October 2026

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INSIGHTS TO OPPORTUNITY



For Business

CITY OF HOUSTON
OFFICE of BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

A Message from the Director



Hello there,

Let me start with the news many of you have been asking about: a recent court ruling has halted our Minority Business Enterprise certification. It puts us in a new situation, but on well-trodden territory for OBO. While our legal team does all it can regarding this ruling, we must accept that, for now, the City cannot certify or count MBEs. How is it new? Well, we've never been without our MBE program. How is it well-trodden? This is not the first time we've faced an obstacle we have to overcome. As the political and social landscape evolves, so must we. We're not going to sit back and let things happen; we have to prepare and find avenues that still benefit and advance underutilized businesses in this city. This is far from over, and we are far from done. If you want to learn more about this, I address your MBE questions on page 4.

On a positive note, as we wind down the final quarter of 2026, we're entering my favorite time of the year. Not only are the holidays fast approaching, but some of the biggest and most impactful events are happening! We've already kicked it off with the Turnaround Entrepreneurship Program Graduation this month. This one is near and dear to me, and I'm proud to work with a department that prioritizes second chances and removes the stigma from those previously impacted by the justice system who just want to make better lives for themselves. We all deserve that opportunity. Next, we have the Financial Symposium with Pastor and Council Member Willie Davis on Oct. 29. In November, we have something we're trying for the first time that I am very excited about: the Turnaround Houston Construction Job Fair. An ALL-CONSTRUCTION Job Fair! We are so eager to extend this opportunity to the city and match up companies with deserving job seekers. And lastly, of course, this December we will host both Meet the Buyer and Champions of Diversity on the same day — another first for me and my team. We're bringing together our flagship events for one exciting day. What more can you ask for to close out this year?

As this is our last newsletter for the year, I want to wish you all a happy and safe holiday season and a prosperous New Year! And remember: turn in those certification renewals and applications because we are OPEN FOR BUSINESS. I will see you in 2027.

—Cylenthia Hoyrd
Director, Office of Business Opportunity

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Answering MBE Questions Post-Ruling

Q: What is the current status of the City of Houston's MBE program?

A: On July 28, a court ruling imposed an injunction on the MBE program. We are now enjoined from MBE certification, MBE compliance, and MBE participation. That has not resulted in the dismantling of our program, but rather a portion of our program.

Q: Is my MBE certification still valid outside of the City of Houston?

A: Yes. You absolutely should use your MBE. It is still valid outside of the City of Houston. Harris County, Harris Health, MD Anderson, and many other agencies across the Houston metropolitan area will still accept it. Your MBE is valid, just not with the City of Houston.

Q: Will my MBE be counted toward City of Houston participation goals?

A: We cannot count your MBE participation, but participation goals still stand. If a contract had a 30% participation goal, it does not go away. We expect that prime contractors will continue to use MBEs who are dually certified. If you are an MWBE or an MWSBE and you have a dual certification, your prime contractor should acknowledge and utilize you on their contract under the SBE or WBE certification you hold, where applicable.

Q: What if I was in the queue to be certified as an MBE?

A: Those MBE applications will be closed out. However, we encourage you to apply for every certification you qualify for. For example, if you are a veteran with a disability and your business is woman-owned, apply for all three. Our certification specialists will verify which ones you can be approved for. If you're an MBE and you don't have the SBE, please ask for your certification to be expanded so that you can have the SBE certification.

Q: Are there other entities where I can get an MBE certification?

A: Yes. Other agencies, such as the Houston Minority Supplier Development Council (HMSDC), provide MBE certification. We encourage you to pursue your MBE certification through those entities.

Q: What is the status of the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) federal certification program?

A: If you are a DBE and haven't yet submitted your application, it's still open, and we really do need our DBEs to come back. This program is coming back online around the country; as of October, eight states have gone back online. Texas cannot come back online until all of our DBEs have been reevaluated. We want to get you back in the system so that you can work in other states and be used on other airport systems or highway programs. Reevaluating our DBEs is also necessary for us to resume setting goals on our federally funded projects.

