



Startup Acceleration & Idea Launch Program

— IN NEW HANOVER AND PENDER COUNTY —

Sponsored by  Bank OZK

PROGRAM DETAILS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROGRAM OVERVIEW	1-2
PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS	3
SCHEDULE & MATERIALS	4-8
DAY OF PITCH COMPETITION	8
MEET THE INSTRUCTOR	9-10
HOW TO APPLY	11
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	12-14



OVERVIEW



Do you have a new business idea? The Cape Fear Community College Small Business Center (SBC), in partnership with Bank OZK, is excited to present the Startup Acceleration & Idea Launch (SAIL) Program—a cohort-based entrepreneurial training program and pitch competition designed to help aspiring entrepreneurs transform their ideas into viable businesses in New Hanover and Pender Counties. Participants will also have the opportunity to compete for startup funding: \$4,000 for first place, \$2,500 for second place, and \$1,500 for third place.

SAIL is a multi-week training program created to equip first-time entrepreneurs with the tools, knowledge, and local connections needed to successfully launch and grow a business. Over nine weeks of structured coursework—running from August 20th through October 29th—and culminating in a final pitch competition, participants will receive hands-on instruction in:

- Business planning and operations
- Marketing strategies for small businesses
- Financing options and funding resources
- Networking and community engagement

All participants will receive The Guided Small Business Planner™ and will be required to complete a one-on-one counseling session with SBC Director and Counselor Jerry Coleman (offered free of charge, in person or virtually) before the program concludes.

The program concludes with an in-person pitch event, where participants will present their business concepts to a panel of judges for the opportunity to win startup funding and prizes, while also gaining valuable feedback, community connections, and actionable next steps for launching their venture.

Who Should Apply?

The SAIL Program is intended for first-time entrepreneurs who have a viable business idea but have not yet launched their business or begun generating revenue. Applicants should:

- Be within six months of developing their business idea
- Be passionate about their concept and willing to commit to the training
- Have some familiarity with the industry they wish to enter
- Plan to launch a business in New Hanover or Pender County

The program is free to apply, and free for all accepted participants.

Eligibility and Participation Requirements:

Applicants **must** be residents of New Hanover or Pender County and must certify that:

1. They are in the early planning or startup phase and have not yet begun operating or generating revenue for the business concept.
2. They will participate in all SAIL trainings and events.
3. They are not employees of Bank OZK or Cape Fear Community College.
4. They are not related to a current CFCC or Bank OZK employee.
5. They plan to open a new business based in New Hanover or Pender County.
6. Participants are expected to have access to a computer and reliable internet for all virtual sessions.
7. Each applicant is required to complete one one-on-one counseling appointment with Small Business Center Director Jerry Coleman before the program concludes in order to participate in the pitch competition. Participants who do not complete this counseling requirement will not be eligible to pitch their business idea on the final day of the program and, therefore, will not be eligible to compete for startup funding.
8. Any prize funds awarded will be used solely for the business pitched in the program.
9. Prize funds will not be distributed directly to participants. Funds will be administered by the CFCC Small Business Center to support approved startup expenses that best advance the launch of the proposed business.

Program Fee and Class Size:

- There is no fee to apply or to attend this course.
- Space is limited to 15 participants, and must apply to attend.
- Not all applicants will be accepted; admission is competitive and based on application strength.

Use of Prize Funds:

Prize funds are not distributed directly to participants. The Small Business Center will administer the funds to pay approved subject matter experts for startup support expenses such as:

- Legal/Business Structure
- Financial/Accounting
- Marketing/Customer Acquisition
- Product Development
- Sales Systems /Infrastructure

The Small Business Center will work with each award recipient to determine the highest-impact use of funds and will disburse payments directly to approved vendors or service providers.

PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS



Communication and Participation

- Participants are expected to read all emails and communications from the instructor and the Cape Fear Community College Small Business Center and respond promptly when requested.
- Participants should be prepared to attend all program-related classes, events, and activities
- Participants are expected to have access to a computer and reliable internet for all virtual sessions.
- Classes move at a fast pace. Sessions will begin on time and run the full scheduled duration. Participants should arrive a few minutes early and be ready to engage at the scheduled start time.
- General program questions will be addressed during class when appropriate. Individual or situation-specific questions should be addressed during one-on-one business counseling sessions.

