

WHITE PAPER | 2026



The State of Supplier Readiness

Findings from the National Business League Conference

What a national room of contract-seeking businesses actually scored on readiness, where the gap sits, and the sequence that closes it.

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WHERE THIS STARTS

We scored a national room on what buyers check

At the National Buyer-Supplier Summit, part of the 126th National Business League Annual Conference, attendees took a live readiness assessment grounded in the Arc of Business Development framework.

8

readiness dimensions buyers check before an award

53–70

the narrow band seven of the eight dimensions landed in

21

the eighth, certifications and compliance, out of 100

3 in 4

attendees did not qualify for supplier certification

Not because their business was weak, but because the paperwork a buyer requires before award was not yet in place.

No shortage of capabilities. Only a shortage of mechanisms.

THE MISSION

The Summit advanced the NBL's mission to eliminate the nation's \$240,000 median racial wealth gap.

THE CONSTRAINT

Deloitte and McKinsey find over 80% of midmarket suppliers lack the readiness required for corporate onboarding.

THE PURPOSE

Embed supplier-readiness awareness among Black businesses and map where they stand on the Arc of Development.

THE FINDING

Capability is rarely the constraint. Evidence is. A buyer does not evaluate how good a business is. A buyer evaluates the folder that proves it.

The language of the buyer's review

01

Tier 1/Prime and Tier 2/Sub

Suppliers that sell directly to a large corporation or government agency, or to the companies that do. Reaching either tier is what most businesses in the room are working toward.

02

Supplier readiness

The separate, provable standard a buyer checks before award: governance, compliance, cybersecurity, and financial documentation, not just product or price.

03

The Arc of Business Development

A six-stage path from a newly launched business to one holding real market share, with supplier readiness placed near the top.

Readiness is the gatekeeper to the wealth gap



\$240K

wealth gap between median
White and Black households

~4.7%

average yearly growth in the gap,
2013-2022

62-67%

of GDP flows through Fortune 500
and government spend

80%+

of mid-market suppliers miss
baseline enterprise requirements

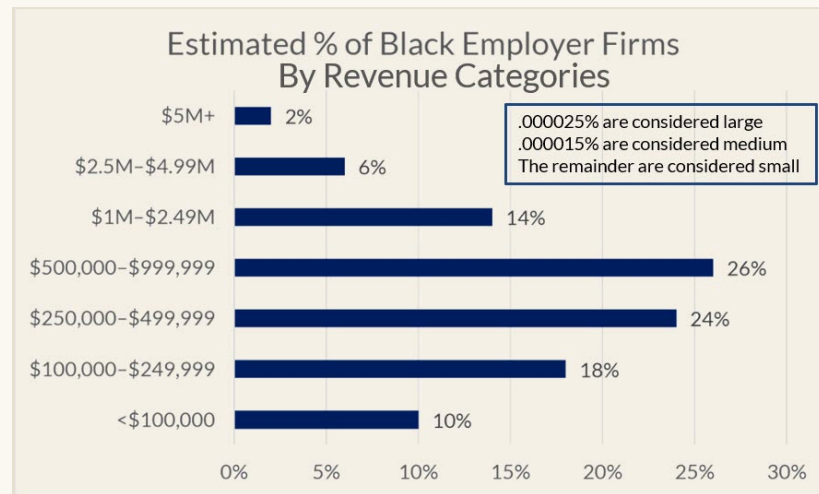
Sources: Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances, 2013-2022. Deloitte, *Closing the Supplier Readiness Gap*, 2022, confirmed by McKinsey.

To get much bigger, suppliers must get much better

Like a fish in an aquarium, a business's growth is bounded by the capacity and capabilities of its operating framework.

Significant increases in capacity and capabilities must significantly precede targeted increases in size and revenue.