Q: What should prime contractors or subcontractors do if they have compliance concerns?

A: Our compliance division is open to answering any questions. If you are a prime contractor concerned about whether you're meeting participation goals, or a subcontractor concerned about whether you will be used for participation, please reach out to us at 832-393-0600 or obocertification@houstontx.gov.

Interagency Mentor-Protégé Program (IMPP)

Class of 2026

The 2026 Interagency Mentor-Protégé Program (IMPP) concluded its summer cohort in late July, culminating in the graduation of 19 emerging local businesses. IMPP operates as a targeted collaborative initiative within the Houston area and pairs historically underutilized businesses with established anchor institutions. The program is designed to build long-term business stability and technical expertise while fostering lasting working relationships across the local economic landscape.

This program is a joint effort driven by the City of Houston, the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, the Houston Independent School District, Houston City College, Port Houston, Harris Health, and Harris County.

Over the course of the two-month hybrid program hosted at Houston City College, participants completed a rigorous curriculum tailored for government contracting. The sessions provided comprehensive training on back-office operations, regulatory compliance, market positioning, and competitive project pricing. A significant portion of the program was dedicated to an intensive, multi-week exercise in which participants dissected, developed, and presented mock Requests for Proposals (RFPs). The program officially closed with a networking graduation event and the formal assignment of mentors, equipping these emerging enterprises with the strategic tools and institutional connections necessary to secure competitive contracts in the future.

Of the 20 protégés initially accepted into the cohort, 19 graduated and will now be connected to a network of established partners to help them grow. “It brought me so much joy to see these businesses being paired with more established businesses as mentors to lift the next generation of small businesses,” OBO IMPP Representative Alejandro Guajardo said. “They had great questions and were very eager to learn throughout the course of the program.”















The first and second place winners of IMPP's business pitch competition.

2026 Future Founders Program

The Office of Business Opportunity, Houston Public Library, Greater Houston Women's Chamber of Commerce, and Council Member Tiffany D. Thomas of District F partnered to bring the 2026 Future Founders Program to students at the Alief Neighborhood Center, July 27-31. The weeklong program taught Houston's future entrepreneurs the fundamentals of owning and operating a business and how to create a business plan.

The lessons taught included understanding what entrepreneurship is and what an entrepreneur does, business planning, marketing and branding, and financials for entrepreneurs. OBO Communications Specialist Conrad Garcia served as the primary instructor, with Sofia Naranjo of PMG Project Management Group serving as a guest instructor for marketing.

"There's something really special about getting to pour into the next generation," Naranjo said. "Being able to share a little of what I've learned, hear their ideas, and hopefully encourage them to believe in what they're capable of is incredibly meaningful.

"I'm so grateful to support OBO's Future Founders and proud to represent PMG while giving back to the community that continues to give so much to us."

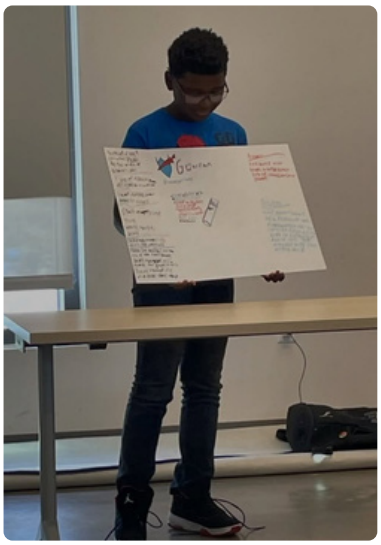
The week culminated with the students using what they learned to work in teams and present their business ideas. In front of their parents, the OBO team, and representatives from the City, the teams explained their business concept and how they would market, budget, and brand it. Business ideas included bug spray, a home construction company, a landscaping company, a gaming accessories company, and a gadget for safely warding off stray animals.

