

MAY 2026

INSIGHTS TO OPPORTUNITY



Veteran business owners pose with Director Cylenthia Hoyrd after the announcement of veteran-specific certifications.



[HOUSTONTX.GOV/OBO](https://houstontx.gov/OBO)

A Message from the Director

Hello,

It's hard to believe that we're almost halfway through 2026. This year has moved quickly, but we've accomplished so much in that time. As we went through this newsletter, I took an opportunity to take stock of all that has been done this year – not only at the Office of Business

Opportunity but also in my own life. I say this because I hope you, too, are taking stock of all that you've done this year and what matters most to you.



That being said, OBO has accomplished a lot in these first five months that we should all be proud of. We started off this year with a bang: launching two new certifications that greatly benefit those who have served in our military – deepening our ties with this city's veterans and our community. We held our first LGBTBE mixer, giving a pivotal part of our community the chance to network, mentor, and simply connect with each other. We also had an astounding turnout for this year's bonding program, with local business owners showing an incredible commitment to never stop learning and growing their businesses. For that, you should be proud!

This is also a great time to remind you that May is Small Business Month. I know I probably don't have to tell you to shop small and shop local, but if you needed a little extra push or to give someone else that extra push, there's no better time than now!

As always, thank you for your support.

- Cylenthia Hoyrd

Director, Office of Business Opportunity

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CITY OF HOUSTON CERTIFICATIONS & DESIGNATIONS

Small Business Enterprise (SBE)

Applies to all eligible firms in ALL Industries.
This certification is race and gender neutral.



Women Business Enterprise (WBE)



Firms owned and operated by women. WBE goals may be applied to any locally funded contract type.

Minority Business Enterprise (MBE)

Applies to firms owned and operated by ethnic minorities.
MBE Goals may be applied to any locally funded contract type.



LGBT Business Enterprise (LGBTBE)



LGBT Business Enterprises certified by the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) through the NGLCC Supplier Diversity Initiative (SDI)

Persons with Disabilities Business Enterprises (PDBE)

Eligible firms owned and operated by individuals with an existing, medically determined physical or mental impairment of a chronic or permanent character. Also includes U.S. Veterans with service-connected disabilities.





CITY OF HOUSTON CERTIFICATIONS & DESIGNATIONS

Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB)

Firms owned and operated by veterans who hold Veteran Small Business Certification with the U.S. Small Business Administration



Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB)

Firms owned and operated by service-disabled veterans who hold Veteran Small Business Certification with the U.S. Small Business Administration



OBO CERTIFIES THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF BUSINESSES ON BEHALF OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (U.S. DOT):

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)

Firms owned and operated by one or more individuals who are both socially and economically disadvantaged.



Airport Concessionaire Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (ACDBE)

Firms owned and operated at an airport by one or more individuals who are both socially and economically disadvantaged.





Q&A with Yolanda Wright: Our First-Ever Veteran-Owned Small Business

OBO's Alejandro Guajardo sat down with the CEO of Gamechanger Logistics & Consulting LLC, to discuss her journey to becoming the city of Houston's first VOSB. Watch the interview at www.youtube.com/@houstontxobo.

Q: Yolanda, please tell us a little bit about your time in service.

A: I joined the Army right after high school as an E-1 Automated Logistics Supply Specialist (91 Alpha). I promoted through the ranks from E1 to E7 on the enlisted side. And I put in an application for Officer Candidate School where I was selected, went to OCS and transitioned on the officer side and promoted through the ranks of Second Lieutenant to Major. I commanded at Fort Bragg in the 82nd Sustainment Brigade. I deployed to Iraq, and after 23 years, four months, and 11 days of service, here I am, the owner and CEO of Gamechanger Logistics and Consulting LLC.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your business. Why you started it, and what made you realize that you wanted to be your own boss?

A: Service isn't just something that I did; it's who I am. And I think most veterans can speak and say that same thing. It's part of who we are. When I transitioned out, I knew there was more to give. I still had a sense of purpose. I still wanted to serve. So, that's when I started my business – as I retired. It's simply a different uniform. I still serve, but just in a different uniform. By supporting the community, solving problems, and delivering reliable, mission-focused results. That's my mission. That's my focus.

Q: What were your initial thoughts when you heard that veterans were getting their own certification in the City of Houston? And did you know about being certified beforehand, and what made you want to get certified?

I was pretty excited, actually. I had heard that it was coming. So when it finally – I think it was like midnight; I was working on another certification – and the opportunity came together very quickly. And as soon as I saw it, I

immediately pursued it. So I was pretty excited about it, and I pursued it because it reflects a commitment to service. My commitment to continue to serve. It validates business and allows me to create opportunities for other veterans. So for me, I mean, there was no other way. For me, the opportunity was great in that aspect.

