**SCORE SC Lowcountry Program Supports Minority Owned Businesses**

**Background on Minority Owned Businesses**

Did you know that Hardeeville in Jasper County and Bluffton in Beaufort County are the top two fastest growing cities in South Carolina in 2022 per the American Community Survey by the US Census Bureau? [[1]](#footnote-1)

Based on the July 1, 2019 statistics from the US Census Bureau[[2]](#footnote-2), did you know that 36% of the population in Beaufort, Jasper, Hampton and Colleton County are minorities but minority business ownership accounts for only 20% of the businesses?

Our community is ethnically diverse and with its continued growth, businesses need capital. According to the National Small Business Association, 41 percent of small businesses say a lack of capital is hurting their ability to grow.  For America’s Main Street businesses, having access to capital means the difference between hiring and layoffs.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The pandemic exacerbated the needs of small businesses. While the various SBA programs, (Paycheck Protection Program and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Fund), provided assistance, some minority owned businesses were by-passed by these programs. Other business owners were uncertain or unclear on how to apply for the SBA programs and some just did not know they were available. Beyond business owners trying to survive, the pandemic led to job losses and many people turned to starting their own business. Many of those businesses struggled.

**How Did SCORE SC Lowcountry Help Minority Owned Businesses**

SCORE SC Lowcountry recognized that serving the entire community is critically important to its chapter. SCORE SC Lowcountry is a non-profit that provides free, confidential business mentoring to clients that want to start or grow a small business in Beaufort, Jasper, Hampton, and Colleton Counties in South Carolina.

SCORE is a nationwide nonprofit and resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). Since 1964, SCORE has helped more than eleven million aspiring entrepreneurs. SCORE has over 250 chapters nationwide with over 10,000 volunteers. In 2021, SCORE volunteers helped start more than 25,084 small businesses and support the creation of a total of 96,559 jobs and non-owner jobs of 71,475 nationwide.

SCORE SC Lowcountry (SCORE Chapter) saw the need to assist minority owned businesses in its community and created the Minority Small Business Award Program. The SCORE Chapter created a committee of experienced SCORE mentors to develop this program. Michelle Gaston, a new member of the SCORE Chapter in 2021 and recently awarded the Rookie of the Year award for the chapter, jumped in with both feet and agreed to be the Chair of this committee

The committee networked with local community leaders and organizations to understand the needs of minority owned businesses. Based on this feedback, the committee created the outline of this program and requested grants to fund these awards. Wells Fargo and Truist became the primary sponsors of the program. The committee asked local community leaders to participate as an Advisory Committee who would review and score all the applications and decide on who should receive awards. Five local leaders volunteered for this very challenging role. The Advisory Committee was:

* Anthony Brockington, Small and Minority Business Program Manager, South Carolina Commission of Minority Affairs
* Brianne Buckner, Teacher, Colleton High School – Colleton County
* Sheree Darien, Executive Director and Founder of nonprofit, Second Chance Outreach – Jasper County
* Dr. Roy Hollingsworth, Hampton County Council Member
* Eric Turpin, Executive Director of the Native Island Business and Community Affairs Association (Beaufort County)

This program was focused on the four counties SCORE SC Lowcountry serves – Beaufort, Jasper, Hampton and Colleton County. Primary eligibility was applications from minority owned business owners that are owned 51% by African American, Hispanic, American Indian & Asian business owners and are starting or have a small business (less than 25 employees) in one of the four counties. The awards were up to $2,500 each.

The online application was created and the website with instructions were launched on September 7, 2021 with a deadline of Oct 6, 2021. The program was marketed in various social media sites, boosted on Facebook and sent to all the Chambers of Commerce in all four counties and the advisory partners to share. The result was 80 applications were received with 24 being sent to the Advisory Committee for scoring and interviews. 11 awards were made totaling $27,500.

**Impact on the Community**

The best way to measure the impact on the community is the feedback from the people who were involved and the recipients of the awards.

