



# IDAHO TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT DBE NEWSLETTER

February 2026



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# Sustainability Practices for Small Businesses

■ *By Project Solutions Inc. Team*

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, sustainability has become more than just a buzzword—it's a crucial component of long-term success. As awareness of global climate change grows, new regulations are being implemented that may require your business to adopt new policies to meet the government's standards, but even if your business is not affected by changing governmental guidelines, sustainability is becoming increasingly important for businesses and their customers and just meeting compliance may not be enough. In this article we'll discuss four reasons why you should care about sustainability and five steps you can take to begin implementing sustainability practices in your small business.



## Why You Should Care About Sustainability in Your Business

- 1. Compliance:** With new rules and regulations emerging as we begin to better understand the impacts of human activities on the climate, the most immediate reason to care about sustainability may be compliance. Before you begin developing sustainability plans, it's important to understand the regulations that are relevant to your business so that you can meet non-financial reporting standards. The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website can be a good place to start when researching regulations, but there may be others you should review depending on the nature of your company. While you're there, the EPA also provides sustainability guides that are worth reviewing for those who want to do more than meet compliance.
- 2. Profitability:** Of course, improving the environment has long term benefits on yourself, your business, the people around it, and the generations that will follow in your footsteps, but it can also have immediate and specific benefits for your company. First and foremost, many sustainability practices reduce costs and improve profitability. Reducing plastic use reduces the amount you need to buy, which reduces costs. Lowering energy waste by investing in sustainable energy systems also reduces utility bills. Reducing the distance between manufacturers and customers also reduces the cost of transport. While some sustainability practices do increase costs, in many cases practices that protect the environment also protect your bottom line. Implementing sustainability practices can also qualify your business for government funding and tax breaks.
- 3. Marketability:** Implementing sustainability practices attracts new customers, especially when those practices are celebrated publicly. For many people, especially young people, choosing which companies to support is about their impact as much as their products. Having a positive impact on the environment makes customers who care about the planet more likely to seek you out over competitors who don't take the same steps.

**4. Health:** Some sustainability practices improve your employees' wellbeing as well as that of the world around them. Steps that improve air quality, reduce the use of harmful chemicals, lower travel time, and otherwise improve the environment of your workspace can improve the mental and physical health of the people who work there, and people who are happy and healthy produce more and higher quality work.

### Steps You Can Take to Implement Sustainability Practices in Your Business

**1. Learn:** Before you start developing a plan, it's important to learn about your impact. Review the relevant regulations to know what the baseline of compliance is for your company and assess how your business's activities impact the environment. At the same time, learn about the ways in which human activities impact the environment where your company can make an impact through sustainability initiatives.



**2. Plan:** Once you understand what your company is required to do, what impacts your operations are having, and where you can improve, develop a plan to implement changes that matter to you like reducing waste or lowering carbon emissions. When creating your plan, it's important to ensure that your goals are realistic and attainable. If your business involves significant shipping, completely reworking your supply chain probably might not be an option you have the resources for, but changing the way you package your products to reduce waste and lower the number of single use plastic items can be. If your employees work in a shared office space, converting to a more energy-efficient building would take a lot of time and money and cause interruptions in work, but adding plant life into the office to improve air quality and using cleaning supplies that are eco-friendly and non-toxic can improve the health of your employees with minimal interruption or cost. Setting unrealistic goals and failing to reach them can be demotivating, but successfully reaching a series of smaller goals can snowball into broader, more impactful changes over time. Similarly, it's important to ensure that your goals are specific and measurable. Setting out to "reduce waste" at your company is vague and hard to define, but performing a waste audit to determine the quantity of waste generated by your workplace and setting a specific goal, like moving documents to electronic distribution with the goal of reducing paper waste by a set percentage, can be measured, which allows your business to celebrate a win when that goal is achieved, or gives motivation to look at the causes when the goal is not met.

**3. Engage:** Implementing sustainability practices in your company is a team effort, so everyone needs to be involved. Educate your employees, suppliers, and customers on your new policies, including your goals, their importance, and the steps they can take to help your businesses succeed. Internally, create initiatives that encourage staff involvement and include rewards like extra time off, bonuses, or verbal praise. Create an environment where people can be active, make suggestions, and improve together, and those individual wins will combine to improve the overall effectiveness of your plan even as it improves the morale of everyone involved. Similarly, by expanding that philosophy to the community that surrounds your business, you can draw in new customers who hear about the steps your company is taking to improve the world.

