



Results Report from Visioning Meeting

September 19, 2008

Ottawa, Canada



Executive Summary

On September 19, 2008, a group of 24 passionate business leaders met in Ottawa to create a vision of success for WEConnect Canada. Multinational corporations, top women business owners, global experts in women's entrepreneurship attended, with high level government officials participating as observers due to pre-election regulations in place at the time of the meeting.

The group unanimously and enthusiastically supported WEConnect Canada's central mandate. WEConnect Canada will deliver the leading international certification standard for women owned businesses and will be affiliated with WEConnect International, which is leading the global expansion of certification for women business owners. The Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC in the US) launched in 1997, WEConnect UK launched in 2007, WEConnect Canada will launch in 2008 and WEConnect India and WEConnect China will launch in 2009.

Five leading corporations in the field of supplier diversity attended the meeting including Staples, AT&T, Harris Bank/Bank of Montreal, Manpower, and Pfizer to explain the importance of supplier diversity and its positive economic impact for non-traditional communities of suppliers. Today, corporations aggressively pursue supplier diversity because of its strong business case.

Corporate executives who attended the meeting explained their commitment to supplier diversity based on:

- One corporation was able to attribute \$26 billion in revenues from supplier diversity programs
- Women's businesses are often creative, flexible, vibrant, innovative, and focused on value
- The fact that women are their major clients as well as a major part of their workforce and supplier diversity provides an additional link to corporate customers and employees
- Women entrepreneurs express their appreciation for business received openly, frequently and eloquently and are prepared to assist with corporate advocacy efforts with governments
- Substantial positive press around corporate supplier diversity that helps with corporate branding
- Corporations use supplier diversity to enhance the economic vitality of the communities they serve
- Top level corporate leadership which is essential to a successful supplier diversity programming
- Supplier diversity as a key aspect of corporate social responsibility programs
- The need for all corporations to find good information about promising new suppliers
- Corporate programs that are available to help train and educate diverse suppliers
- A trend by multinational corporations to develop global supplier diversity programs

Leaders from the women business owner community explained their commitment to certification based on:

- Canadian women business owners understand and will appreciate the value certification offers because they have been hearing about it from women entrepreneurs in the US for 10 years
- WEConnect Canada can work with the existing women business owner support network to get information out about WEConnect Canada and certification
- The need for women to work together to develop new market opportunities
- Potential to access domestic and global networks that create economic benefits for all Canadians
- A pipeline of women business owners who want to be certified
- The need to launch as soon as the funding is available to build on the momentum

Background

Mission—WEConnect Canada delivers the leading international certification standard for women owned businesses. We bring together the growing corporate and public sector demand for diverse supply chains with certified women business enterprises.

Status—WEConnect Canada will be incorporated this year as an independent non-profit corporate membership organization guided by a corporate Board of Directors. Based on statistics in the US and the UK, we estimate that Canadian women owned businesses comprise less than 5% of suppliers to the corporate and public sector. The result is that women's businesses don't grow, big business misses out on value and innovation and national productivity and GDP suffer.

Support—Quantum Leaps (www.QuantumLeapsInc.org) is helping to launch and incubate WEConnect International (www.WEConnectInternational.org) and WEConnect Canada (www.WEConnectCanada.org), a new organization that will offer corporate members a database of certified women business suppliers. Astrid Pregel our Interim Executive Director is leading our strategy to create WEConnect Canada.

Capacity Building—Beyond certification, WEConnect helps women entrepreneurs focus on growth and development. Many women are not aware of the markets open to their businesses including corporate markets, government markets and global markets. Part of the WEConnect value proposition is to help women business owners increase their capacity to network and scale up their operations. There is already evidence of US women entrepreneurs mentoring UK women entrepreneurs on how to maximize the corporate contract potential through certification, and to partner in order to bid for large contracts.

Recent Events—Last week, WEConnect Canada hosted a small visioning session with leaders from the women business owner community and heads of global supplier diversity from AT&T, Manpower, Staples, Pfizer, Harris Bank and Bank of Montreal. The interactive discussion resulted in a more detailed strategy for reaching key goals outlined in the official WEConnect Business Plan. The first step will be to incorporate, continue to reach out to partner organizations to identify opportunities for collaboration and recruit corporate members to provide leadership and business opportunities.

Government—The Canadian government will also play an important role in promoting the role of certification as a way to find historically underutilized companies in Canada—including businesses owned by women, aboriginals, and ethnic minorities.

Contact—For more information, please contact info@WEConnectCanada.org.