Business Counseling Requirement

- Participants must complete a **minimum of one hour** of business counseling with Small Business Center Director and Counselor Jerry Coleman before the pitch competition on Thursday, October 29th, 2026 in order to complete the program and receive a certificate.
- Counseling appointments are first come, first served. Participants are strongly encouraged to request counseling early in the program and may schedule additional sessions as needed. There will be a one-week break built into the program to allow additional time to meet this requirement.

Coursework and Business Plan Development

- Participants are responsible for completing all homework assignments and working on their business plans outside of class.
- A dedicated session will be held prior to the pitch competition, where participants will meet with the instructor and peers in breakout sessions to help finalize their pitch presentations.
- To stay on track and be prepared for the pitch competition, participants should work on their business plans weekly and remain current with all assignments.
- Participants are encouraged to leverage additional resources offered by the Small Business Center, including counseling, workshops, and technical assistance, to strengthen their business plans and launch readiness.

Attendance Requirements

- Participants are expected to make every effort to attend 100% of program classes and events.
- Attendance is required for all sessions. Participants may miss a **maximum of one class**. Missing a class means missing a significant portion of the curriculum and may impact eligibility to complete the program.

Pitch Competition and Judging

- Business plans and pitch presentations will be delivered, with each participant allotted six minutes to pitch.
- Judges will score each presentation independently using a standardized scoring rubric.
- Judges will vote individually, and there will be no group discussion prior to scoring or voting.

Post-Program Reporting

- Participants must notify the CFCC Small Business Center when their business launches.
- We encourage participants to complete an annual impact survey for the current year and continue responding to annual surveys in subsequent years to help measure program outcomes and community impact.

