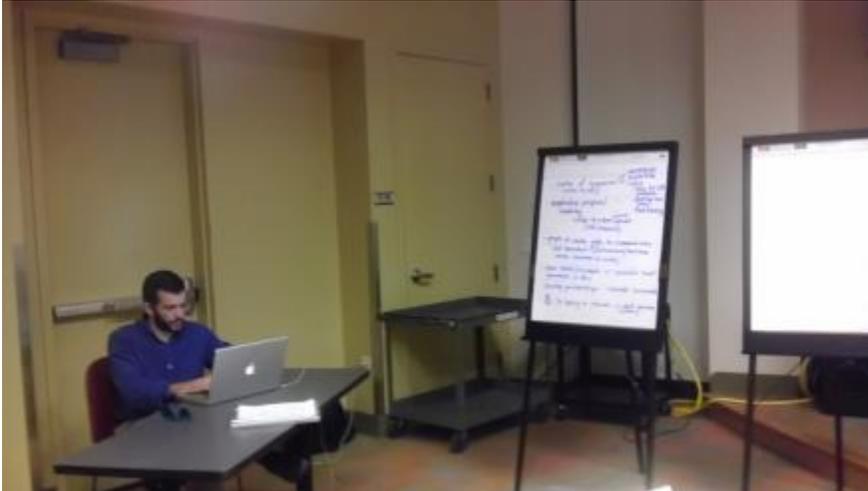


Urban Entrepreneurship Center strives to address deaf talent drain

By Kate O'Connell, WXXI



Davin Searls records the ideas of the deaf community.

Credit Innovation Trail's Kate O'Connell



Community members discuss what services the center should offer.

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Rochester has a thriving deaf and hard-of-hearing community, but many young graduates **end up moving** away from the area to find jobs.

With the downsizing of many giants in Rochester like Kodak and Xerox, leaders of the deaf and hard of hearing community have stressed the need for smaller businesses to be more active in accessing the talent in their own backyard; particularly graduates from the **National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID)**.

The Rochester Institute of Technology's [Center for Urban Entrepreneurship](#) (CUE) is actively addressing the issue.

The CUE reached out to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community Tuesday night, with a 'deaf town hall'. The event was organized to gain input on how the center could help the community to overcome the lack of employment options.

Professor at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Scot Atkins says that one way to help deaf and hard of hearing people to find jobs in Rochester, is to help them create their own.

"We know that there are a lot of deaf people who want to stay and live in Rochester, but there's not a lot of job opportunities. So one way to solve that is to create their own jobs through creating their own businesses."

"This is an opportunity to keep the jobs here in Rochester, and allow the people to develop and dream and grow their own businesses here."

Shaping the center's mission

Dr. Atkins says the CUE town hall event is the first step into collecting ideas about what services would be most helpful and would encourage people in the deaf and hard of hearing community to start their own businesses.

"This is one way of collecting that data, so we can be able to see where we need to go and how the deaf community can be involved in the entrepreneurship efforts here in Rochester."

Executive director of non-profit [Discovering Deaf Worlds](#), Davin Searls says the center has the potential to build a strong spirit of entrepreneurship, not only in Rochester's deaf community, but in other minority groups also.

"I see the center for urban entrepreneurship as extending a hand to say, we are here for you, we want to include you, we know there are barriers out there, we know there is discrimination out there."

Business owners weigh in

Gary Meyer is a deaf business owner in Rochester and he says the challenges he faced when starting his company were the same as those faced by hearing entrepreneurs. However, he says there were also the extra hurdles of communication and acceptance.

"It's long overdue for the deaf community to have a place to go to. This is a perfect opportunity for the center to become the resource for the deaf community."

Meyer says that technology has made the communication process between deaf and hearing individuals much easier.

The fact that many businesses now have a web presence has also made a significant difference.

He says one of the biggest things that the center needs to provide for deaf entrepreneurs is mentoring. That is how he got his business off the ground, he says.

The most common suggestions to come from the evening included the creation of a comprehensive resource center . Community members stressed the need for a space that would give deaf entrepreneurs access to interpreters, mentors, seed funding and legal advice.

RIT officials say the comments, questions and input from the town hall session will be used in shaping the mission of the CUE.

The CUE acquired a building in October last year. The services and specific purpose of the center has yet to be fully determined. Tuesday's town hall was one of several meetings planned to help decide what should be available through the service.