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## New city portal for minority- and female-owned businesses

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Three days after Mayor Bill de Blasio boasted in his State of the City address that City Hall spent \$690 million on contracts with businesses owned by minorities and women last fiscal year, one of his agencies is unveiling a new online tool to expedite the contracting process.

The mayor's budget office also plans to announce extra funding for similar efforts.

The Department of Small Business Services is launching an internet portal today to enable minority and women-owned businesses, referred to as M/WBEs, to get certified online for city contracts. The businesses now use a labor-intensive, paper-based certification process.

"This online portal, really together with a suite of services that we're providing to build the capacity of M/WBEs, all of that really allows us to make sure that they are in the best position to bid on and perform city contracts," agency commissioner Maria Torres-Springer told Capital in an interview Thursday. "Through the larger M/WBE program, which this administration is committed to strengthening, the goal here is to ensure that the city's purchasing reflects the great diversity of business owners in New York City."

Companies qualify as M/WBEs if they are at least 51 percent owned and operated by minorities or women.

The NYC Online Certification Portal will help firms track the status of their applications and routinely update their profiles, which include bonding limits and business contact information.

De Blasio is also expected to announce a \$1.4 million increase in funding for M/WBEs when he unveils his Fiscal Year 2016 budget next week, two administration officials told Capital.

That money will pay for workshops to help the companies submit bids and proposals for city contracts, connect them with mentors and educate them about partnerships and subcontracts.

De Blasio has said the \$690 million for M/WBE firms in Fiscal Year 2014 represents a 57 percent increase over the previous fiscal year. His aides did not have an updated figure for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30.

City Comptroller Scott Stringer issued a report last year criticizing the administration, including his own office, for failing to issue enough contracts to these firms.