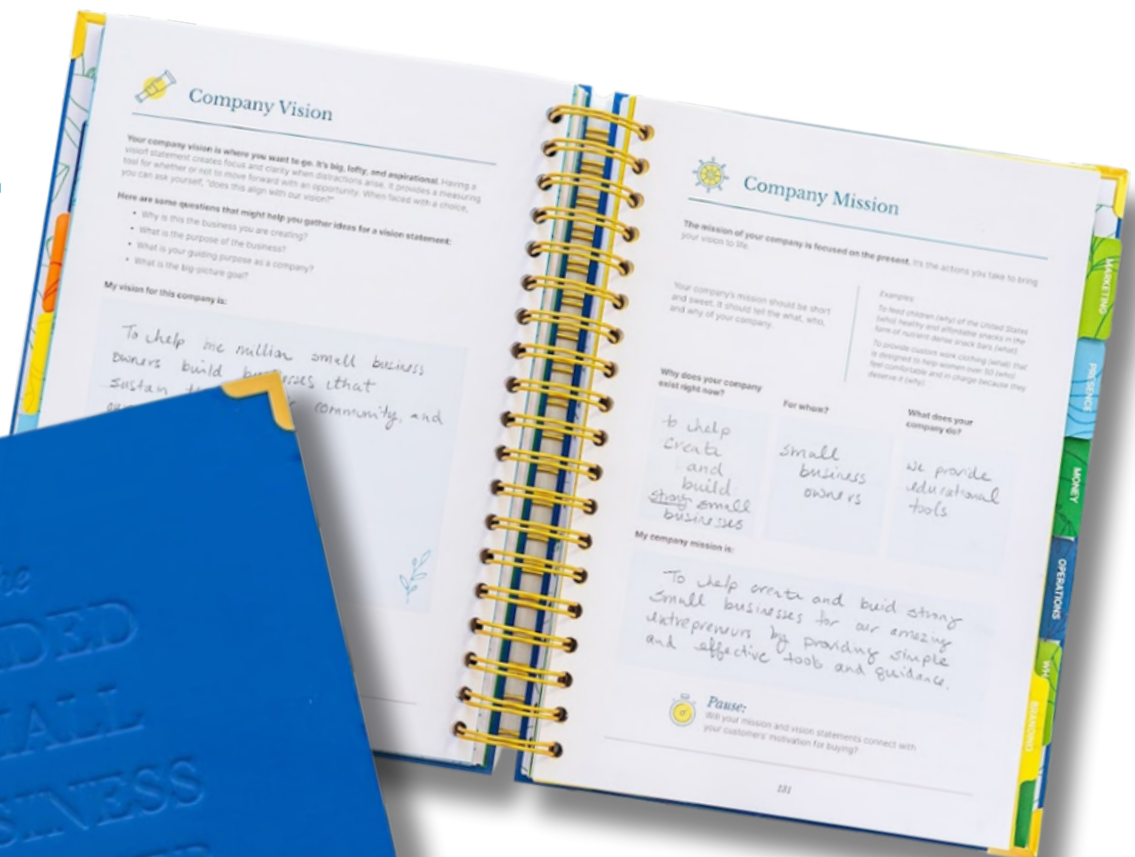
PROGRAM SCHEDULE & MATERIALS

Application Deadline and Notification

Applications are due by **Monday, July 27th at 11:59 PM**. All applications will be reviewed, and applicants will receive a decision via email by August 3rd.

Applicants who are accepted into the program will be provided with all program materials and expectations for review approximately two weeks before the program begins.

Attendees who are accepted into the program will receive *The Guided Small Business Planner*TM to help guide you through the process of building your business plan and to do homework for the program. These planners will be provided to attendees on the first day of class on **Thursday, August 20th, 2026 in person**.



SCHEDULE



Timeline:

- Week One** - Thu, August 20th, 2026 - In Person - How Your Business Makes Money
- Week Two** - Thu, August 27th, 2026 - Virtual - Designing a Business That Fits You
- Week Three** - Thu, September 3rd, 2026 - Virtual - Finding Your Ideal Customer
- Week Four** - Thu, September 10th, 2026 - Virtual - Knowing Your Market & Your Advantage
- BREAK** - Thu, September 17th, 2026 - Be sure to schedule your required counseling appointment!
- Week Five** - Thu, September 24th, 2026 - Virtual - Legal, Taxes, & Funding Basics
- Week Six** - Thu, October 1st, 2026 - Virtual - Defining Your Brand
- Week Seven** - Thu, October 8th, 2026 - Virtual - Marketing & Money
- Week Eight** - Thu, October 15th, 2026 - Virtual - Managing the Money
- Week Nine** - Thu, October 22nd, 2026 - Virtual - Pitch Workshop
- Week Ten** - Thu, October 29th, 2026 - In Person - Pitch Competition Day

Week One: How Your Business Makes Money (In-Person)

Thursday, August 20th, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Cape Fear Community College, Small Business Center G-Building
(402 N Front Street, Wilmington, NC)

Defining your revenue model and what you actually sell. The basics of business finances.

In this session, we will learn what a business model is and how to clearly name your own. Through an interactive game, we will explore different ways businesses make money and identify the model that best fits your idea. You will also be introduced to the basics of business finances, including key terms like revenue, costs, profit, margins, and overhead. We will walk through the difference between gross and net profit, what "cost of goods sold" (COGS) means, and how industry margins affect pricing and decisions. By the end of the session, participants will be able to describe how their business makes money and use basic financial language to explain their idea with confidence.

Week Two: Designing a Business That Fits You

Thursday, August 27th, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virtual through Zoom

Structuring your business to match your personality + crafting the first 30 seconds of your pitch.

This session focuses on the business owner as the leader of their business. We will explore how mindset, values, and personal priorities shape the way a business is built and run as we walk through Chapter 1 of The Guided Small Business Planner™. Through guided activities, founders will identify what matters most to them and how those priorities influence the kind of business they want to create. Then we will examine how different business structures, schedules, and roles can align with individual strengths, energy, and goals. Founders will also begin crafting the first 30 seconds of their pitch by clearly explaining who they are, what they do, and why their business matters to them. By the end of the session, you will have a clearer vision for a business that fits your life — and the first piece of your pitch.

Week Three: Finding Your Ideal Customer

Thursday, September 3rd, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virtual through Zoom

Who you serve and how to clearly describe them. How to talk about the problem that you solve.

Every business exists to make someone's life better—some examples are creating a memorable experience (tour packages), or helping someone find the perfect gift (gift boutique). In this session, you will learn how to find your ideal customers by identifying the problems they face. You'll also learn how to describe that problem clearly and concisely in three sentences or less as we continue to prepare for the Pitch Competition.

