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## Entrepreneurship pioneers initiative kicks off at Rutgers-Newark

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NEWARK — Fifty first-generation entrepreneurs met at the Paul Robeson Center at the Rutgers University on Friday morning for the launch of the New Jersey Entrepreneurship Pioneers Initiative.

The nine-month project, sponsored by the Center for Entrepreneurship & Economic Development at Rutgers Business School, will help the entrepreneurs expand their businesses through training, counseling, networking opportunities and access to local financial resources.

The program will help to support the state's goal of "work force development leading economic development," said **David Socolow**, commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Although "New Jersey is a high-cost state...it's got the most highly productive work force in the nation," he said. "That's our competitive advantage."

Participants will attend monthly training sessions that cover topics such as operations and technology management, procurement for the public and private sector, and brand building and positioning. The business owners — who are based in northern New Jersey — also will meet monthly for one-on-one counseling sessions. Following graduation, the Center for Entrepreneurship & Economic Development will track the businesses for four years to assess their growth.

A first-generation entrepreneur is defined as someone who does not have a family history of formal entrepreneurship, according to the Rutgers Business School. Such business owners often are at higher risk of failure because they lack the business skills and connections to start and grow their companies.

"I hope to learn how to bring my business to the next level, from a small local operation to a much broader operation," said **Oren David**, a participant who started his Livingston-based technology services company, **Bavelle Technologies**, 12 years ago. David, whose firm employs 10, said he wanted to do more work with larger companies, which currently account for only a small percentage of his business, but "in order to do that, I need to grow."

Aside from the training, the entrepreneur hoped to benefit from the mentoring and networking opportunities that the program offered. Mentoring "is something I've never really had," David said. "I never had the guidance from someone who had experience."

Funding for The Entrepreneurship Pioneers Initiative was provided by North Jersey Partners, a regional partnership supporting economic growth in northern New Jersey, through a Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.

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