Vendor Outreach Program (VOP) basics

- VOP strives to award purchases for goods, services, and construction to eligible small & local businesses. Generally, there is a goal to award at least 25% of subcontracting opportunities to certified businesses. The 25% business inclusion goal is broken down into subgoals:
    - 5% to minority-owned business enterprises (MBE)
    - 10% to woman-owned business enterprises (WBE)
    - 10% to other small business enterprises (SBE)

- The Central (CERT) Certification Program certifies eligible businesses. Vendors must have CERT certification to count toward VOP goals. https://cert.smwbe.com/

- View the "How to Access the Current CERT Directory" help sheet on page 2. This can help in your search to find CERT vendors for each scope of work or supply.

- Reach out to targeted CERT vendors for specific scopes of work or supplies. To meet VOP goals, you should try to include a minimum of 3 CERT vendors when bidding for each scope.
    - Do not send an "email blast" to the entire CERT vendor list. It is not a targeted effort, is often considered to be spam, and will not count toward your VOP good faith efforts.

- Keep records of vendors solicited for bids and responses received. (See Good Faith Efforts on pages 2-3 of the VOP specs.) Vendors (subs/suppliers/etc.) at any sub tier level can count toward VOP goals.

- Be sure to include the VOP contract specs with your subcontracts.

Payments (both received by prime and paid to vendors) are reported monthly in the online compliance system https://stpaul.diversitycompliance.com (also known as B2Gnow). Online reporting requirements will be discussed further at a pre-construction meeting.

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2022-04-14
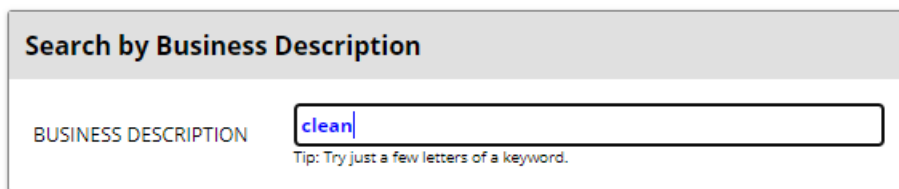
How to Access the Current CERT Directory

1. Visit https://cert.smwbe.com/, click on "Central CERT Directory" button in the left column in the "Vendor Certification" section.
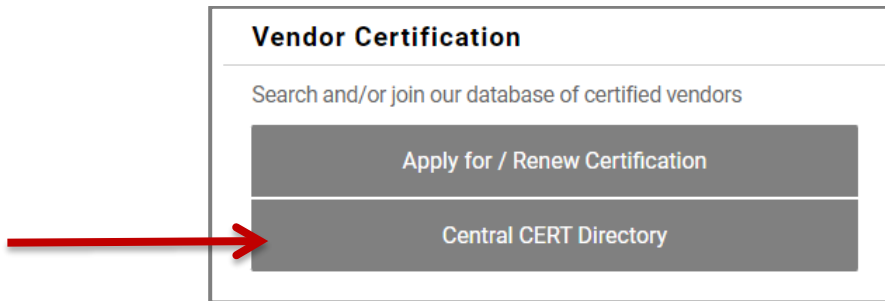
2. In the pop-up window, you can search for items including: business name, description, commodity code, or location. For example, search for a cleaning company by entering "clean" in the business description field. **TIP:** keep search terms short. *Example:* searching for "plumb" will return results for both "plumber" and "plumbing".
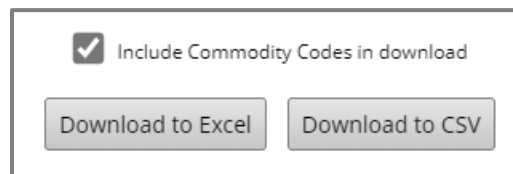

3. Once you have entered your search fields, scroll to the bottom of the window, complete the reCAPTCHA, and click the "Search" button. (Or you can choose to download the entire business directory without entering any search terms.)
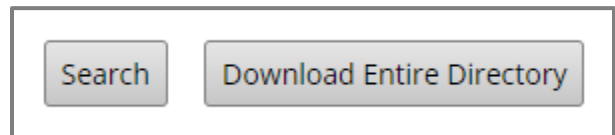
4. To download your filtered search results, click the "Download Search Results" button.

5. Check the "Include Commodity Codes in download" box. Click "Download to Excel" or "Download to CSV" button.

6. Save file to a location on your computer that you can find, and then open the file to view the list filtered by your defined criteria. If you chose to download the entire directory, you can also search directly in the downloaded list.

For further assistance finding CERT certified vendors for a certain scope of work, contact a CERT specialist at cert@ci.stpaul.mn.us or call 651-266-8966. Choose the option for "CERT" to speak with a CERT specialist.