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## Women Veterans Program Conquers Government Contracting for Entrepreneurs

(Washington, DC) Navigating government contracting can be a challenge, but women veterans have the experience and leadership skill it takes—they just need a place to begin. To help women who are transitioning out of military service and into business ownership, several regional partners have collaborated to create a free, 14-week training series. The VetBizLadyStart program will provide the information, tools and connections needed to start a small business and position it for success with federal contracting opportunities.

VetBizLadyStart is a collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) Women Veteran Small Business Initiative, the DC Women's Business Center, the Old Dominion University Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Women's Business Center/Veterans Business Outreach Center/Business Development Center in Virginia, and the Maryland Women's Business Center.

Successful women contractors serve as training experts, teaching participants regarding a variety of business areas, including products and services, pricing, processes, funding and marketing. Classes started in September and meet weekly for virtual instruction plus additional networking and mentoring opportunities.

"As a longtime veteran, I know women vets have the knowledge and skills to take on government contracting – they just need the tools to start," said Michelle "G.I." Gardner-Ince, Director, Woman Veteran-Owned Small Business Initiative at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VetBizLadyStart program gives them the resources to be successful."

Women veteran's startup growth has been higher than any other segment of the entrepreneur economy, and our center is poised to assist them," said Morgan Wortham, Managing Director of the Maryland Women's Business Center (MWBC). This is a fast-growing entrepreneurial sector that deserves our attention to help them cultivate business growth skills."

Heidi Sheppard, Project Director of the DC Women's Business Center said, "While we have seen some growth in the number of Women Veteran Owned Small Businesses (WVOSB), the DC WBC is pleased to play a vital part in making sure Women Veterans have the resources they need to achieve success in the government contracting industry by collaborating with the Woman Veteran-Owned Small Business Initiative and the region's Women's Business Centers."

"Female veteran-owned businesses make up just 15.2% of the 2.52 million veteran businesses, and we aim to change that by offering a focused strategy and a solid planned approach to help on their journey to success, said Erika Small-Sisco, Program Director of the Women's Business Center of the Old Dominion University Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Over 40 women veterans have participated in the first program cohort. The sessions consist of a curated 14-week training module administered through Growth Wheel and successful women mentors in Government/Federal contracting and business. These activities include presentations, group collaborations, panel discussions, networking, weekly assignments and one-on-one engagements.