**4. Assess:** Building your sustainability plan should not be a one-and-done event. Regular evaluations are important to measure whether goals are being met, if they are having the intended impact, and what can be changed or improved going forward. If your goals are specific and measurable, set up a timeline to perform progress assessments and make changes as needed. It is important to be transparent about these assessments. Communicating your achievements to the community enhances your reputation. However, even if performance does not meet expectations, maintaining transparency fosters trust and support. It allows internal improvements to continue, encourages stakeholders to engage, and for many external customers and community members, it is the act of trying that is important. Making an effort might be more than your competitors are doing, and even less-than-expected improvements are still improvements to be applauded.



**5. Repeat:** Whether your goals are being met or your efforts are failing to meet your expectations, it's important to follow up on assessments by initiating changes. Reassess your situation, study your previous successes and disappointments, and begin implementing the next steps in a new plan. Sustainability isn't a

## PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT



### Training Needs Survey

We're pleased to share that Project Solutions, Inc. is now the DBE Supportive Services provider for ITD. As we kick off this partnership, we want to hear directly from you. This survey will help us understand your training interests and guide the development of workshops and resources throughout the year.

[ITD Training Needs Survey](#)

Your voice is essential in helping us build a program that supports your goals and strengthens your capacity to compete. We appreciate your time and feedback!

# UPCOMING TRAINING & EVENTS

## February 12

### Small Business, Big Impact: AI-Powered Marketing

SBA Webinar

Thurs., Feb. 12, 2026 | 12:30 P.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

## February 18

### OSHA Workplace Safety Inspections: What Every Safety Pro Should Know!

OH&S Webinar

Wed., Feb. 18, 2026 | 12:00 P.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

## February 20

### Bid to Win! - Learn to successfully bid on construction projects

North Idaho Small Business Development Center Webinar

Fri., Feb. 20, 2026 | 9:00 A.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

## March 5

### March ITD Monthly Contractor Meeting

Virtual

Thurs., Mar. 5, 2026 | 8:00 A.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

## March 10

### Federal Contracting Basics and Certifications for Small Businesses

SBA Webinar

Tues., Mar. 10, 2026 | 10:00 A.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

## April 2

### April ITD Monthly Contractor Meeting

Virtual

Thurs., April 2, 2026 | 8:00 A.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

## RESOURCES

### Project Look-Ahead

The following links to the project look-aheads can be found on the [ITD Contractor Bidding](#) page.

- [90-day Contracts Bidding Look-Ahead](#)
- [18-month Contracts Bidding Look-Ahead](#)
- [LHTAC Leading Local Bridge Contractor Bidding Look-Ahead](#)

## DID YOU KNOW

Project Solutions Inc is the Supportive Services provider for ITD and is available for one-on-one assistance to DBEs who would like help drafting their personal narrative for the recertification process.

To schedule time with a consultant, email [dbe@projectsolutionsinc.com](mailto:dbe@projectsolutionsinc.com).

Firms interested in scheduling a one-on-one session for personal narrative assistance with Project Solutions Inc are strongly encouraged to attend one of the Personal Narrative workshops hosted by Project Solutions and ITD.

## PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT

### Personal Narrative Workshops for Idaho DBEs

Project Solutions Inc., the supportive services provider for ITD, will be hosting two additional Personal Narrative Workshops to support Idaho DBEs in preparing their personal narratives required under the Interim Final Rule (IFR). These sessions will cover how to structure a compelling narrative, reflect on key challenges, and effectively communicate experiences that demonstrate disadvantage.

#### **Workshop Dates:**

- Wednesday, February 11 at 10:00 a.m. MT
- Thursday, February 12 at 3:00 p.m. MT

These workshops are offered at no cost through Supportive Services of the ITD DBE Program. Register now to secure your spot!



# WRITING YOUR PERSONAL NARRATIVE WORKSHOP



In Response  
to the Interim Final Rule (IFR) released on October 3, we have put together a workshop to assist DBEs with writing Personal Narratives that are required as part of the reevaluation process.

**Workshop Topics:**

- How the Interim Final Rule (IFR) changes DBE certification requirements
- How to reflect on and articulate key personal or professional challenges
- Techniques for identifying and describing impactful life experiences
- How to structure a compelling personal narrative with clarity and purpose
- Ways to connect personal experiences to broader patterns of disadvantage or bias
- Strategies for assessing and communicating the impact of those experiences
- Tips for organizing supporting documentation to strengthen your story

This workshop is provided to you at no cost through Supportive Services of the ITD DBE Program.

