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41 Years 1984-2025

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Gerald W. Johnson: Champion of Diversity at 101

By Kato Cooks

Gerald W. Johnson is a living, breathing LEGEND; reserved, dynamic, brilliant. He is a quiet cannon of activism. He is history alive.

Johnson is perhaps best known as co-founder, along with his spouse and business partner, Valerie Voorhies, of the San Francisco-based Small Business Exchange (SBE) newspapers in 1984. SO much happened before that.

First, Rewind

On March 2, 1955, Claudette Colvin, then fifteen years old, was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to relinquish her seat, on a public bus, to a white woman. In 1956, she, along with fellow plaintiffs Aurelia Browder, Susie McDonald, and Mary Louise Smith, prevailed at the United States Supreme Court (*Browder v. Gayle*) in striking down discrimination in public transportation.

Of course, we all remember Rosa Parks, also in Montgomery, Alabama, in the same situation

on December 1, 1955 (nine months after Claudette Colvin's arrest), which launched the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott. This shot the name of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. into the national consciousness.

In 1967, the Black-owned National Economic Growth and Reconstruction Organization (NEGRO), opened bus routes in Watts, an impoverished area of Los Angeles—this owing to the inferior, when it came to all, bus service provided to residents.

But in 1946, nine years before Montgomery, Alabama, and nearly twenty years before the 1965 Watts Rebellion, and more than twenty years prior to the NEGRO bus service in Watts, Gerald W. Johnson was handling our business.

He Refused to Move

Johnson had just returned to his hometown of New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1946, after World War II service in the United States Navy. Johnson and a companion were on a bus headed home when the driver directed him to move behind a "Coloreds Behind This Sign" demarcation. Johnson refused. The driver threatened to call the



police; still, Johnson refused with this retort: "You can call yo' mama. I ain't sittin' behind no sign." Some of us understand.

Prudence prevailed sufficiently for Johnson and his companion to disembark at the next stop.

Small Business Exchange • Voice of Small, Emerging, Diversity-Owned Businesses Since 1984

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IS SOLICITING COST PROPOSALS FROM NEW YORK STATE MWBE SUBCONTRACTORS AND VENDORS

Owl's Head Wastewater Resource Recovery Facility
Main Substation Replacement Project
NYC DEP Contract No. OH-95
Bid Date: January 29, 2026

Description of project:

The Owl's Head Wastewater Resource Recovery Facility is located at 6700 Shore Road in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, New York, and treats approximately 95 MGD of waste on an average annual basis. The work under this contract includes an upgrade of the existing Main Substation No. 1, installation of new power infrastructure (including transformers, switchgear, service feeds, etc.), sitework such as building and flatwork demolition as well as surface restoration, and other general exterior improvements. The Main Substation construction includes a secant pile support of excavation system, concrete substructure, steel framing, architectural finishes, a fire alarm system, HVAC, etc.

Many bidding opportunities are available: electrical, plumbing, HVAC, haul and dispose, rebar, masonry, roofing, fencing, paving, waterproofing, windows and doors, fill materials, geotechnical instrumentation and monitoring, environmental testing, flatwork curb and sidewalk, landscaping, office trailers, survey, painting, office cleaning, lumber supply, erosion and sedimentation control supplies, jobsite toilets, MPT supplies, site photography and video, rodent control, arborist, ready-mix concrete supply, fireproofing, furnish and install new concrete masonry units (CMU) and brick, exterior gypsum board wall, EPDM roofing, aluminum screen wall panel, aluminum louvers, overhead coiling doors, stainless steel doors, intumescent paint fireproofing.

If you are interested in bidding on this project, please contact Skanska's Outreach Coordinator: Aislinn.Speranza@skanska.com • EOE/Vet/Disabled

Scan Here
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PowerUp2030: Prepare Your Business to Tackle Clean Energy Opportunities

PowerUp2030 is a joint initiative of the New York Power Authority (NYPA) and LaGuardia Community College. This

program is designed to support small businesses, especially those owned by minorities, women, and service-disabled veterans, looking to understand and access clean energy opportunities across New York State.