Q: And now during our press conference, you did attend. We had somebody else in attendance as well. What did it mean for you to be introduced as our first Certified Veteran-Owned business and to have your mother there with you, alongside you?

It was a pretty proud and humbling moment. And I'm trying not to get emotional, especially when it comes to my mom. I actually flew her in for this, and it was a last-minute thing. She stopped everything to come and support me in this. So, it was pretty proud and a pretty humbling moment. Being the first helps set the tone for other veteran-owned businesses. **Did you expect the recognition that came with becoming the city's first certified VOSB?** No, so it kind of sets the tone, for me, but it's a great, great, great opportunity. And hopefully it will open doors for others, and that's what it's about for me. It's bigger than me. It's not just about me, my business. It's bigger than me. It's not just about me. But you know, it will open doors for others, especially other veterans, because the veteran community truly feels like a family. The city of Houston, all of the veterans here, the veteran organizations, City of Houston Office of Business Opportunity – you guys are awesome – and there's a lot of veterans here. We're literally like a family regardless of what branch of service you're in. **I believe Houston has the largest population of veterans in the United States.** So there's a lot of us around here, and so this opportunity, me being the first, for me, it sets the tone and just the doors that will open up for veteran businesses is amazing.

Q: What was the certification process like, and what has that done for you so far?

The certification process actually wasn't that bad. It was manageable. And it was a pretty easy process. I was already in the process of being certified for the MWE and, it wasn't bad at all. It wasn't. **So you were certified previously, so you already knew what you were getting yourself into.** I knew what I was getting myself into. I'm also SBA certified, service disabled, veteran-owned, and woman-owned with the Small Business Administration. So becoming certified through the program has been an amazing experience.

Q: Going into our last question here, what would you say to those that are not certified or that are thinking about becoming certified?

I say go for it. I tell them it's so worth it. Sometimes the process, as you know, can seem pretty draining. Going through the certification process and waiting on it to be approved. However, you have to understand and know that it's bigger than us. It's bigger than you. You know, that's the way I feel about it. So, positioning yourself, myself, the veterans positioning themselves, gaining visibility and opportunities – that's what it's done for me. I mean, from the day that I was certified, I've received calls, I've received opportunities, as a veteran-owned business, so it recognizes the value that we bring.

Q: Now, is there anything that maybe we didn't ask or that you want to say; anything that we might have missed?

I would say if you're looking to get certified, go for it. Don't hesitate. Go for it. It's worth it. It's well worth it. And so, I'm super grateful for the City of Houston Office of Business Opportunity. I'm also a member of the Houston Regional Veterans Chamber of Commerce, and I volunteer and serve with a lot of other veteran organizations. Houston is a beautiful place, and it's a beautiful place to be certified as a veteran-owned business.

And we're here to help you out every step of the way. So if you ever need any help, OBO's here for you. I want to thank Yolanda Wright for being here today. Ma'am, we salute you. Thank you so much for your service to our country.



Presser Held for Two New Veteran-Specific Certifications

On Feb. 26, the Office of Business Opportunity and the Office of the Mayor held a press conference at City Hall's Legacy Room to announce the city's first-ever veteran-specific certifications. The event was broadcast live on HTV.

The Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB) Certification and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Certification (SDVOSB) were created to generate growth for small and local businesses of those who have served our country.

In attendance for the event was Dr. LaShondra Jones, Coordinator for the Mayor's office of Veteran & Military Affairs; Council Member Willie Davis, At-Large Position 2;

and Dan Weaver, President of the Houston Veterans Regional Chamber of Commerce. Also in attendance was Yolanda Wright, CEO of our first-ever certified VOSB, and dozens of veterans and disabled veterans who own businesses in the Houston area.

In their addresses to the public, the speakers emphasized the impact that these certifications will have on not only the veteran business owners but Houston's local and small business economy at large.

These new certifications further OBO's commitment to our veteran entrepreneurs and move Houston one step closer to economic equality.





OBO Introduces 2026 Advisory Board

On Feb. 18, the Office of Business Opportunity had the honor of introducing its 2026 Advisory Board before City Council.

The new board consists of (left to right in above image): Adriana Gonzalez, Jedediah Greenfield, Michelle Wright, Marlon Mitchell, Abraham Polatsek, Nasrullah Khan, Rogelio "Roger" Pombrol, Tracy Prince, Cylenthia Hoyrd, Yusef Burgess, Jing Johnson, Rachel Olivier, Tamika Dickerson, Alvin Rucker standing in for Bill Brown. Other board members not pictured include Leviticous "Vic" Cleveland and Kayla Wrengler.