Register now!

Choose the date & time that work best for your schedule!

**Wed. Feb 11**  
10:00 a.m. MT



[Register Here](#)

**Thurs. Feb 12**  
3:00 p.m. MT



[Register Here](#)



What your fellow Idaho DBEs shared about their December workshop experience:

*"This was phenomenal. This is all very confusing but they did great with the information that is currently available."*

*"Good job, the workbook was helpful to get through the steps and making sure the narrative hits all the points needed!"*

*"This was good for brainstorming, and I am glad to know that there is help out there. Thank you!"*

# Turning Uncertainty into Opportunity: How DBEs Can Thrive During the Interim Final Rule Re-evaluation Period

■ *By Project Solutions Inc. Team*

The re-evaluation period of the Interim Final Rule (IFR) has introduced a wave of uncertainty for Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs). But within this uncertainty lies a powerful opportunity: a chance to reassess, refine, and reimagine the future of your business. As one presenter wisely said during a recent industry meeting, “Choose peace over panic, and calm over chaos—and do what needs to be done.”

Here’s how DBEs can use this time to make meaningful strides forward:



## **STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS**

Relationships remain the foundation of sustainable business growth, and this is an ideal time to strengthen them. Reconnect with agency contacts and prime contractors by:

- Sending a brief note of appreciation
- Scheduling a check-in call
- Attending industry events where they’ll be present

Small, genuine gestures help keep your business visible and reinforce your reliability. Show gratitude to the partners who have supported you and highlight successful collaborations to remind others of your value.

At the same time, explore new partnerships with other DBEs or complementary firms to expand your capabilities. When agencies and primes see that you are dependable, proactive, and collaborative, they’ll remember you for your performance—not just your certification.

## **REASSESS AND REALIGN YOUR BUSINESS**

Reassessing your business is essential as a business owner. The IFR re-evaluation period is the perfect opportunity to begin. Start by asking yourself three key questions:

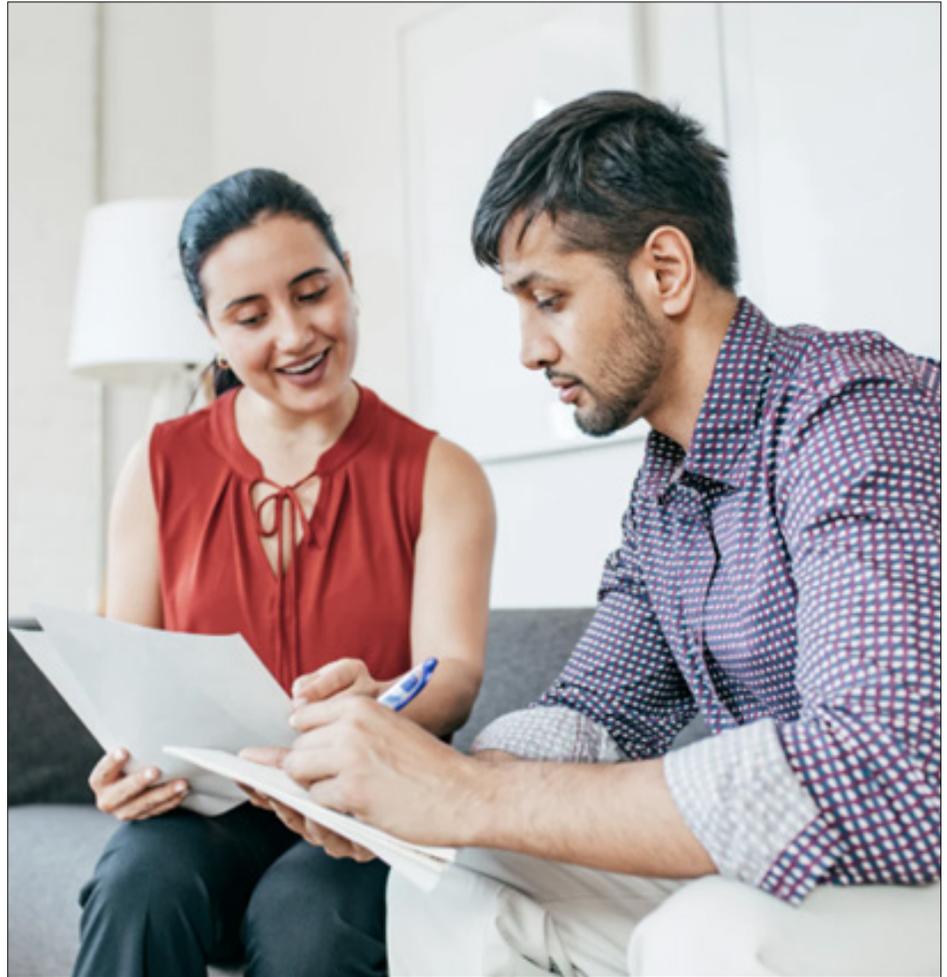
- What are we doing well?
- Where can we improve?
- What do our clients value most?