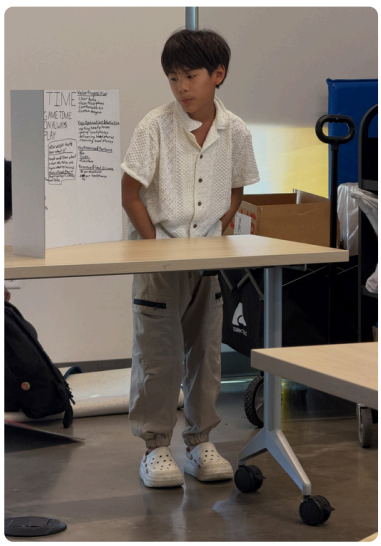
"I was extremely proud of what these students accomplished with their business plans," Garcia said. "They took what they learned and utilized it to create very cohesive and well-thought-out proposals. I really hope we started a new generation of local business owners."

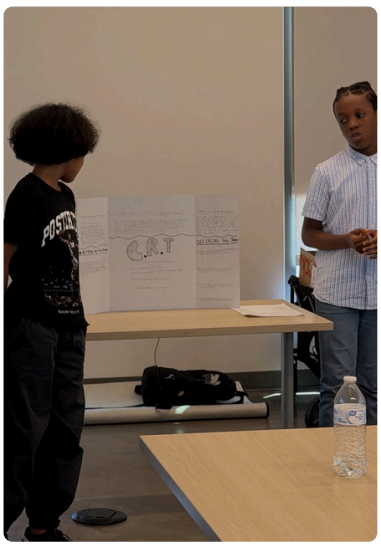



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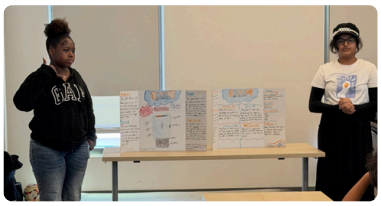




















Contract Compliance Attends ACCA's 40th

OBO's Contract Compliance team attended the American Contract Compliance Association's (ACCA) 40th Anniversary National Training Institute (NTI). The theme for this milestone celebration was "Southern Roots, Compliance Is Power: Celebrating 40 Years of National Impact." This year's NTI—held Aug. 10-14, 2026, in Atlanta, Georgia—marked four decades of shaping the national conversation around supplier diversity, inclusive procurement, and compliance leadership across transportation, aviation, public works, higher education, utilities, and major infrastructure sectors.

Founded in 1986, ACCA advances equitable contracting and employment practices, along with minority, women, and disabled business programs, in both the public and private sectors.

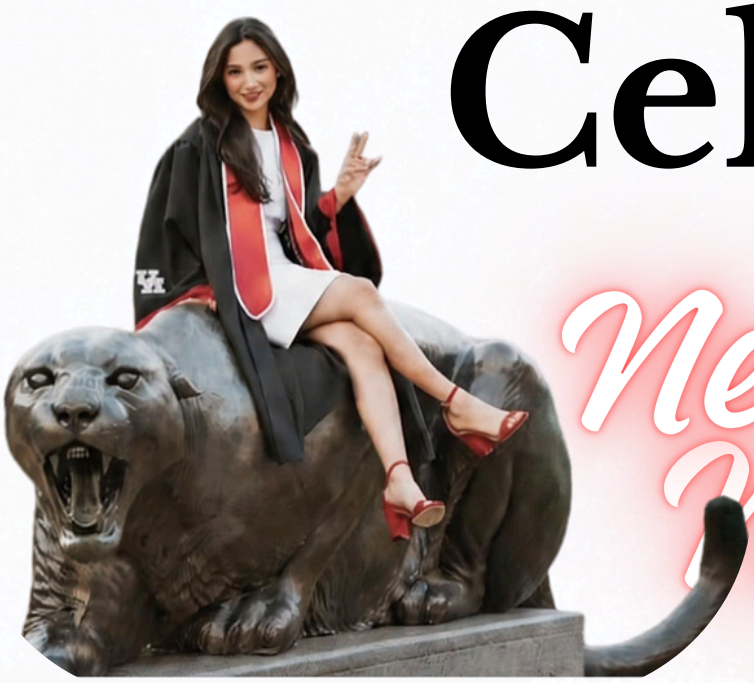
The milestone event brought together public agencies, industry leaders, primes, subcontractors, and community partners from across the country. Attendees reflected on ACCA's legacy and looked ahead to the future of inclusive contracting.

