

A Program That Helped Build 144,000 Jobs Gets Slashed by Budget Cuts – What Happens Next Is Pivotal for Small Business Support

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SCORE, the nonprofit that has supported small businesses for over six decades, recently faced a major setback: the latest tax and spending bill eliminated about 60% of its federal funding – a core part of its budget. For an organization that offers free mentoring to hundreds of thousands of entrepreneurs annually, this looks like a serious blow.

But what if this funding cut is not the end of SCORE – but a new beginning?

With a vast network of 10,000 volunteer mentors and a proven track record of economic impact – including helping start 58,000 new businesses and creating 144,000 jobs in 2024 alone – SCORE has always been a vital lifeline for small business owners. However, without reliable federal support, SCORE faces a crossroads: continue to rely on uncertain government appropriations or reinvent itself as a self-sustaining business.

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The real impact behind SCORE's numbers

According to SCORE, every federal dollar invested generated \$45 in economic benefits. This was achieved through four million mentoring hours across 200 chapters, advising over 300,000 entrepreneurs annually. These numbers show that SCORE's work isn't just a feel-good story – it's an economic engine.

Yet, despite these impressive results, the realities of federal budget cuts have forced SCORE's leadership to confront a difficult question: How can SCORE continue fulfilling its mission without government backing?

Facing tough realities: the bigger budget picture

As an advocate and advisor for small businesses in this country, it pains me to see great organizations like this lose their support. SCORE is clearly a valuable agency that has helped countless small businesses in the more than 60 years since its founding in 1964. But I'm also a realist.

The reality is that, regardless of what we want, there are limitations to what we can afford. Yes, I'd like free education, free healthcare, clean water, safe highways and strong defense. I also appreciate all the research done by so many government agencies and academic institutions that received federal support. But I, like many business owners, also see a \$2 trillion annual deficit and a \$36 trillion national debt and don't know how we and our children and grandchildren can sustain that level of liabilities. Some things have to be cut. Some things have to go. And it looks like SCORE, like many other good programs the Federal government funds, is one of those things. Government spending

must be prioritized and trimmed where possible. Unfortunately, this means good programs sometimes lose funding – even those with proven results. It's painful for advocates and advisors to see a respected organization like SCORE face these challenges. But the truth is, many federally funded programs will need to find new models to survive.

A bold proposal: what if SCORE became a business?

SCORE's greatest asset isn't just its volunteers or history – it's its infrastructure, leadership and brand recognition. These assets could enable SCORE to spin off from government support and operate as a private, self-sustaining entity.

It already has the foundation – a trusted name in the small business community, a robust volunteer network and experienced leadership. With the right strategy, SCORE could attract investors, lenders or equity partners who see the value in its proven return on investment. And that ROI can be translated into real dollars.

Imagine SCORE charging a sliding scale of fees based on a business's ability to pay – allowing startups and small enterprises with limited resources to still receive help, while those who can afford it contribute. Or consider raising funds from corporate sponsors who already invest heavily in small business programs, redirecting those dollars toward SCORE's mission.

SCORE could also contract its expertise to consulting firms or financial institutions – creating new revenue streams while expanding its impact.

Why change is necessary

SCORE's traditional model – volunteer consultants supported by government-paid staff – has its limitations. Volunteers vary in quality and motivation, and government employees don't operate under typical business incentives that reward customer satisfaction and performance. For SCORE to thrive in a post-funding world, it must adopt a model that encourages accountability, quality and sustainability.

The opportunity ahead

If SCORE were to disappear, would more small businesses fail? Would the economy suffer? Probably not dramatically – other organizations and market forces would fill some gaps.

But SCORE has a unique opportunity to redefine itself – not just as a nonprofit supporter of small business but as a business itself, accountable for its outcomes and financially self-sufficient. Like the entrepreneurs it helps, SCORE can pivot, adapt and innovate.

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Final thoughts

Brigett Weston, SCORE's CEO, recently said, "Without federal support, this incredibly efficient and effective program is at serious risk of no longer fulfilling its mission." That risk is real.

But it's also a chance.

SCORE can lead the way in demonstrating how public support programs might evolve to meet today's financial realities – continuing to empower entrepreneurs and build our economy, but on its own terms.

This is not just a story about funding cuts; it's about resilience, reinvention and the future of small business support in America.

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