

Mississippi Secretary of State's Office

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WELCOME TO BUSINESS WEBINARS:

Early connection of new businesses to state resources through partnership and collaboration. A project built by the Mississippi Secretary of State's office.



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The Stakeholders

- MS SOS External Affairs Division
- MS SOS Business Services Division
- MS Small Business Development Centers (MSSBDC)
- MS Development Authority Minority and Small Business Development Division (MDA)
- Other Business Development Entities (BDE)
- New Business Formations in MS



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New Business Needs

New Business formations are unaware of what the business development landscape looks like in MS.

Correctly establishing a business with the right partners is vital to success.

Most new business formations are not reaching out to anyone for help because they are unaware the free help exists.



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Stakeholder Needs

All stakeholders need a more stable ongoing process to connect resources and services to clients. Clients aren't finding them.

There is no history of ongoing collaboration between state agencies operating in the small business development space. Silos and duplicative efforts are everywhere!

SOS office desire to create more positive interaction with businesses instead of just reminders and warnings. We want to be seen as a success partner.



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The Disconnect

- New businesses need services and resources to be successful.
- The state has free services and resources to help but needs consistent connection to new businesses.
- No other agency can address connection issues on the scale the SOS can because all formations start with us.



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The Fix: Making the Connection

- A webinar to connect newly formed businesses to SOS, MDA, and MSSBDC for an overview of free services offered in Mississippi.
- Capture businesses at registration to make resource connections early in the life of the business to ensure success.
- Create ongoing collaboration between stakeholders for better service to Mississippi businesses in the future.



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WELCOME TO BUSINESS WEBINARS

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WELCOME TO BUSINESS

Details of Live WTB Webinar

- One-hour event hosted twice-monthly via Zoom
- One event at noon and one in the evening for ease of access
- Live stakeholder presentations and Q&A
- Post-event follow-up email with a survey, relevant links, and event presentation materials

Live WTB Webinar Agenda

- Welcome video from Secretary of State, Michael Watson
- SOS team presentation of SOS resources
- MSSBDC presentation of services and resources
- MDA Minority and Small Business Division presentation of services and resources
- Live Q & A

SOS WTB Content Presented

- **Mississippi BOSS:** A road map to starting your business in MS
- **Yall Business:** MS Business Information Center for community market research
- Importance of **filing your annual report**
- **Warning** against business schemes

SOS Content

Mississippi BOSS

- Interview tool asks questions about the business
- Generates a step-by-step to-do list for establishing a business in MS
- Complete with contact information for all relevant federal, state, and local entities



SOS Content

Y'all Business

- Interactive map for exploration of local businesses and resources
- Free reports for up-to-date community-specific market research
- Excellent tool for putting together business plans and loan proposals



SOS Content

Annual Reports

Quick overview of Annual Reports

- Why it's required
- What if I forget to file?
- How to file



MSSBDC Content Presented at WTB

- Overview of services and resources offered free of charge
- Business 101 workshops
- One-on-one business counseling
- How to become a client of MSSBDC
- Overview of other SBA partners

MDA Content Presented at WTB

- Minority and women-owned business certification process
- State procurement assistance for minority and women-owned businesses
- Overview of loan programs for minority-owned businesses
- Contractor's academy program overview

Connecting Businesses to the Webinar

Innovative pathways to connection

- New businesses have the opportunity to sign-up for WTB during the business formation process, so businesses are captured early. We rebuilt our registration process to accomplish this.
- Businesses may register directly through our website.
- Social media alerts are sent prior to each event and shared by partners.
- Reminder emails are sent to those who register for the event but fail to attend.



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Connecting Businesses to the Webinar

Overall Result

- 240 registrations for the WTB webinars monthly
- 75 average attendance per month and trending upward
- 850 new businesses attended WTB in 2022
- MDA saw a significant increase in clients accessing their minority certification and loan programs.



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Connecting Businesses to the Webinar

The Audience

- Over 70% of participants are from minority or women-owned businesses.
- 90% of participants had never heard of MSSBDC or MDA and were unaware of their free services prior to WTB.
- Meaning, we are directly addressing observed needs of the business community by connecting them to resources.



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Connecting Businesses to the Webinar

Feedback from attendees

- 100% of surveyed participants found the content very (67%) or somewhat (33%) helpful
- “very educational for beginners”
- “very informative.. Thank you for providing handouts”
- “would like an in-person option”



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Connecting Businesses to the Webinar

MDA Feedback

- Connecting clients to resources has been positively impacted by WTB
- “Our collaboration with the Secretary of State’s Welcome To Business Webinar has truly been a success. Since November (2022), I have certified 65 business owners as minority-owned and or woman-owned businesses. Of that 65, 48 were clients who joined the WTB Webinar.”

Dr. Latonia Lewis, MDA Program Manager



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Connecting Businesses to the Webinar

MSSBDC Feedback

- “To increase visibility and awareness of statewide resources available to entrepreneurs, the Mississippi Secretary of State’s Office implemented Welcome to Business webinars, a semi-monthly (twice per month) live webinar... The webinar is free of charge and is primarily targeted toward new entrepreneurs that could benefit from non-fee-based entrepreneurial training and technical assistance.”

Mitch McDowell, MS-SBDC Assistant State Director



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Connecting Businesses to the Webinar

MSSBDC Feedback

- Client connection has been positively impacted, particularly in underserved market segments.
- “The Welcome to Business webinars significantly assist with our outreach efforts to increase program visibility across the state. Immediately following the conclusion of each Welcome to Business webinar, the MS-SBDC observes a noticeable uptick in requests for training and technical assistance services from underserved, hard-to-reach market segments.”

Mitch McDowell, MS-SBDC Assistant State Director



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Fringe Benefits of WTB

- Increase in social media enrollments
- We have saved our businesses money with early warnings of scams
- Building trust and a desire for further collaboration between stakeholders
- Web traffic increase to Y'all Business and MS BOSS platforms

Plans for the Future of WTB

- Social media feed to showcase all business development efforts and opportunities in the state to keep businesses connected to ongoing opportunities.
- We have ideas to expand WTB to our charities and securities divisions.
- We want to offer additional resource programs geared toward the needs of minority and women-owned businesses.

Plans for the Future of WTB

- We hope the collaboration will expand to other stakeholders in the formation space resulting in a one-stop-shop for business registrations involving all MS state agencies in the business setup gauntlet. We are one step closer!

Lessons Learned

- Thoroughly test all registration pathways as an actual registrant in the live platforms. Our beta platform worked without flaws, but the live version had bugs we didn't uncover until six weeks after launch. We lost registrants.
- Women and minority-owned businesses have more of a felt need for our program than other groups.
- Collaboration is mutually beneficial for all stakeholders. Collaborate often with others in the business development space. Collaborate, don't duplicate!

Lessons Learned

- Content needs to be focused on creating ongoing connection of businesses to resources and not a one-time informational meeting.
- 60% of WTB attendees register or plan to register for services through MDA or MSSBDC. We'd like this number to be higher.
- We have a lot of business formations we aren't reaching and are looking for ways to increase participation in WTB.
- Regularly survey participants to narrow the relevance of topics presented. We only recently started doing this. We should have done it from the beginning.

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