Business Development Supervisor Desiree Williams earned her Certified Compliance Administrator (CCA) certification, recognized by Morgan State University. It requires 21 hours of training per year over two years, for 42 hours total.

Contract Compliance Division Manager Letrista "Lee" Brown earned her Master Compliance Administrator (MCA) designation, recognized by Morgan State University. It requires 84 hours over four years.

Brown also served as a moderator for two days of the 2026 NTI, representing OBO.

Celebrate



New Faces New Places

Hi, I'm Aliyah Elizondo.

I'm the new Business Development Coordinator with the City of Houston's Office of Business Opportunity. I've always had a passion for storytelling and building connections with people. I love bringing creative ideas to life and finding ways to make a meaningful impact in my community. I'm a proud recent graduate of the University of Houston (Go Coogs!) and excited to begin this new chapter with the City of Houston. When I'm not working, I'm most likely traveling, reading a book, or creating art.



Christa Jones

Certified Move-Makers



Kordae Ortega

Contract Compliance is proud to announce that Senior Business Development Coordinators Kordae Ortega and Christa Jones successfully passed their Certified Texas Contract Manager (CTCM) exams.

By earning this designation, Kordae and Christa have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to professional growth and to expanding their expertise to better serve our clients. They now join Sumir Patel, bringing our division's total to three Certified Texas Contract Managers.

Their hard work significantly elevates the division's capabilities and sets a high standard for excellence. Please join us in congratulating Kordae and Christa on this major achievement!

The Wins

Hooray for 5K

September was filled with major wins for External Affairs' social media platforms. At the very beginning of the month, they officially crossed the 2,000-follower mark on LinkedIn. Then, in the middle of the month, Communications Specialist Conrad Garcia hit a personal goal of his: 5,000 followers on OBO's Instagram. Not only was this a pivotal milestone, but it also meant gaining 1,000 followers in the less than 12 months since he joined the OBO team.



She's On Board

This past August, Procurement Specialist Tifney Scott was elected to the Board of Directors of the American Contract Compliance Association at its National Training Institute. She will proudly represent the Central Region. Congratulations, Tifney, on this well-deserved recognition and position!



Officially Official

In June, Houston City Council voted to make OBO's LGBTQ+ Economic Empowerment Coordinator a full-time position, less than a year after the pilot program launched in October 2025. The decision ensures continued support for LGBTQ+-owned small businesses and job seekers. Mayor John Whitmire also recognized Coordinator Kel Victor's work at this year's Greater Houston LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce's Pride In Business event. Join us in congratulating Kel!



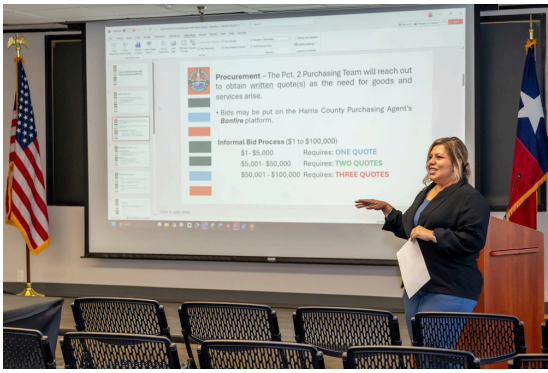
Certifications Takes the Process to You

This September, the Office of Business Opportunity's Certifications team successfully partnered with local representatives to bring the certification process directly to business owners. On Sept. 10, we teamed up with Council Member Fred Flickinger, Commissioner Adrian Garcia, and the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership to host an informative session on navigating local government procurement. This workshop equipped attendees with the necessary knowledge to become approved vendors and confidently do business with both the City and Harris County.

