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# M&T Bank will put East Side companies through Innovation Lab. That's just the start

Oct 20, 2021, 6:00am EDT

Thirty-three small businesses are set to enter M&T Bank's Small Business Innovation Lab.

The inaugural program kicks off this month with a series of in-person workshops hosted by M&T business bankers and Canisius College professors.

The six-week program specifically sought East Side entrepreneurs from diverse ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds.



M&T BANK

David Femi, head of M&T Bank's Multicultural Banking & Community Affairs Segment

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“Access to capital was huge, but when we polled our audience it was about knowledge,” said [David Femi](#), multicultural banking leader. “A lot of these multicultural-owned businesses don’t know where to go to find help in scaling their businesses.”

The program will conclude with a Shark Tank-syle pitch competition, with the winner taking home \$5,000, a \$3,000 second-prize and a \$2,000 third place prize.

This is the start of an ongoing effort, Femi said. There is a good chance M&T (NYSE: MTB) will run another cohort through the workshops in 2022.

And it hopes to deepen its relationships with the business in the program, helping them become beacons within an impoverished community.

“The East Side has a tremendous opportunity to grow and do well,” Femi said. “But small-business growth has to be at the core of all that. So that’s our mission there.”

**Dan Miner**  
Reporter  
*Buffalo Business First*