These questions help you take a clear-eyed look at your operations and performance.

To go deeper, conduct a SWOT Analysis—a structured review of your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This can reveal hidden potential, such as untapped markets or underutilized skills, and help you identify external risks like shifting regulations or increased competition. By using these insights to sharpen your focus, you can align your efforts with what you do best and position your business for long-term success—regardless of regulatory changes.

## REFRESH YOUR APPROACH

Innovation doesn't always require a complete overhaul—it often starts with small, strategic changes that make a big impact. Refresh your branding and messaging so they capture your current capabilities, particularly if you've expanded into new services or adopted sustainable practices. Look for ways to streamline operations; this could involve adopting project management software to improve workflow or automating routine tasks to free up time for strategic planning. Additionally, exploring new technologies or service offerings can open doors to new markets and diversify your revenue streams. A construction DBE might begin offering drone-based site inspections, while a consulting DBE could add data analytics to their portfolio.



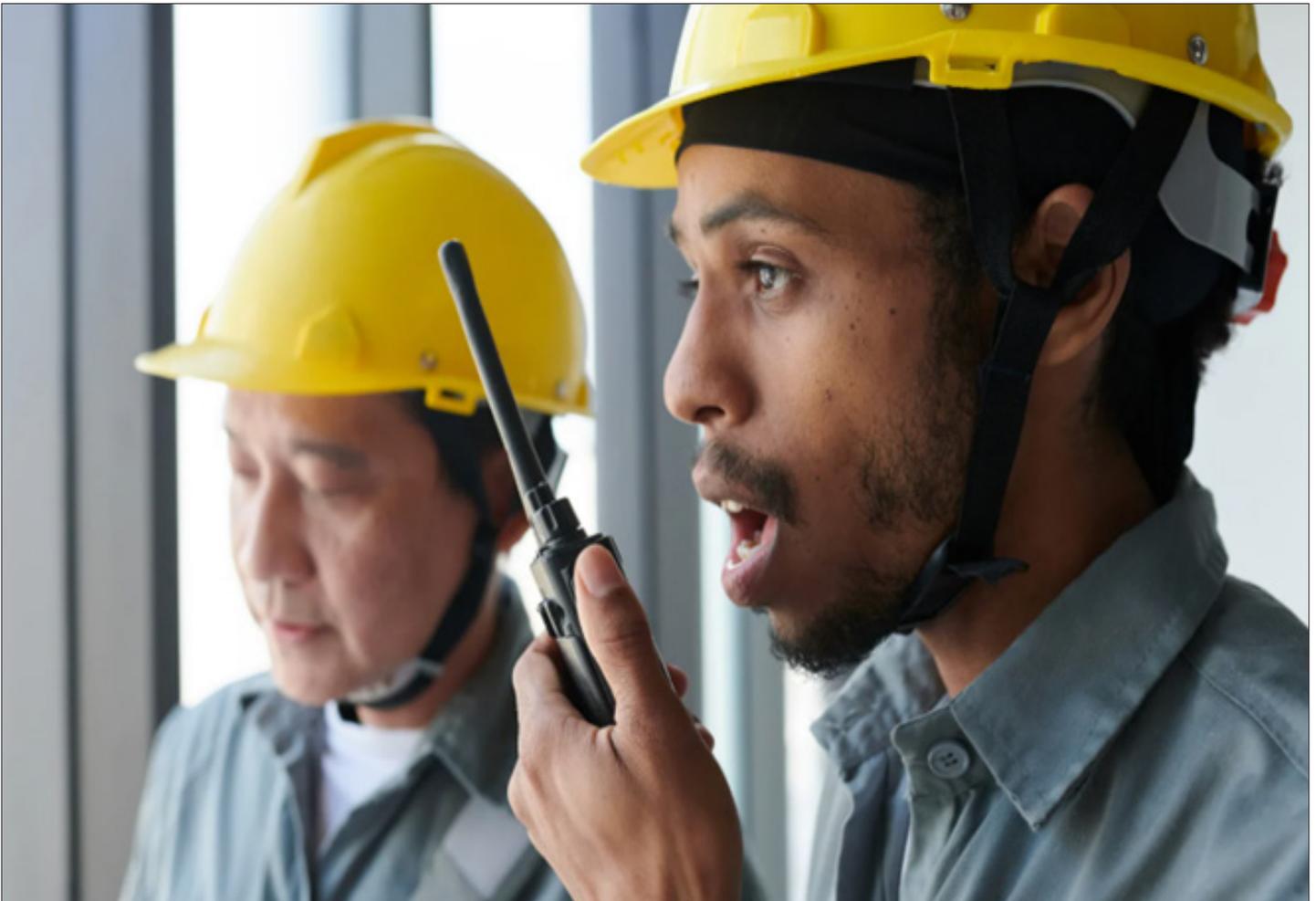
A refreshed approach signals growth, adaptability, and resilience—qualities that primes and agencies look for in strong partners.