Following this success, we collaborated with Council Member Joaquin Martinez and Mayor Pro Tem Martha Castex-Tatum on Sept. 24 for the IThrive Certification Workshop at SERJobs. This event offered hands-on guidance, allowing attendees to use their laptops to officially begin their certification applications on-site. By taking these resources into the community, our team is making it easier for local entrepreneurs to get certified and grow.






Procurement – The Pct. 2 Purchasing Team will reach out to obtain written quote(s) as the need for goods and services arise.
• Bids may be put on the Harris County Purchasing Agent's Bonfire platform.
Informal Bid Process ($1 to $100,000)
$1 - $5,000 Requires: ONE QUOTE
$5,001 - $50,000 Requires: TWO QUOTES
$50,001 - $100,000 Requires: THREE QUOTES




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PROCUREMENT




THE CITY OF HOUSTON


Fred Flickinger
Houston City Council Member
District E






Let's Talk Certification


Let's Talk Certification



The Reviews are In

Ashley Lewis and Stephaun Martin of SM Texas Quality Services joined us at OBO to share their experience working with our Certifications team and attending our pre-certification workshop. These two business owners came across our radar when they left a glowing email review for Senior Business Development Coordinator Michelle Knight, writing, "From the very beginning, you were incredibly thorough in your explanations and took the time to ensure that every question was answered clearly and completely. Your patience, attention to detail, and commitment to helping us understand each step of the process did not go unnoticed. It is rare to encounter someone who provides such exceptional customer service, and I truly believe your efforts deserve recognition."

They sat down with us to not only share their testimonial but to also encourage others to seek help from us when they need it and keep from feeling stuck. Here are some of the top highlights from the interview.

Making the Experience Quick and Efficient

"[The process] just seemed like literally a whole bunch of chaos. We just signed up for the pre-certification workshop... We waited until the end. Once we were finished, we were like 'please help us, please. We don't know what we're doing.' [Ms. Knight] put it into layman's terms. She made it very efficient, quick, and easy. And we submitted our application in under two hours just from her help."

The OBO Team Has Your Back

"We're glad we came in to take care of all our work and stuff like that, because we were kind of lost in the paperwork. So when we came in, we had a lot of help from Ms. [Amircal] Webb and Ms. Knight... And the City of Houston Team is amazing — especially when you barely have any support. Me and [Ashley] are trying to team up and support each other, but we barely know what we're doing because we never did it before. It's way easier to come in and have the people in real time help you and answer all the questions you need. You always need a friend, and to have somebody, a friend in this type of environment, it just makes it more seamless for the process of success."

Getting Certified Was a Must

"Once we decided to go for contracts, specifically state and local contracts, it was just best because you get at least a little more of an advantage. And the certification is always smart to do because a lot of people feel more comfortable. Just like if you call a plumber and they don't have a certification, you're kind of iffy. But if you have certifications, then you feel a little bit more comfortable giving that person the work."

There Are No Excuses

"The processing time is what: three weeks turnaround time? It's going to be a long time if you don't get it right and you're just trying to guess the stuff versus asking questions and getting the right answers. Even if your information is incorrect, they stop your application, they let you reopen it, submit all documents that you need. So it's basically your time. The longer you wait, the longer it takes. You're leaving money on the table... And we came from afar to make it here. So it's all depending on how bad you want it."

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Thank you again to SM Texas Quality Services for your kind words and for sharing your testimonial, and to Business Development Coordinator Amircal Webb and Ms. Knight for guiding them through the process.

SM Texas Quality Services is a landscaping business that also does pressure washing, grounds maintenance, irrigation systems, tree servicing, trash hauling, and as Stephaun puts it, "Pretty much: you call it, we're going to get it done."

To watch the full video, visit our Instagram at @houston_obo.



2026 Turnaround Entrepreneurship Program

The OBO Turnaround Entrepreneurship Program wrapped up on Oct. 9 by celebrating its nine graduating cohort members with a ceremony at the Houston City College Southeast Campus.

"When you think about the word 'turnaround,' you think about someone who's physically turning their life around from any situation that they have," External Affairs Division Manager Brandon Jones said. "Yes, mistakes happen, people mess up, but tonight is a night to redeem yourself."

