

# SCORE Bucks Chapter Expansion: Small Business Boom Drives Need for More Volunteers



Many of the local employees out of work or whose places of business closed during the pandemic saw the virus-induced economic downturn as an opportunity to start a business.

For SCORE Bucks County, a local chapter of a national nonprofit committed to providing business mentoring services, the influx of new business is a good thing. The downside, however, is that the skyrocketing demand in new mentoring requests has left the Bucks chapter struggling to keep up.

In fiscal year 2019, the chapter handled 1,200 mentoring sessions. For 2020, that number grew to 1,767 mentoring sessions. For the 2021 fiscal year, which concluded Sept. 30, the Bucks chapter handled a whopping 3,055 mentoring requests. To further complicate matters, the Bucks chapter's 50 active volunteer mentors have dwindled to about 40, making it even more challenging for mentors to meet the increased demand for services, according to Chairwoman Linda Zangrilli.

The surge in 2021 mentoring sessions, in addition to be driven by the pandemic, stems from the eastern Montgomery County chapter of SCORE joining with SCORE Bucks County. SCORE Bucks, in addition to serving Bucks County business owners, also serves the eastern portion of Montgomery County, from Willow Grove to Blue Bell.

In response to the increased demand, the chapter is seeking volunteers to guide would-be business owners and entrepreneurs throughout their business ownership journey.

"We want new people who have the time and are willing to give back," said Zangrilli, who began volunteering with SCORE five years ago. "We need people who are engaged."

SCORE provides mentors with ongoing training on everything related to business. Mentors typically have a specialty or area of expertise based on their career and educational background, but the organization teaches all mentors the basics of business startup.

"Learning never stops," Zangrilli said. "Every client brings something different to you, and you actually learn as you're teaching the client too."

When the organization began in 1964, it was focused primarily on recruiting retired executives and former business owners as mentors for the next generation of entrepreneurs. That mind-set has changed dramatically in recent years, with some mentors still holding down jobs or running their own business.

Under the leadership of Zangrilli—the chapter's first female chair—the Bucks chapter has diversified its pool of mentors. Zangrilli, who worked 30 years in operations management, customer service, and management, initially wasn't sure if she had the right experience to be a SCORE mentor.

"I never started a business. I was seriously doubting whether I could contribute," Zangrilli said. "However, corporate life gives you all of the skills you need to be successful as a mentor. The fundamentals are the same, whether you are in a corporation or in your own business."

The key to mentoring success is involvement, according to Zangrilli. The goal of a mentoring session is to not only answer the client's questions and guide them but also to set goals for the next session. "In order to do it right, it does take a time commitment," Zangrilli said. "It's never a one and done situation. You want it to be a commitment on both sides."

Each client has different needs. Some may want weekly meetings, then shift to monthly sessions as their operations begin. Some clients may need support for a few months, while others need SCORE's help for a few years.

"You want to build a rapport," said Zangrilli. "You want to establish a relationship."

#### Get involved

If interested in becoming a SCORE Bucks County mentor, please call 215-943-8850 or email [buckscounty@scorevolunteer.org](mailto:buckscounty@scorevolunteer.org).

## About SCORE



## Bucks County

Since 1964, SCORE has helped more than 11 million aspiring entrepreneurs. Each year, SCORE provides small business mentoring and workshops to more than 375,000 new and growing small businesses. With 50 members across the county, SCORE Bucks County provides over 1,500 free mentoring services annually to local small business owners through one-on-one counseling and small business seminars. To stay up to date on news and happenings, join SCORE Bucks County's email list. Text SCOREBUCKS to 22828.