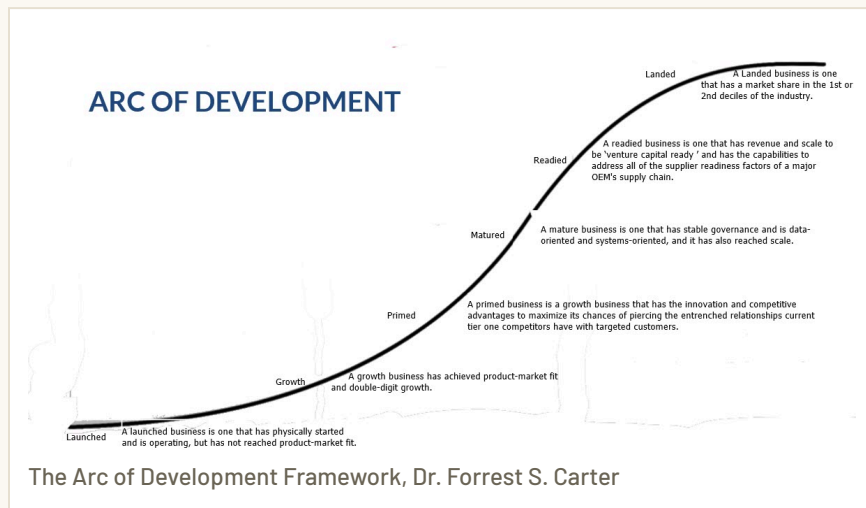
Small	\$2.5M to \$47M in revenue
Medium	\$50M to \$1B
Large	Above \$1B



Size definitions as used by the Small Business Administration and most private venture capital firms.

Judge the aquarium, not the fish

Businesses are categorized by the capabilities, readiness, and capacity they operate in, which determine the size they can be.



01 Launched

Operating, before product-market fit.

02 Growth

Product-market fit and double-digit growth.

03 Primed

Innovation to pierce entrenched tier-1 relationships.

04 Matured

Stable governance, data and systems, at scale.

05 Readied

VC-ready and meets every OEM readiness factor.

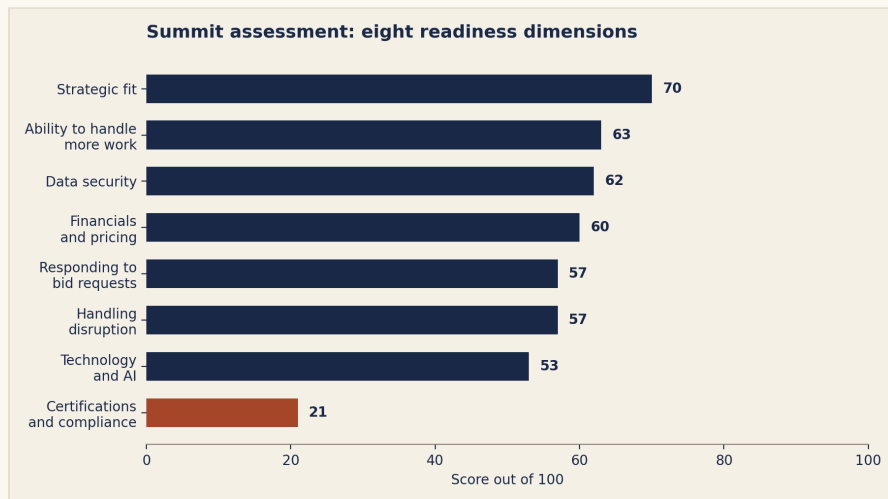
06 Landed

First or second decile market share.

Supplier readiness sits near the top of the arc, and must be achieved before market performance goals.

WHAT WE MEASURED

Eight dimensions, in the room's own numbers



FOUR RESULTS, NOT ONE SCORE

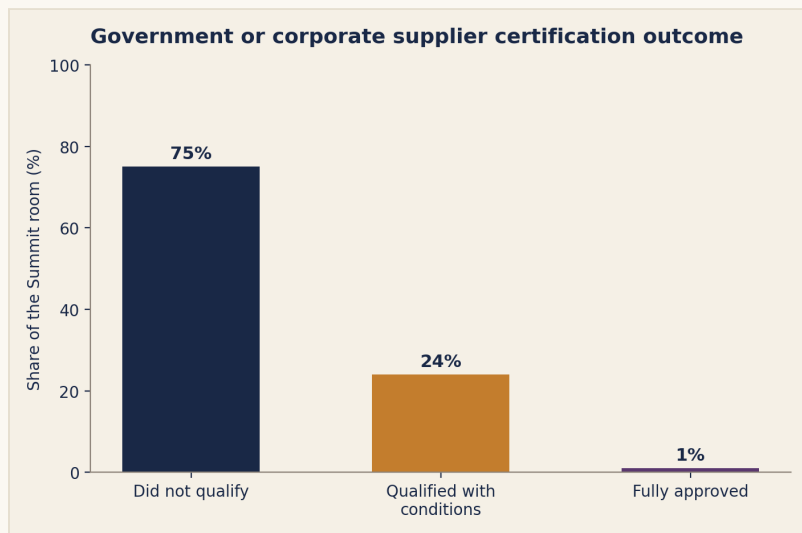
- 01 Readiness across each dimension
- 02 Stage of growth
- 03 Government or corporate certification
- 04 Room left to grow

