

WESTCHESTER



Acceleration Project Takes Off

Scarsdale-based nonprofit boosts Westchester's small businesses while offering professionals meaningful work.

By Robert Selwitz



**TAP Members
(left to right): Ann
Yaspan, Elyse
Klayman, Tracy
Jaffe, CEO and
Co-Founder Jane
Veron, Co-
Founder Lisa
Tretler, Pam
Rubin, Amanda
Hack, and Mary
Blum Photo
Courtesy of Tap**

Though small in numbers, [The Acceleration Project \(TAP\)](#)—whose mission is to provide strategic and tactical business information for a nominal fee to small businesses that otherwise couldn't afford to pay for it—doesn't have small goals.

Since 2012, the Scarsdale-based nonprofit organization has linked Westchester consultants with

local firms in need of expert management-consulting input. By doing so, TAP is, according to its mission statement, working toward its lofty goal of “boosting local economic development by enabling small businesses to grow and flourish.” Aid provided by TAP includes an analysis of problems and challenges, and offering practical solutions that can help fledgling firms stay in business or expand their operations.

The organization is the brainchild of co-founder and CEO Jane Veron, who after a career spent in management consulting, marketing, and strategy roles, was determined to apply her professional skills to make an impact in the local economy. Through various experiences in her career, Veron says she “became painfully aware of the struggles small businesses face, particularly given competition from the Internet and big box stores. Everywhere I turned, I saw vacant storefronts and understood that these vacancies endangered entire local business communities.”

So Veron built TAP with twin goals: to harness the untapped potential of small businesses while also helping local female professionals hone or strengthen their own management skills. TAP’s roster of consultants is made up professional Westchester women who’ve taken time off from their careers and want to re-engage in business while helping small firms in their communities.

As TAP consultant Tracy Ullman explains, “TAP gave me the opportunity to use my business experience and skills in a low-risk, supportive, collaborative, results oriented environment. Being a TAP consultant was a great way to re-engage with the working world. And the experience provided a natural transition back to full time employment.”

So just what does TAP do for local companies? At the heart of TAP’s assistance is its Strategic Advisory Program, explains COO Tracy Jaffe, who has extensive experience in developing corporate marketing strategies. It works this way: A team of consultants advise a client on business needs;

each participates in several structured sessions, with interim preparation by consultants; and then client then receives customized tools based on their unique requirements, along with a detailed Action Plan—which includes strategies and tactics with target dates attached, which the client can use to achieve self identified goals, both short term and long term—for execution.

In order to build the Action Plan, Jaffe says, “our consultants first work with the business owner to complete a goal setting worksheet. By clearly identifying the goals, business owners participate in an exercise prioritizing those goals.



“Once this is done,” she adds, “our consultants use TAP tools to identify the necessary strategies and tactics the business can implement to achieve their desired results.”

The organization is garnering positive feedback, both from clients and from county government. One of many companies TAP has assisted is Peekskill-based [G&K Sweet Foods](#), makers of artisan sweet-potato pies and other

desserts. Founder and COO Kecia Palmer-Cousins found that “TAP quickly identified our challenges, met us there, and then took us to the next level.”

Also, Susanne Shoemaker, CEO and founder of [Undercare](#), a New Rochelle clothing store, emphasized, “So many people have trouble focusing on what is important and on keeping it simple. [TAP] is masterful at that. Working with them feels very productive.”

Similarly pleased is William K. Mooney III, Director of Westchester County’s Office of Economic Development, who sums up that, “the Acceleration Project’s skilled dedication to the

vitality of Westchester's small businesses makes them an important component of the Office of Economic Development's toolbox. We are grateful for the high quality assistance their consultants provide to local businesses, and look forward to continuing our relationship."