Ombudsman, as well as multiple forums with the General Services Administration, Securities and Exchange Commission, and Department of Labor.

Small Business Saturday: Record Level Official Participation

WIPP led the Small Business Saturday Coalition including outreach to federal officials. The Senate unanimously passed a resolution, designating November 29, 2014 as Small Business Saturday, while 57 Representatives signed onto the House resolution. More than 180 Members of Congress publicly expressed support, as did numerous agency officials and the President, who went shopping.

A Voice at the White House, on Capitol Hill, and Across the Country

Thirteen years after WIPP was founded, there is a strong voice for women business owners in Washington. With our seat at the table, WIPP is informing policymakers about the solutions needed by women entrepreneurs nationwide. But more than just communication, WIPP is leveraging its relationships, reputation, and membership to effect positive change.

Throughout 2014, WIPP continued its presence at the White House and was invited to forums on a variety of issues including business, healthcare, and women's outreach. In each meeting with the Executive branch, WIPP delivered the concerns and recommendations of women business owners.

Congress also called on WIPP, its members, and partners to provide insight and feedback on legislative initiatives. WIPP testified before Congressional Committees five times in 2014 on issues including regulatory fairness, federal contracting, and general women's business policy. Finally, in her final floor speech as Small Business Chair, Senator Cantwell formally recognized and thanked WIPP on the Senate floor for leadership in advocacy. This rare honor represents an incredible year of achievements for women entrepreneurs.