Comments from award recipients

* “*I am overjoyed to be one of the fund recipients! This grant will be vital in the growth of my business. I can’t thank SCORE enough for recognizing the needs and hardships of small minority businesses and using their platform and knowledge to allow us to stretch and expand is unimaginable ways.”* Sonya G.
* “*What a wonderful way to start the day! Thank you and the committee so very much for your consideration and the grant. For a new company, this award will be pivotal in helping me get started on the road to success*!” Luana S.

The Advisory Committee members who supported the program were equally impressed with the program and commented.

* “*It was gratifying to be a part of the SCORE Minority Small Business Program Advisory Committee. The program itself provided assistance to underrepresented entrepreneurs seeking supplemental funding to grow their business. I feel that our efforts in supporting these businesses help create jobs, support families, and overall strengthens the community*."

Dr. Roy Hollingsworth, Hampton County Council Member

* “*I am humbled and grateful for the opportunity to participate in the grant reviewing process.  Access to capital remains a consistent barrier for many minority business owners.  These funds are “chipping away” at that barrier*! “

Anthony Brockington, Small and Minority Business Program Manager, South Carolina Commission of Minority Affairs

* “*This grant revealed a great need for capital and business operational support among minority business owners. With additional funding, this program can produce sustainable startup businesses which can grow & scale.”*

Sheree E. Darien, CPDC, Executive Director & Founder, Second Chance Community Outreach, Inc.

This program could not have been accomplished without the generosity and support of the sponsors.

* *“There is immense power when a group of people with similar interests gets together to work toward the same goals to build better lives and communities in our South Carolina Markets.”* Matt Giddens, Truist Regional Community Development Manager for the South Carolina Region
* “*We know the pandemic has disproportionately impacted communities of color throughout our nation, and right here in our communities. Wells Fargo is excited to support an equitable recovery across the state through this partnership with SCORE SC Lowcountry*," said Wells Fargo Regional Banking Director for South Carolina Justin Hawkins. "*With these resources, we aim to support communities and small business to emerge from the pandemic stronger and more resilient."*

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Lastly, it was the SCORE SC Lowcountry team that developed and implemented the program.

* “*The expansion into Colleton, Hampton, and Jasper counties, the prescreening and mentoring efforts of countless SCORE SC Lowcountry volunteers, and the administrative efforts undertaken to make the program successful are a testimony to the dedication of our volunteers and their desire to help our minority communities*,” said Michelle Gaston, SCORE mentor and Chair of the Minority Small Business Award Program. “*I’m proud to be part of this effort*.”
* *“It is a privilege for our SCORE team to support the minority small businesses in our Lowcountry communities and contribute to their success.   We look forward to enhancing this program to positively impact more minority businesses going forward.”* Rod Casavant, Chapter Chair SCORE SC Lowcountry

**What’s Next?**

SCORE SC Lowcountry performed a follow up review and developed lessons learned at the end of this program. From the feedback, it was determined there is a need for business literacy training for small business owners. Business owners needed assistance in many areas including marketing, understanding financial statements and other topics. Many owners have the technical skills to run the business but needed assistance in other business areas. SCORE SC Lowcountry helps businesses with resources to fill the knowledge gap and offers free and confidential mentoring services to help business owners with one on one support. Because of the need for funding and success of the first program, the SCORE Chapter is planning another program for 2022 that will address these concerns by adding an educational component. The SCORE Chapter is looking for grants to help expand this program as well as industry leaders who will be part of an expanded Advisory Committee and volunteers who can assist in mentoring and administrative roles within the chapter.

It takes a village to support a community and SCORE SC Lowcountry has shown what can be done with the support of its sponsors, local community leaders and its chapter volunteers to help grow small businesses. If you want to support this effort, please contact Michelle.gaston@scorevolunteer.org. To learn more about SCORE SC Lowcountry, see [www.sclowcountry.score.org/](http://www.sclowcountry.score.org/).

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Certified SCORE Business Mentor

Chair, Partnership Committee

1. https://www.homesnacks.com/fastest-growing-cities-in-south-carolina/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/jaspercountysouthcarolina/PST045219>

   <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/beaufortcountysouthcarolina/PST045219>

   <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/hamptoncountysouthcarolina/PST045219>

   <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/colletoncountysouthcarolina/PST045219> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.sbc.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/democraticissues [↑](#footnote-ref-3)