"We extend our sincere appreciation to each of our newly appointed and reappointed advisory board members," Director Cylenthia Hoyrd said. "Their commitment, insight, and readiness to contribute their time and talent speak volumes. We look forward to the impactful guidance they will bring as we continue advancing our strategic goals."

The new board held its first official session on Wednesday, April 8.



Take A Child to Work Day

This year's Take a Child to Work Day was held on Thursday, April 30. The international event is "designed to expose children to what a parent or mentor does during the workday, show them the value of their education, and help them discover the power of possibilities."

From OBO, this year's participants were Donisha Anderson and her daughter Jada, Kordae Ortega and her son Levi, and Amircal Webb and her daughter Kyla.

"I really like that the City of Houston offers the Bring Your Child to Work Day because my son was given the opportunity to see and truly understand what I do for work," Ortega said. "Now that my son has been to work with me, he has a new sense of pride for what I do and he really enjoyed the City Hall Tour where he was able to visit the Legacy Room and imagine himself as the Mayor giving a speech."

As Ortega mentioned, the parent-child duos' days consisted of shadowing the parent to get familiar with their primary job functions; meeting and conversing with coworkers; and was capped off by a



tour of City Hall by OBO's TACTWD Coordinator Jesse Rubio.

"It was very interesting to learn of all the history tied to the City of Houston," Anderson said of the tour. "We were in awe of the Sister Cities of the City of Houston and how it explains it further in the Legacy Room."

OBO's mission with TACTWD has always been to make it a fun, inviting environment where children can be proud of the work that the parents and mentors here do. So far, the reviews have been great.

"I do this every year, and next year will be no different," Webb said. "This was my first year bringing Kyla, and she loved seeing what I do at work. Next year, it's my goal to get us a tour of the tunnels."



OBO Hosts its First LGBTBE Mixer

The LGBTQ+ Economic Empowerment pilot program with the Office of Business Opportunity (OBO) is making moves to connect directly with small business owners in Houston. On April 6, 2026, OBO held its first event focused on LGBTQ+ business owners. The Certified LGBTBE Mixer, hosted at the Montrose Center, facilitated cross-industry networking among LGBTQ+-owned marketing, consulting, legal, and other small businesses.

OBO Director Cylenthia Hoyrd welcomed 15 attendees representing 10 small businesses and 2 partner organizations. She provided an overview of OBO's work, including the LGBTQ+ Economic Empowerment pilot program, and introduced the event's other speakers. Council Member Ramirez and Council Member Castillo's Chief of Staff spoke on their support of the program and reaffirmed the City's commitment to small businesses. Chief Administrative Officer, Michael McIntyre, expressed how this and other events at the Montrose Center foster community and authentic connections. Vanessa Aplon-Letson, OBO Certification & Designation Division Manager, shared how receiving LGBTBE and other certifications impacts City contracting and guided

business owners through recent certification changes. After the Q&A session concluded, the pilot program coordinator, Kel Victor, opened the floor for networking.

Attendees chatted over light bites, deepening connections with each other and exploring connections with the City. A Mixer Bingo card encouraged business owners to uncover facts about fellow attendees, such as who had learned from a setback, won an award, or served as a mentor. A handout with icebreakers suggested asking about productivity hacks, client referrals, and advice you'd give your younger self. Kel Victor sat with multiple business owners, offering guidance on finding relevant open bids and the bidding process.

The event was intimate and impactful, showing a path forward to increase engagement between LGBTBEs and the City. Kym Adams, CEO of the Business Team, shared after the event that "not every city is lucky enough to have [a] team dedicated to our success." Outreach efforts remain ongoing for certified LGBTBEs and businesses considering certification. If you want to learn more about City contracting or certifications, email kel.victor@houstontx.gov today.



Celebrate Small

What is Small Business Month?



National Small Business Month takes place every May in the U.S. It is a month of celebrating and highlighting small businesses. Beyond that, it brings national attention to small businesses' economic impact and the number of jobs they create.

The first Small Business Month

The first Small Business Month was actually only a week. The tradition first began in 1963 when President John F. Kennedy issued the first Presidential Proclamation for National Small Business Week. While the U.S. Small Business Association still recognizes the week-long tradition, it's naturally become a month-long celebration nationwide.



Small Business Month's legacy

In further efforts to support small businesses, similar celebrations have popped up over the years, like Small Business Saturday. Cosponsored by the SBA since 2011, SBS takes place each year the day after Black Friday to take advantage of the busy Holiday season. From 2010-2024, the celebration has generated over \$200 billion.