Is this Program for You?

It is if you have been in business for at least 5 years in one of these fields:

- Construction
- Electrical
- Plumbing
- HVAC or another skilled trade

This initiative is also a good fit for those looking to grow a business through clean energy contracts in the public sector.

What You Will Gain

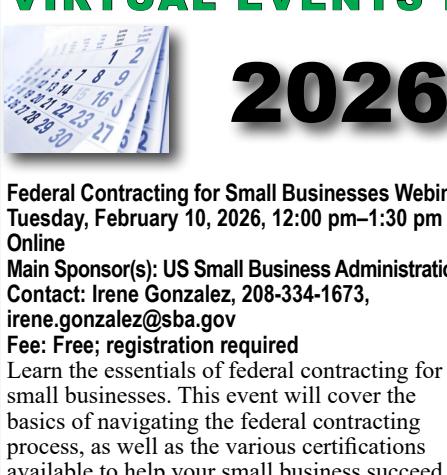
- Learn what public and private clean energy buyers look for
- Strengthen your approach to pricing, permits, partnerships, and capacity planning
- Meet NYPA representatives, project developers, and clean energy experts
- Build relationships with other business owners navigating the same landscape
- Prepare your business to work on NYPA projects



NY Power Authority



CUNY



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- Computer Generated Dated and Timed Documentation
- Customized Reports Available

For more info contact

Valerie Voorhies at

vv@sbeinc.com

VIRTUAL EVENTS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

2026

Federal Contracting for Small Businesses Webinar

Tuesday, February 10, 2026, 12:00 pm-1:30 pm

Online | Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration

Irene.gonzalez@sba.gov, 208-334-1673,

Fee: Free; registration required

Learn the essentials of federal contracting for small businesses. This event will cover the basics of navigating the federal contracting process, as well as the various certifications available to help your small business succeed in the government marketplace. Certifications include 8(a) Business Development Programs, HUBZone Certification, Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB/EDWOSB), and Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB). Don't miss this opportunity to gain valuable insights and resources to help your small business. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/federal-contracting-tickets-197729717825>

SBA 101: Introduction to SBA Programs Webinar

Monday, February 20, 2026, 9:00 am-10:00 am

Online | Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration

Rhode Island District Office

Contact: Brian Hopkins, 401-528-4575,

brian.hopkins@sba.gov

Fee: Free; registration required

This free workshop, presented by the Rhode Island

District Office, is designed to help entrepreneurs understand the various SBA programs and services available to help them as they start, grow, and recover their business.

This is the SBA's presentation covers: Introduction to the SBA; SBA Resource Partner Network—Business Training and One-on-One Counseling; Contracting Certification Programs; Access to Capital—Certified Program; Small Business Capital—Loan and Surety Bond Programs; International Trade Assistance; Emergency Loans; Preparedness and Disaster Assistance; Emergency Loans.

Register online for the free workshop or webinar at <https://www.sba.gov/event/77581>

Federal Contracting for Woman-Owned Small Businesses Webinar

Tuesday, March 17, 2026, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm

Online | Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration

Contact: Patrice Dozier, patrice.dozier@sba.gov

Fee: Free; registration required

SBA is creating a space for Woman-Owned Small Businesses, via WOSB certification!

Are you a woman owner of a small business? The federal government's goal is to award at least five percent of all federal contracts to woman-owned small businesses each

dollar to woman-owned small businesses each year. Join us for training on how to register for the SBA's Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) program, which helps eligible small businesses (WOSB) to qualify for federal contracts.

The monthly sessions include an overview of the NAIC codes that qualify as WOSB or EDWOSB. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/woman-owned-small-business-wosb-certification-program-tickets-197795825761>

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