Week Four: Knowing Your Marketing & Your Advantage

Thursday, September 10th, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virtual through Zoom

Understanding your industry and defining what sets you apart — the next part of your pitch

In this session, we will dive into your industry to better understand who your competitors are, industry trends, and opportunities. You'll learn how to differentiate your business by identifying your unique competitive advantage—the qualities, skills, or features that set you apart. We'll also explore how your business can impact your community, from creating jobs to supporting local economies, helping unpack the broader value of your business. You'll analyze market potential, define your advantage, and connect your business to positive community outcomes. Finally, we'll practice how to clearly communicate your market position, competitive edge, and economic impact for the next part of your pitch.

Week Five: Legal, Taxes & Funding Basics

Thursday, September 24th, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virtual through Zoom

How business structures affect your personal finances and how businesses get funded.

In this session, you will learn how different legal and tax structures impact both your business and your personal finances. We will explore the basic differences between common business structures and what they mean for taxes, liability, and financial responsibility.

Next we will review the fundamentals of small business funding, including common ways businesses access money to start and grow. Through examples and guided discussion, you'll gain a clearer understanding of how legal structure and funding choices affect long-term sustainability—and how to talk about these decisions as part of your pitch.

Week Six: Defining Your Brand

Thursday, October 1st, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virtual through Zoom

Vision, mission, values, and building a brand people recognize — the next 30 seconds of your pitch.

Let's define the heart of your business by naming your vision, mission, and values. You'll explore how these elements shape the way your business looks, sounds, and shows up in the world—and why strong brands are built on more than just logos and colors.

You will translate your vision, mission, and values into a clear brand message. Using a structured framework, you'll apply this work to the next 30 seconds of your pitch, explaining not just what your business does, but what it stands for. Practice time will help you refine your message so your pitch reflects both your purpose and your brand.

Week Seven: Marketing & Money

Thursday, October 8th, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virtual through Zoom

Reaching your ideal customer and calculating what it really costs to run your business

In this session, you'll figure out how to reach your customers by choosing marketing touchpoints that fit the people you serve. We'll explore practical ways to choose marketing channels that make sense for your business, your budget, and your capacity. You'll also learn how to calculate the true cost of running your business by identifying both visible and hidden expenses, including materials, time, tools, and overhead. This work will prepare you to explain how you attract customers and what it costs to run your business as part of your pitch.

Week Eight: Managing the Money

Thursday, October 15th, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virtual through Zoom

Business finances made simple, and how to talk about them in your pitch.

In this session, founders will take a closer look at their business finances, moving beyond the basics to understand cash flow, budgeting, and profit projections. You'll learn how to track money in and out, plan for expenses, and anticipate future needs without getting lost in complicated accounting – all using the money calculator available from Cherith Roberson with The Guided Small Business Planner™. We'll also connect these financial insights directly to your pitch. You'll practice describing your financial picture clearly and confidently, showing potential investors, partners, or customers that you understand not just your product or service, but also the sustainability and profitability of your business. By the end of this session, you will be able to explain the financial health and needs of your business in plain language, and integrate this into your pitch.

Week Nine: Pitch Workshop

Thursday, October 22nd, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virtual through Zoom

Practice, refine, and bring all the pieces together! This session is your opportunity to put all the pieces of your pitch together. You will practice delivering your full pitch in a supportive peer-led environment, receive peer and facilitator feedback, and refine each section for clarity, flow, and impact. We will practice together in small-group breakout sessions. By the end of the session, you'll have refined your pitch for Pitch Day.

Week Ten: Pitch Competition Day

Thursday, October 29th, 2026 from 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Cape Fear Community College, Small Business Center G-Building
(402 N Front Street, Wilmington, NC)

It's SAIL Pitch Day presented by Bank OZK! Invite your family and/or friends to watch you pitch as you share your vision for building a new business in Pender or New Hanover county. Each attendee is allowed to invite **two guests**. Each business owner will receive up to six minutes to pitch and the three prizes of \$4,000, \$2,500, \$1,500 will be awarded to the top three pitches.