Business Month

Small Businesses by the Numbers

36.2
MILLION

The number of small businesses currently operating across the United States.

Small businesses create nearly 2 out of every 3 net new jobs each year.



45%

Small businesses employ over 45% of the United States' workforce.

OBO Certified Firms by the Numbers

There are currently 5,141 firms certified by the City of Houston.

5,141

44%

Over 44% of those certified firms are owned by women.

Firms by type:

MBE: 3845 WBE: 2271 SBE: 4984 PDDBE:

158 VOSB: 9 SDVOSB: 8 LGBTBE: 89



Entrepreneurs Pack the House for Spring Bonding Program

On April 29, OBO hosted its 2026 Bonding Program for the spring at McCarthy Building Company. In partnership with McCarthy, United Airlines, Strategic Insurance Advisors, and a roster of industry experts, local business owners were taught about how they could increase their bonding capacity to take on more jobs.

“Bonding capacity is an important topic, especially for some of the work that we’re pursuing, so I made it a point to be here,” Marian Ledoux, VP of Operations for Accurate Security Inc. “It helped me better understand the nuances of bonding in general – the terminology, how it works, and what’s important to gain bonding capacity.”

The topics covered during the event included Surety by Erveis Cortez & Micah Wright of FCCI Insurance Group; Claims by Paul Eaves of Markel; Accounting by Byron Riley of Byron Riley of Byron L. Riley, CPA; and Banking by German Hoffmann of Texas Capital Bank.

“This is a great way to help more businesses enter the industry,” Eaves said. “We think it’s a vital step in growing their bond program, and it changes the direction of their company.”

“The training here today definitely explained why the need of surety bonding and having to establish a relationship is so important,” Wright said. “It’s a great first step.”

After the lessons of the day concluded, attendees were handed framed certifications to signify their completion of the Bonding Program. Also, three lucky winners were drawn to receive \$50 gift cards, courtesy of the External Affairs team.

“This was definitely our best bonding program to date,” Workforce Development Coordinator Jesse Rubio, who helped spearhead the program, said. “Everyone was engaged and brought great energy, especially the speakers.”

The Bonding Reviews Are In

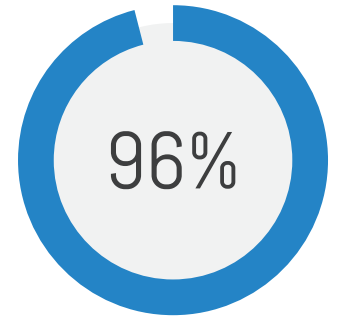
We conducted a survey at the end of the Bonding Program for all those in attendance.

100

100% of respondents said the topics covered were helpful.



Each speaker received a minimum rating of 4.5 stars from respondents.



96% of respondents said they are more confident in their bonding knowledge.



UPCOMING EVENTS

SAVE THE DATE!

**THU
May 14**

Turnaround Houston Job Fair

Turnaround Houston is a community-driven program that integrates the features of a job fair with those of a resource center. Its primary aim is to enhance the lives of residents by tackling the job training, educational, and employment challenges faced by individuals who find it difficult to secure work, including the unemployed, underemployed, and formerly incarcerated individuals.

July

Turnaround Entrepreneurship

A specialized initiative designed to help individuals with criminal backgrounds overcome employment barriers by starting their own businesses. This program provides training, mentorship, and resources to help participants transition from job seekers to entrepreneurs, fostering self-sufficiency and economic empowerment.

Summer

Future Founders

The initiative strives to cultivate a robust entrepreneurial mindset among participants ages 10-14, encouraging them to explore their creativity, embrace independence, and take calculated risks. Young innovators will immerse themselves in a series of interactive workshops and engaging activities tailored to develop essential skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and business savvy.

**THU
Dec. 10**

Meet the Buyer & Champions of Diversity

Two of OBO's key annual events will take place on the same day this year! Please be on the lookout on how you can register, purchase a table, sponsor, and more!



TURN AROUND HOUSTON JOB FAIR

Open to the Public

- Meet with employers ready to hire
- Featuring Second-Chance Employers
- Connect with community resources
- Dress to impress and bring your résumé

May 14th, 2026
10:00AM - 1:00PM

**Burnett Bayland
 Community Center**
 6026 Chimney Rock Rd,
 Houston, TX 77081

A great opportunity for job seekers looking for a fresh start and new career pathways!



To pre-register:
scan QR code
or

Link: <https://tinyurl.com/2xxmxjmz>

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

For more information:
Workforce Solutions
713.493.0052
east@wrksolutions.com



www.morejobshouston.com

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