

# \$2.7M to foster black entrepreneurship

## SEED MONEY, MENTORING, NETWORKING

Project receives generally warm reception from members of the target communities

MARY LAMEY  
THE GAZETTE

The Quebec government hopes to foster black entrepreneurship by offering seed money, mentoring and networking services to businesspeople from the Haitian, African and English-speaking black communities.

Details of the \$2.7-million program were made public in a joint announcement yesterday in Montreal by Yolande James, Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities and Raymond Bachand, Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export Trade.

The program earmarks \$120,000 annually for three years to allow established agencies in each community to hire a resource person to guide small-business owners.

The government is also offering \$200,000 to start a venture-capital fund for new black entrepreneurs. It is asking the private sector to kick in an additional \$800,000. There are no firm commitments yet, but Bachand said he's confident the money will come.

The project also earmarks \$90,000 over three years to set up a black mentoring cell within the Fondation de l'entrepreneuriel, a non-profit group. Finally, the government has budgeted \$80,000 over three years to promote diversity in the workplace.

The project received a generally warm reception from members of the target communities who turned out in large numbers for the announcement.

"Africans are born entrepreneurs. It is in our blood," said Zameda Jeanne Sabiti, who runs,

Intertourisme, a Montreal company promoting equitable tourism in her native Democratic Republic of Congo. "Our cities grew along trade routes."

She liked much of what she heard yesterday, but worried that too much paperwork and interference could stifle entrepreneurial energy. That was her experience running a previous business exporting second-hand clothes.

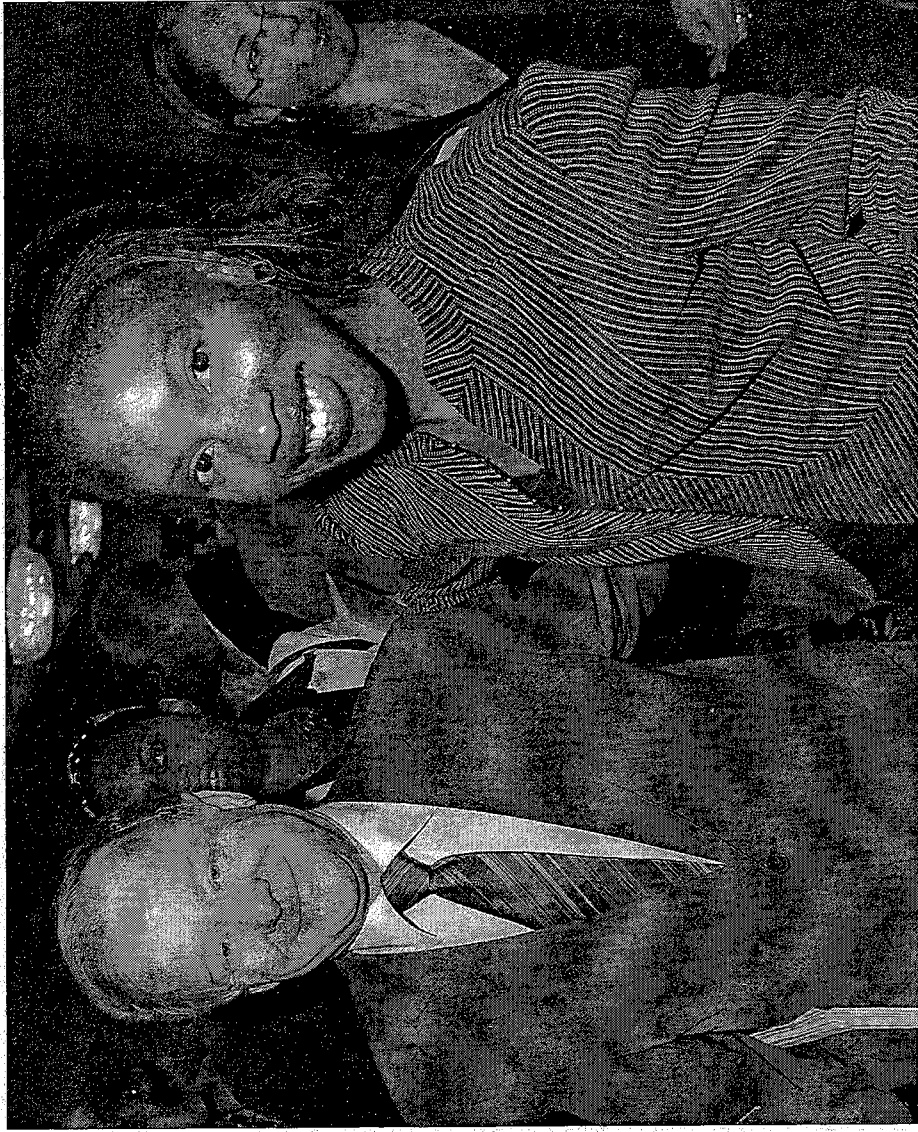
"A mentor is a great idea, but it has to be a good match. It can't just be someone who imposes their will, because a business is like a baby and no one knows a baby better than its mother," Sabiti said.

Reaching young Haitian entrepreneurs could prove a challenge, said Stéphanie Raymond-Bougie, president of the Young Haitian Chamber of Commerce. By day she is a merger and acquisitions lawyer with Stikeman Elliott.

"In the Haitian value system, young people are encouraged to study hard and become professionals," Raymond-Bougie said. "In a certain way entrepreneurs are looked down on." Finding mentors within the community could also prove challenging.

"If you look around, there are no Haitians heading up public companies. We don't have our Quebecor yet," she said.

The problems facing the three target communities are distinct. English-speaking blacks face a language barrier, while second- and third-generation Quebec Haitians have no language problems, but lack business contacts. Among Africans, the rules and customs of Quebec business can be bewildering.



Yolande James, Quebec Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities, and Raymond Bachand, Minister of Economic Development, make their way through a crowd after announcing a program to promote entrepreneurship among black communities.

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Bayne was on the working group that advised the government on setting up the black entrepreneurship fund and views the \$2.7 million as "seed money" for a pilot project. If all goes well, he hopes the program will be made permanent and given more funding.

The government has tried throwing money at the problem of Business.

of black underrepresentation in the business world before. In the early 1990s, the \$1-million Mathieu Da Costa Business Development Fund collapsed under mismanagement and financial irregularities.

This time will be better, vowed Bachand.

"There will be better governance mechanisms in place."

Bayne put it differently. "This time, they aren't just throwing money at us. Any community would fail under those circumstances."

"This time, they are offering expertise and creating links. That makes all the difference."

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