

Office of Advocacy Roundtable on the U.S. Trade Representative's Request for Comments on Significant Foreign Trade Barriers for the 2026 National Trade Estimate Report and the Operation of the Agreement Between the United States of America, the United Mexican States, and Canada

**Wednesday, October 22, 2025
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM ET
Microsoft Teams Webinar**

The Office of Advocacy will host a virtual Small Business Roundtable to discuss a recent request from the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) for input on identifying significant foreign trade barriers affecting U.S. exports, investments, and electronic commerce for inclusion in the 2026 National Trade Estimate Report. USTR is also seeking input on the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) ahead of a critical 2026 review that could result in significant changes affecting North American trade. Small business stakeholders are encouraged to participate in the event and raise the issues they have encountered in international trade. The roundtable will be held on October 22, 2025, at 1 PM ET on the Microsoft Teams platform.

[Register to attend](#) the roundtable.

AGENDA

I. Welcome and Introduction to the SBA Office of Advocacy

*Dr. Casey Mulligan, Chief Counsel, SBA Office of Advocacy
Roselyn Steward, Assistant Chief Counsel, SBA Office of Advocacy*

II. Brief Overview of the USTR's Request for Comments

What are unfair trade barriers?
What sectors of the economy are affected by unfair trade barriers?
What information is USTR requesting from you?

III. Open Discussion

IV. Closing Remarks and Follow-up Instructions

V. Adjourn

** SBA Advocacy is an independent government office responsible for advancing the views of small businesses in the regulatory policy across the federal government. We conduct roundtables to hear the experiences, challenges, and recommendations of small businesses related to regulations, and to identify alternative approaches for policy development at federal regulatory agencies.*

Our roundtables are largely held online, to facilitate the attendance of stakeholders from a diverse range of backgrounds, industries, and geographic regions.

*** Roundtable meetings are open to all interested persons and are intended to facilitate an open and frank discussion about issues of interest to small businesses. These meetings are off record and not intended for press purposes. Direct quotations of presenters or attendees may not be used without direct written approval of the person(s) making the statement. All press inquiries should be sent to Chandler.Baxter@sba.gov. Agendas and presentations are available to all. Please direct any requests for further information or disability accommodations to Assistant Chief Counsel Rosalyn Steward at Rosalyn.Steward@sba.gov.*

Visit <https://advocacy.sba.gov/category/regulation/regulatory-alerts/> to comment on important proposed regulations.

Topic Summary

Discussion of the USTR's notice seeking comment on significant foreign trade barriers

On September 15, 2025, the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) published a notice seeking public comments identifying significant foreign trade barriers affecting U.S. exports, investments, and electronic commerce for inclusion in the 2026 National Trade Estimate Report.

Why: The federal government wants to identify and address these barriers in future trade negotiations and enforcement actions with foreign countries.

Action: Small businesses should provide feedback on the country or countries and the government policy/trade barrier. Where possible, comments should estimate the potential increase in U.S. exports, foreign direct investment, or electronic commerce from removing each identified trade barrier, and describe the estimation methodology. Use these value ranges: under \$25 Million; \$25 Million-\$100 Million; \$100 Million-\$500 Million; over \$500 Million.

Advocacy is asking small businesses engaged in manufacturing, agriculture, services and other sectors impacted by foreign trade barriers to provide feedback. Some examples of trade barriers include, but are not limited to:

- Tariffs and import duties: These directly raise the price of exports, making U.S. goods less competitive overseas.
- Complex customs procedures: Onerous paperwork and delays can overwhelm small teams and add to transaction costs.
- Technical barriers to trade: These include different product standards, certification requirements (such as the CE mark in the EU), and conformity assessment procedures that are costly and complex.
- Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures: These are non-science-based restrictions or excessive rules on food, agriculture, or plant exports that block or slow U.S. goods.
- Government procurement rules: Requirements that restrict foreign bids or demand that goods be locally sourced.
- Intellectual property protection issues: Weak protection for patents or trademarks makes it riskier for small companies to enter foreign markets.
- Digital trade barriers: Restrictions on cross-border data flows, discriminatory taxes, or data localization requirements can limit access to global digital markets.
- Currency risk and financial barriers: Fluctuating exchange rates, difficulty accessing trade finance, and unpredictable costs.
- Lack of mutual recognition for certifications or credentials: Especially in services (e.g., engineering, health care, software, film), where different countries may not recognize U.S. qualifications.

To help identify barriers, here are some questions to consider:

1. What foreign markets have you tried to enter, and which specific challenges did you face when exporting?
2. Have you encountered difficulties with product certification, testing, or safety standards abroad? If so, how did these requirements differ from those in the U.S.?
3. Are there customs procedures or paperwork that have delayed or blocked your exports?

4. Have you experienced higher costs or delays due to health, safety, or environmental rules applied inconsistently or without scientific basis?
5. Do you find it difficult to protect your intellectual property or brand in foreign markets?
6. Have foreign government procurement policies (such as “buy local” rules) prevented you from bidding or participating?
7. Are there digital trade measures, such as limits on data transfer, discriminatory taxes on digital goods, or censorship, that affect your business internationally?
8. What has been your experience with tariffs or import duties? Do these costs discourage exports to certain markets?
9. In service sectors, have you struggled with gaining recognition for your U.S. licenses or qualifications?
10. Have you been affected by foreign subsidies to domestic competitors or by restrictions on foreign investment?

Discussion of the USTR’s notice seeking comment on the operation of the USMCA

On September 17, 2025, USTR published a request for public comments and a public hearing on the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) ahead of a critical 2026 review that could result in significant changes affecting North American trade. This is your opportunity to share how the USMCA has impacted your business operations, compliance costs, market access, and competitiveness with Mexico and Canada. The review could lead to modifications that affect tariffs, trade rules, and business operations across North America, potentially influencing whether the agreement continues beyond 2036.

Discussion Questions for Small Businesses:

- In what ways has the USMCA affected your business operations, costs, and ability to trade across North America?
- Have you experienced any compliance challenges or issues with how the agreement is implemented by U.S., Mexican, or Canadian authorities?
- Are there trade barriers (such as tariffs, customs procedures, standards, or licensing) that still hinder your ability to do business with Canada or Mexico?
- Do you have recommendations for improving specific USMCA provisions or processes to promote better, fairer, or more efficient access to North American markets for small businesses?
- Has the USMCA made it easier (or harder) for your business to invest or expand operations in Canada or Mexico? What factors support or hinder your competitiveness?
- What are your experiences with enforcement, protection of intellectual property, and dispute resolution mechanisms under the USMCA?
- Have you encountered issues or opportunities in digital trade, e-commerce, or cross-border data flows as a result of the agreement?
- Are the labor, environmental, or procurement rules under USMCA impacting your business? If so, how?
- What government or trade resources or support (such as training, information, or export services) have been most useful in helping your business take advantage of the USMCA?
- Do you have concerns about regulatory changes, product standards, labeling, or certification requirements in Canada or Mexico since the USMCA was implemented?
- Has your firm participated in any joint U.S.-Mexico-Canada small business initiatives, dialogues, or export promotion efforts? What was helpful and what could be improved?
- What steps could the U.S., Canada, or Mexico take to make the agreement more supportive for American small businesses in the next joint review?

Advocacy looks forward to engaging a broad cross-section of small entities on this important topic.