## DEMONSTRATE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

This is the time to double down on performance and precision. Strengthen internal systems like project tracking, invoicing, and compliance documentation to ensure your processes are efficient and error-free. Conduct internal audits to confirm alignment with agency requirements and address any gaps early. Most importantly, continue delivering outstanding results on your current contracts:

- Meet deadlines
- Uphold safety standards
- Communicate proactively with clients

Demonstrating reliability, professionalism, and excellence now will position your business as a trusted professional partner for future opportunities.



## **BE STRATEGIC AND COLLABORATIVE**

Being strategic and collaborative is essential for DBEs navigating the current climate. Right now, businesses have the opportunity to think creatively—not just about what they offer, but how they engage with others. In uncertain times, strategic collaboration can open doors that competition alone cannot. Consider partnering with complementary firms to offer bundled or integrated services that appeal to primes and agencies. Seek out opportunities to join industry organizations or minority contractor associations, where you can gain access to insider updates, training, and networking opportunities. Approaching this period with composure and creativity—rather than panic—will help you form meaningful alliances and uncover new opportunities for growth. Panic leads to reactive decisions, while calm allows for strategic thinking. By remaining composed and focused, DBEs can position themselves as reliable, forward-thinking partners—qualities that are highly valued in uncertain times.

## SHARE ACCURATE INFORMATION AND ADVOCATE

In times of change, misinformation can spread quickly making it more important than ever for DBEs to be a source of truth and clarity. One of the most impactful things you can do is share official updates from trusted sources, such as government agencies, industry organizations, and reputable news outlets.

If there are changes to certification requirements or contract opportunities, make sure your team and partners are informed with accurate, timely information. Educating your internal team is equally critical, hold briefings, send out summaries, or host Q&A sessions to ensure everyone understands what's happening and how it affects your business.

Beyond your own organization, advocate for your business and your DBE community by participating in public forums, joining advisory boards, or contributing to industry discussions. This positions you not only as a reliable partner but also as a leader who is actively shaping the future. In a landscape where confusion can lead to missed opportunities, being a beacon of truth helps build trust, credibility, and influence.

## BUILD AND PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION

Your reputation is one of your most valuable business assets and protecting it should be a top priority, especially during times of uncertainty. Strengthening your reputation starts with consistently delivering on your promises. Whether it's meeting project deadlines, staying within budget, or maintaining high-quality standards, reliability builds trust with clients and partners.

Clear communication is equally important:

- Keep stakeholders informed
- Respond promptly to inquiries
- Be transparent about challenges and solutions

Staying visible in your industry also reinforces your credibility—attend conferences, participate in panels, contribute to trade publications, or share updates on social media platforms like LinkedIn. These actions remind others of your expertise and commitment.

You've already faced and overcome challenges to get where you are today—and this moment is no different. With resilience, consistency, and strategic focus, you can navigate this period of change and emerge even stronger.

The Interim Final Rule may bring uncertainty, but it also brings possibility. DBEs can rise above the noise, refine their operations, and position themselves as trusted, indispensable partners, not just certified businesses. Take a moment to breathe, reflect, and rebuild with confidence. You've done hard things before, and you've got this.