

MEDIA CONTACT:

Cara Mazzei
Director of Development &
Community Relations
YWCA O'ahu
(808) 695-2620
cmazzei@ywcaoahu.org

ON THE WEB:

www.ywcaoahu.org/mbda-ewoc

www.mbda.gov/enterprising-women-of-color

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Enterprising Women of Color Business Center at YWCA O'ahu Announces Free Certification Course and New Program Director

HONOLULU, HI — The new Enterprising Women of Color (EWOC) Business Center at YWCA O'ahu is offering a FREE 10-week certification course to Hawai'i minority women-owned businesses, thanks to funding from the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA).

It's easy to apply: Visit www.ywcaoahu.org/mbda-ewoc for more information or email mbdaewoc@ywcaoahu.org to inquire. **Applications are due Feb. 3.** Space is limited. Classes will be held Feb. 10- April 14 via Zoom on Wednesdays from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

The 10-week certification course — valued at \$3,000 but offered at no cost through MBDA funding — aims to expand contracting opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Classes will cover the benefits and application processes of primary federal government and national corporate certification programs. Course instructors Mari and José Villa of Villa Business Consulting, who have been working with these certification programs since 2008, provide expertise and in-depth knowledge to help participants navigate and thrive in these areas.

“Enterprising Women of Color” (EWOC) is a growing nationwide network established by MBDA to promote minority small business owners, with a focus on women entrepreneurs. Clients served by MBDA represent an inclusive group of African American, Asian-American, Native American, Hispanic/Latina, Pacific Islander and Hasidic Jewish business owners across the country.

The federal government sets aside approximately \$115 billion annually in contracts for certified women-owned, minority-owned, and veteran-owned small businesses. Generally, FORTUNE 1000 corporations also set aside contracts in these business categories. However, many Hawai'i small businesses are unaware that: (1) they can qualify to get certified federally and nationally; and (2) these certification programs would allow them to sell their products or services to government agencies or large corporations.

The MBDA EWOC Business Center at YWCA O'ahu provides diverse and dynamic women entrepreneurs with resources, training, mentorship and events aimed at facilitating access to contracts and funding for medium-sized minority businesses. These opportunities are pivotal in ensuring the sustainability of our local small business community, especially during the difficult times presented by COVID-19.

New MBDA EWOC Business Center Director

The MBDA EWOC Business Center at YWCA O'ahu is led by director Shan Wirt, who joined the organization in December 2020. Wirt leverages her extensive background in law, risk management and communications to promote and increase participation in the Center's offerings.

Most recently, she was Senior Associate Attorney at Torkildson, Katz, Hetherington, Harris & Knorek and Associate Attorney at Ashford & Wriston. Shan has provided strategic legal and public relations counsel to clients ranging from FORTUNE 500 companies to local businesses in matters involving contract, real and intellectual property, procurement, employment, compliance, collections and tort issues.

Her communications work includes her role as the Marketing Communications Group & Program Risk Manager at Hawai'i Energy. In addition, providing pro bono services to the community — particularly to empower women and children in need — has been her priority. Some of the nonprofit and community organizations where she serves as a board member

include Windward Spouse Abuse Shelter, Hawai'i Women's Legal Foundation, Hawai'i Women Lawyers and the Hawai'i Supreme Court's Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection.

"I am excited to help launch this new Business Center to amplify minority women businesses. Small businesses are the heart of our community. By providing training, counseling and resources, our goal is to help businesses sharpen their competitive edge in Hawai'i and beyond," said Wirt.

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ABOUT MBDA ENTERPRISING WOMEN OF COLOR BUSINESS CENTER

YWCA O'ahu is one of only five organizations in the nation awarded a \$1,000,000 two-year grant by the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) to launch an Enterprising Women of Color Business Center. The Center helps minority women business owners grow their businesses through obtaining contracts and facilitating funding. It offers business certification trainings, one-on-one counseling, innovative workshops and other resources. For more information, visit www.ywcaoahu.org/mbda-ewoc.

ABOUT YWCA O'AHU

YWCA O'ahu celebrates its 120th anniversary in 2020, noted as the oldest and largest women's membership organization in Hawai'i. As a 501(c)(3) organization, YWCA O'ahu supports women and girls by providing opportunities for economic advancement, leadership/business development, and health and wellness. YWCA O'ahu has three facilities on O'ahu: YWCA Laniākea in downtown Honolulu, YWCA Fernhurst in Makiki and YWCA Kokokahi in Kāne'ohe. To support YWCA O'ahu, visit www.ywcaoahu.org/donate.