Certifications and compliance scored 21, more than thirty points below the next lowest. Nobody scored above 56 on it.

Each dimension is scored out of 100. A score of 100 means everything a buyer looks for is in place and documented.

THE ONE GAP THAT DECIDED EVERYTHING

The only thing that moved certification was paperwork



Can we do the work? Largely yes

Can we run a business? Largely yes

Can we prove any of it? Well under half of what a buyer expects

Strong strategic fit, healthy financials, and capacity to scale did not move a business up a certification tier.

That is not a flaw in the scoring. That is how government or corporate supplier certification actually works.

Three behavior patterns showed up across the room

67%

Capacity stretch

Could win more work than it can handle.
Usually treated as a growth problem
when it is really a systems problem.

50%

Silent Specialist

Genuinely strong, and no buyer can tell.
The real gap is how it presents and
documents itself.

25%

Analog Achiever

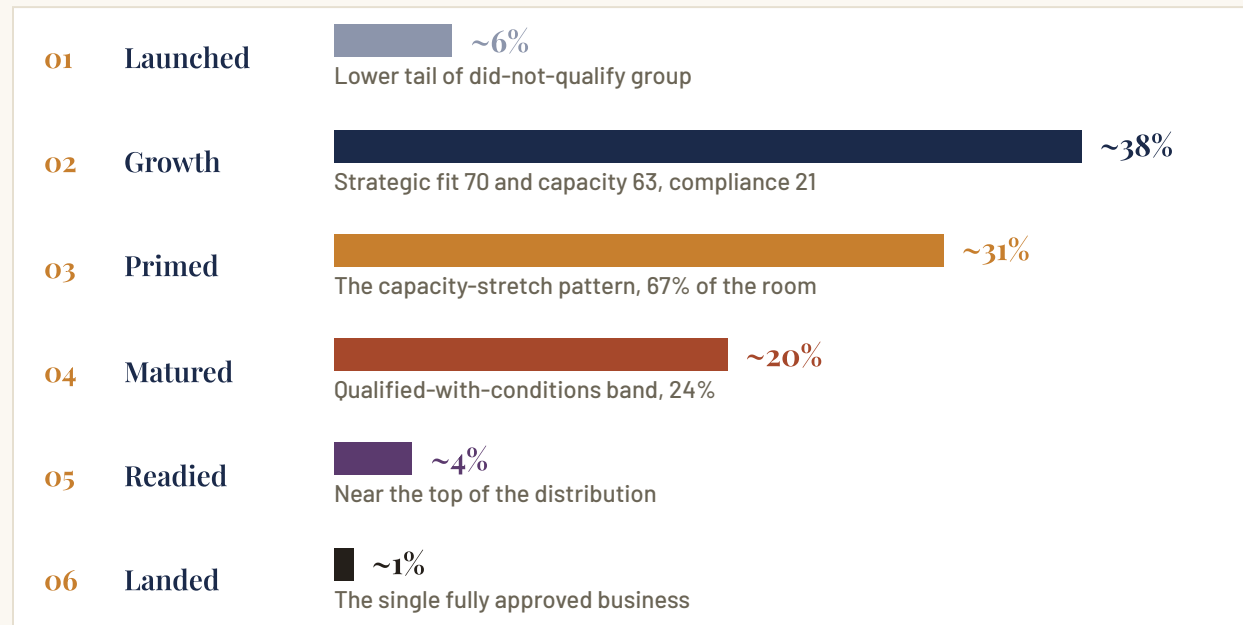
Delivers real results by hand. It does not
survive a buyer asking how the result
repeats next quarter.