Over the eight-week program, current and future business owners learned from some of Houston's best industry experts. OBO proudly partnered with HCC, Enriquez Consulting Services, TheBridgePath, the Small Business Development Center, SCORE, the Houston Health Department, and PeopleFund to make it all possible.

During the ceremony, each participant used all that they learned to give a presentation on their business proposal in front of a panel of judges. In the end, Cherrelle Stokes, owner of The Long Table, walked away with the grand prize of a brand-new laptop and printer. All cohort members received a $300 stipend, valuable connections, and lessons that will put them on a path for success.

"To anyone who's thinking about this program, afraid to take that next step, or wondering if it's for you, just do it," OBO Director Cylenthia Hoyrd said. "You can't go through life wondering 'what if.' You won't know 'what if' until you try. We're here to help. We have guides, mentors, and people who come in to not only teach but actually support you."








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Interns Reflect on Summer 2026

As we do every summer, OBO welcomed its 2026 class of interns: Micah, Kayleigh, Anne, Alaina, and LJ. From June to August, these five young students were introduced to the world of local government through our office. Here are some of their reflections after two months of being here!

Q: Why did you decide to join OBO for your summer internship?

Micah: I decided to join OBO to learn more about the opportunities and resources available to small businesses because it aligns with my goal of opening my own business in the future.

Kayleigh: I decided to join OBO for my summer internship to get insight into how small businesses get started/certified with the City of Houston and the programs they can enter to help businesses grow.

Q: What did you learn about OBO and its programs?

Alaina: I learned that when applications are open, thousands of small businesses apply to be accepted by OBO or verified by them, but only a certain number can be accepted, and OBO can help small businesses out.

LJ: I learned that OBO helps small businesses get certified, and I also learned their programs create opportunities for business owners to excel.

Micah: I learned about the programs OBO puts on such as Future Founders, which encourages young students to become entrepreneurs and grow the community, as well as how OBO promotes the inclusion of smaller businesses in city contract opportunities.

Q: Do you feel a stronger connection to small businesses from your time here?

Micah: I feel a stronger connection to small businesses through my time here because of all that I learned about the ways they are helped by OBO.

Alaina: Yes, I feel much closer with small businesses and understanding what resources I need to help small businesses achieve their goals.

Q: What is your favorite memory/moment from the past couple of months?

Kayleigh: My favorite moment of this internship was getting to help out with Future Founders and getting to learn more fundamentals on how to open up a business.

LJ: My favorite moments were the group trips we attended, going to the construction site and learning how they work together with OBO. Also going to the Greater Houston Procurement Forum, it was fun to see how OBO networks with other companies and businesses.

Q: What is the most important lesson or skill that you learned here that you will take with you going forward?

Micah: The most important lesson I will be taking with me is how to properly interact in a professional environment.

Kayleigh: The most important skill I learned here was how to collaborate with others to help your work stand out and have a purpose.

Alaina: One skill that I have learned is that you have to talk to people to make connections because you never know who you might meet.

LJ: I think the most important lesson or skill I learned is being able to communicate and work together with people that I had never met before.

Calendar

Oct. 29	**Financial Symposium** Join Council Member Willie Davis and special guest Mayor John Whitmire for Banking on Your Business 2.0 on Thursday, Oct. 29, from 9 a.m. to noon at the Bayou City Event Center, 9401 Knight Rd. Check-in and networking start at 8 a.m. Admission and parking are free.
Nov. 5	**Turnaround Houston Construction Job Fair** An all-construction job fair is coming to Houston on Thursday, Nov. 5, from 9 a.m. to noon at the Northwest Educational Center. Jobs, resources, and other opportunities — all for the construction field ONLY.
Dec. 10	**Meet the Buyer & Champions of Diversity** Meet the Buyer (8–11 a.m.) and the Champions of Diversity luncheon come together at the George R. Brown Convention Center to celebrate Houston's small business owners, entrepreneurs, and those who support them!

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