Brainstorming Session I Results: In the year 2020, what will WEConnect Canada success look like?

- **Corporations**
 - Supplier diversity really takes off in Canada and Canadian based corporations are leading it
 - Certified businesses offer corporations mutually profitable win-win relationships
 - Supplier diversity is not just the “right” thing to do, it is also the “smart” thing to do
 - Supplier diversity goals are stretch goals and are not necessarily compliance driven
 - Corporations could offer certified businesses discounts on member services
 - Corporations will be lined up to renew their WEConnect Canada membership and will expect all their large suppliers to be WEConnect Canada members and hire certified businesses
- **Women Business Owner Community**
 - Rich database of businesses that offer diversity in size, industry, geography, etc.
 - There are strategic connections and networks amongst women business owners
 - There are tens of thousands of certified women owned businesses
 - There is a strong pipeline of new companies that aspire to be certified in every province
 - Certified women business owners will have a seat on the corporate boards that support them
 - Highly technical companies owned by women continue to be launched in record numbers
 - Certified women businesses are powerful champions of quality of life and families
- **Public Perception of Women Business Owners**
 - Widely recognized that women are powerful economic actors
 - Women in general understand that profit=freedom=ability to influence and have impact
 - New stereotypes exist for women associated with their role as economic powerhouses
 - Broadly based community leadership exists for supplier diversity
- **WEConnect Canada Organization**
 - WEConnect is self-sufficient and widely known and recognized for its positive impact
 - WEConnect is well known for its excellence in capacity building and access to contracts
 - WEConnect continues to be a uniting organization with innovation, vision and leadership
 - Public understands the organization and its impact on wealth and prosperity for all
 - Government policies are developed to support WEConnect Canada goals
- **WEConnect International Organization**
 - Seat at all international forums, including the United Nations
 - Hubs in all major industrial centers in the world, including developing countries
 - Seamless network for people and organizations to quickly and easily find each other
 - Presidents, Prime Ministers and other Heads of State are the biggest WEConnect champions
- **Research**
 - Data available to show the influence of supplier diversity on the growth of businesses
 - Rich base of gender-disaggregated data available for benchmarking locally and globally
 - All parties understands the importance of good data and the policies that can be developed
- **Education**
 - Education on entrepreneurship begins in middle schools and a special focus for girls is created
 - Significant learning opportunities exist for women owned businesses
 - Entrepreneurial role models are easy to find

Brainstorming Session II Results: What actions, activities and outreach are necessary for the short, medium and long term success?

- **Set Clear Goals, Objectives, Outcomes**
 - Manage expectations and do not oversell the value proposition, especially in the beginning
 - All systems need to be built and all relationships developed at the same time
 - If people can see this clearly they will know where we are heading and how they can help
 - Start certifying businesses that can deliver on large contacts as soon as possible
 - Measure the results for economic and social impact from the beginning
 - Develop a cross Canada network of well known Ambassadors for WEConnect Canada
- **Early Success Stories**
 - Important to have early success stories with the first women who are certified
 - Important to provide excellent support services to certified businesses with real contracts
 - Teach certified businesses to introduce supplier diversity into their own supply chains
 - Encourage and train certified businesses to scale up by partnering locally and globally
- **Canadian Corporations**
 - Educate corporations on the business case for supplier diversity
 - Develop partnerships with corporations headquartered in Canada
 - Recruit significant numbers of corporations as members, especially retail corporations that have internal product and services needs and can also put products on the shelf
- **Training**
 - Develop and deliver training programs to support certified businesses
 - Develop a network of partners to promote and deliver training
 - Maintain a broad based network of advocates for supplier diversity and women's economic empowerment
- **Recommendations to Policy Makers**
 - Build advocacy partnerships to encourage Canadian public policy support for supplier diversity
 - Encourage government utilization of WEConnect Canada and CAMSC certified businesses
 - Fund the launch of WEConnect Canada so that its reach and its positive impact is immediate
 - Fund supplier diversity and certification education and training for key stakeholders
- **Research**
 - Invest in research on the impact of certified businesses, including their economic contributions
 - Track progress as certified businesses succeed in doing business with large corporations
 - Advocate at all levels to promote the need for gender-disaggregated data
- **Marketing and PR**
 - Publicize “Done Deals” and other supplier diversity success stories
 - Create incentive and awards programs and annual events to feature results and best practices
 - Create excellent marketing materials in English and French
 - Conduct media campaign and submit articles to relevant publications