None of this describes a room that is bad at its work. Building the structure and the paper trail underneath them is what moves a certification tier.

WHERE THE ROOM LIKELY SITS

A tentative map of the room on the Arc

Estimated by crosswalking the certification split, the eight-dimension scores, and the behavior patterns onto the six stages. Not a direct measurement.



69%

of the room sits in Growth or Primed, before the certification line

25%

at Matured or above, near or past certification

No attendee self-identified an Arc stage. A future assessment that asks directly would replace this estimate.

Close the gap in order. The order matters most.

01 Measure before you plan

Take the full assessment. Ten minutes, confidential, no obligation.

02 Close certifications and compliance first

The dimension that overrides every other score.

03 Write down governance and succession

Who can sign, and what happens if they are unavailable.

04 Govern the technology already in use

A short written policy behind tools used daily.

05 Enroll in a readiness cohort

Turn the gap map into a sequenced ninety-day roadmap.

06 Measure again, same instrument

The second score turns effort into a documented record.

Working on the wrong layer first is the most common way this work stalls.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT AND ACTIVATE THE PLAN

NBL Supplier Readiness Assessment

A guided, ten-minute conversation that ends with a personalized report, a score across the eight dimensions, and a certification determination. Confidential and free.

buyersupplier.nationalbusinessleague.org

1

Tell us about you

Name, company, and contact.

2

Have the conversation

Nine short sections.

3

Get your report

On screen and as a PDF.



SCAN TO BEGIN

What each assessment section measures

A A1-A3 Strategic Fit Customer engagement depth, documented co-innovation or cost-reduction, and participation in buyers' strategic planning. Chart label: Strategic fit	B B1-B4 Scalability and Capacity Capacity versus the largest target contract, revenue concentration, surge response, and redundancy. Chart label: Ability to handle more work	C C1-C4 Financial and Pricing Buyer-ready financial documents, concentration risk, reporting, and price-to-win discipline. Chart label: Financials and pricing	D D1-D3 Risk and Resilience Documented contingency plans, diversified inputs, and supply-base mapping through tiers. Chart label: Handling disruption
E E1-E3 Cybersecurity Multi-factor authentication, data governance, breach response, and evidence for due diligence. Chart label: Data security	F F1-F3 Digital and AI Systems for forecasting, quality, and scheduling, EDI or API data exchange, and AI tools. Chart label: Technology and AI	G G1-G3 Certifications and Compliance ISO 9001, IATF 16949, Six Sigma, alignment with buyer standards, and verifiable documentation. Chart label: Certifications and compliance	H H1-H3 Procurement and Solicitation Executive contract authority, procurement platform fluency, and RFI, RFP, RFQ, IFB response. Chart label: Responding to bid requests

A ninth, unscored routing section (buyer target, industry, revenue tier, international readiness) personalizes the report without affecting the score.

Correlations the report out flags

PATTERN	SECTIONS	WHAT TRIGGERS IT	WHAT IT SIGNALS
Silent Specialist	A + H	Low strategic fit with low procurement-platform fluency	Capable, but cannot be found, verified, or compared
Analog Achiever	F	Digital and AI below 40% of maximum	Manual, non-repeatable operations
Disloyal Messenger	C	Over 70% of revenue from one customer	Concentration a buyer reads as continuity risk
Attractive Lightweight	B + revenue	Low scalability, revenue well below target contract	Can win more than it can deliver
Transactional Performer	A	Engagement limited to delivering to spec	No evidence of co-value creation
Margin Mirage	C	Strong profit, weak ratios or no pricing logic	Profit a buyer's cost analysis would not confirm

HARD GATE · VULNERABLE PERFORMER · E

No multi-factor authentication caps certification at Tier 2, regardless of total score.

HARD GATE · GOVERNANCE · H

No defined executive authority for enterprise contracts blocks Tier 1 certification.

Who measured this, and how

Results describe the businesses in the Summit room, not every small business nationally. Self-selection skews the sample toward firms already pursuing readiness, which makes results more conservative. Scoring uses fixed point values, applied identically to every respondent.

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