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CUNY's Lehman College Wins \$100K Verizon Grant to Launch Emerging Tech Mentoring Program for Veteran-, MWBE-Owned Small Businesses Across NYC

BRONX, N.Y., January 8, 2020—The City University of New York's (CUNY's) Lehman College School of Continuing and Professional Studies' (SCPS) Bronx Tech Incubator has been awarded a \$100,000 Verizon Foundation Workforce Development grant to create and launch an innovative, two-year emerging technology mentorship program for 250 small business owners across the five boroughs.

Lehman College SCPS will use a portion of the funds to develop the curriculum for a series of free training workshops across the five boroughs for city-based small businesses in 5G technologies, machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI), and other web-based tools and applications. The remaining funds will be used to deliver and publicize the program, which will take place at a CUNY school in each borough, starting this summer at Lehman's Tech Incubator at CUNY on the Concourse in the Bronx. Particular effort will be made to attract to the program small business owners who are veterans and minority- and women-owned businesses (MWBEs).

"Lehman College's Bronx Tech Incubator along with the work of Dean Jane MacKillop through the School of Continuing and Professional Studies is one remarkable part of the Bronx's economic story as a provider of technological infrastructure for local startups and entrepreneurs," said Lehman College President Daniel Lemons. "The Verizon Foundation's Community Workforce Development grant aims to narrow the digital divide and is aligned with Lehman's mission of serving as a catalyst to promote social mobility."

That digital divide exists not only in the Bronx, but across New York, said Kimberly Kendall, director of workforce development at Lehman College SCPS. That's why SCPS is developing the program to be available across the city.

"We wanted to pilot the workshops and mentorship programs in the Bronx, then replicate a successful model across New York to have the widest impact," Kendall said. "Partnering with sister CUNY schools made sense since they are not only anchor institutions in each of their boroughs, but they also provide a conduit to connect with local small business owners."

In addition to Lehman College, participating CUNY schools include Manhattan's Baruch College, Queens College, the College of Staten Island and the New York City College of Technology in Brooklyn. Each partner school is home to either a Small Business Development Center, a technology center, or in Lehman College's case, both—it's Bronx Tech Incubator is home to CUNY's only augmented and virtual reality lab and the only lab of its kind in the Bronx, making Lehman uniquely qualified to develop and execute such a program.

"Lehman College is committed to providing the highest quality education in a caring and supportive environment where respect, integrity, inquiry, creativity, and diversity contribute to individual achievement and the transformation of lives and communities," said Tony Lewis, Verizon's regional vice president of state government affairs. "These values match Verizon's commitments to our communities and form the basis for a true partnership with Lehman. We believe that digital inclusion can reduce social disadvantages and increase economic equity for everyone. This grant to Lehman College will help enhance programs that provide access to digital technologies and increase digital workforce readiness for program participants."

The grant will support the training and support of 50 small business owners in each borough. One unique aspect of the program is that Verizon employees, most likely residents in the borough in which they'll be teaching, will volunteer to serve as mentors to the small business owners, leading the workshops and providing ongoing one-on-one support, where available. The workshops themselves will be designed to be short (no longer than a total of 12 hours over two or three days), intensive and offer practical knowledge in emerging technologies, Kendall said.

"It means a lot to have Verizon as a committed partner in Lehman College SCPS's efforts to ensure Bronx small business owners have access to and training in the emerging technologies that promise to remake the world around us," said SCPS Dean Jane MacKillop. "And while we're always proud that we can offer Bronx residents and local entrepreneurs access to these technologies through our Bronx Tech Incubator, we're even more excited that we'll be able to share the innovative programming we've created here at Lehman College with other CUNY schools serving small business owners across New York City."

Bronx small business owners will be able to begin applying to the program in February, Kendall said, with the first workshops at Lehman's Tech Incubator planned for July. SCPS plans to roll out the next program at the Tech Incubator at Queens College later this fall. The initial program is expected to wrap up at Baruch College's Lawrence N. Field Center for Entrepreneurship at the Zicklin School of Business before the end of 2021.

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