



**BUSINESS**



## Women business owners can face 'heightened scrutiny.' There are resources to help.

Nearly 40% of Pennsylvania businesses are owned by women.



Felicia Shanken, founder and CEO of Philadelphia Women's Network Connection, which partners with other organizations to offer free resources to help women start their own businesses.

Tom Galish / Staff Photographer

by Gene Marks, For The Inquirer

Published Apr. 27, 2023, 5:46 a.m. ET

To honor Women's History Month in March, President Joe Biden hosted a summit for women entrepreneurs where he [announced funding](#) to support more resources specifically targeting the more than 12 million women who own businesses in this country.

“Today it's all about lifting up women entrepreneurs and making sure they have the support they need to succeed,” Biden [said](#). “You're innovators. You're job creators.”

To be eligible for the Women-Owned Small Business Federal Contract program, a business must:

- Be a small business according to the [Small Business Association size standards](#)
- Be at least 51% owned and controlled by women who are U.S. citizens
- Have women manage day-to-day operations who also make long-term decisions

ADVERTISEMENT

Pennsylvania's [Department of Community and Economic Development](#), which provides a variety of resources to women business owners, says that nearly 40% of the commonwealth's businesses are owned by women. In addition to federal funds, many other resources are available to help women entrepreneurs in the Philadelphia area.

## Certified women-owned

Elizabeth Walsh runs one of three [Women's Business Enterprise Centers](#) in Pennsylvania that will receive some of the president's funding and partners with the [Women's Business Enterprise National Council](#) to help certify female

“People used to get their business certified as women-owned because it would help them to get federal grant contracts or establish relations with larger corporations and this is still the case,” she said. “But things have changed, and now we’re seeing a large increase in people getting that certification for the shopper who is looking for the women-owned logo.”

ADVERTISEMENT

Walsh has seen the number of certified women-owned businesses grow more than 50% since 2017 with 26% of them employing at least two employees. Women’s Business Enterprise Centers provide training and programming to address some of the unique issues faced by women in business, including succession planning, maternity leave, and running a business while raising a family.

In recent years, she’s seen interest in starting businesses from women of all ages.

“Our highest growth is in the construction industry,” Walsh said. “But we’re also seeing women in the health-care and the education industries who did not return to their pre-COVID world of work and are becoming business owners. Our largest group is between the ages of 55 and 64, and we’ve seen a significant growth in women of color owning businesses.”

## Networking opportunities

The [Philadelphia Women’s Network Connection](#) has seen a surge in networking opportunities in the area among female business owners, particularly a “large number of women who are over the age of 50,” said Felicia Shanken, who runs the nonprofit.

Shanken’s organization has partnered with others, including the [National](#)

start their own businesses.

ADVERTISEMENT

“They will get one-on-one attention [so] they can start building their business from scratch,” she said. “We’ll go through the fundamentals, and while they’re in the program, they’ll be getting a stipend to help them with costs.”

## Managing ‘heightened scrutiny’

Women business owners face a “heightened scrutiny” of how they look and act compared to their male counterparts, and they need a place to go where they can share these experiences with other female entrepreneurs, according to Nicole Stephenson, the executive director of the [Society of Professional Women](#) for the Main Line Chamber of Commerce.

“I still get people hitting on me on LinkedIn,” said Stephenson. “I don’t know if men reach out to other men and ask if they’re married on LinkedIn but that happens to me.”

ADVERTISEMENT

Stephenson’s organization provides training, seminars, and networking programs to help women business owners and professionals in the area deal with these issues and more.

“Communities of women like ours are important because it helps to inspire and empower women to advocate for themselves and to speak out when something is not right or they’ve been made to feel uncomfortable,” she said.

“There’s something really beautiful about having a supportive network that

## MARKETPLACE

---

- Subscribe
- Inquirer Store
- Job Listings
- All Classifieds
- Death Notices
- Legal Notices
- Gift Subscriptions

## E-EDITIONS

---

- The Inquirer
- The Daily News

## MOBILE APPS

---

- Apple iOS
- Google Android



© 2024 The Philadelphia Inquirer, LLC

[Terms of Use](#) / [Privacy Policy](#) / [Cancellation Policy](#) / [California Notice](#)

[California residents do not sell my data request](#)