Not only will business owners walk away with a fully prepared pitch, you will also have a plan for your business from knowing exactly who your customers are, to how you will reach them, and how much you need to sell to reach your personal income goals.

Box lunches will be served courtesy of CFCC Small Business Center. RSVP here:

tinyurl.com/lunchsail

MEET THE INSTRUCTOR

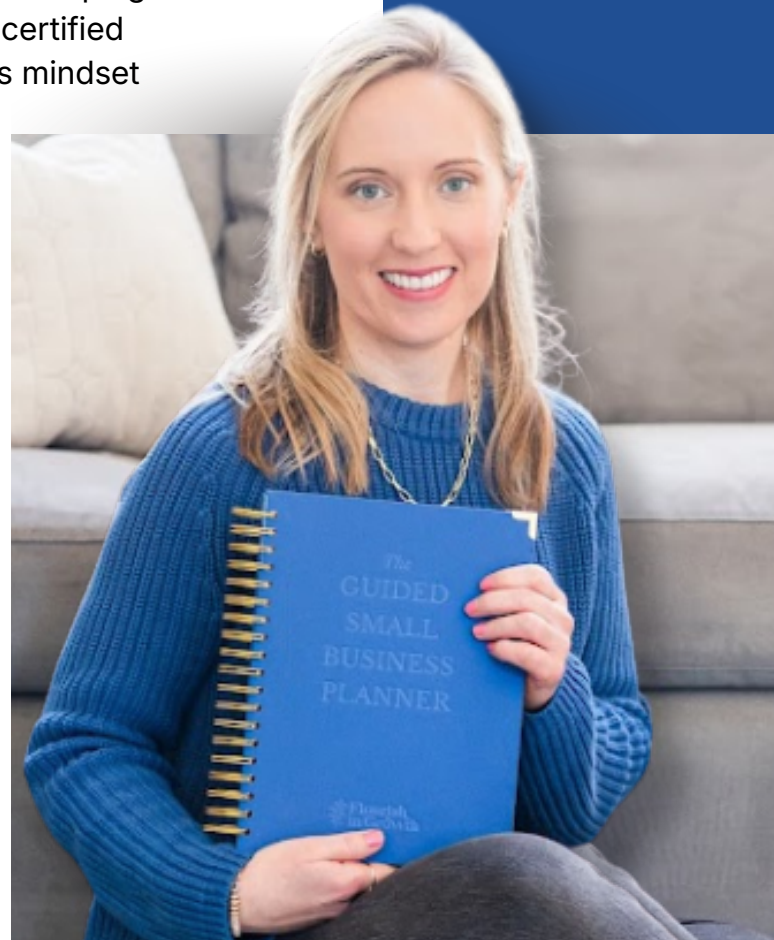


Cherith Roberson is a small business owner, the author of *The Guided Small Business Planner™*, and a speaker and educator. She served as the Director of the Wake Technical Community College Small Business Center from 2017 to 2022, where she supported hundreds of business owners in one on one counseling sessions, managed a team of counselors who supported approximately 500 business owners a year, and facilitated, taught, or organized workshops for thousands of entrepreneurs. In 2020, she was awarded the State Director of the Year by the Small Business Center Network for her support of business owners during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Roberson has hands-on entrepreneurial experience, including flipping houses, managing rental properties, and creating a local food directory and consulting business. She holds a B.S. from North Carolina State University, where she concentrated in Entrepreneurship. She was recognized in the Triangle Business Journal 40 Under 40 awards in 2022 for her role in helping to secure a \$1 million endowment for Wake Tech. A certified Entrepreneurial Mindset Trainer, Roberson applies mindset principles to her work with entrepreneurs, helping them overcome limiting beliefs and drive meaningful growth. Her focus on shifting mindsets has led to significant progress for the business owners she serves. Active in her community, Roberson advocates for effective support systems that help small business owners thrive.



www.flourishinggrowth.com



PROGRAM TESTIMONIALS

WITH THE SMALL BUSINESS PLANNING LAB SERIES

"This has really been the BEST class I have taken with the Small Business Center...Thank you!"



Baton Rouge Community College Participant

Thank you so much!! This has been so helpful and I'm excited to have this planner as a guide as I'm starting! I feel more confident moving forward

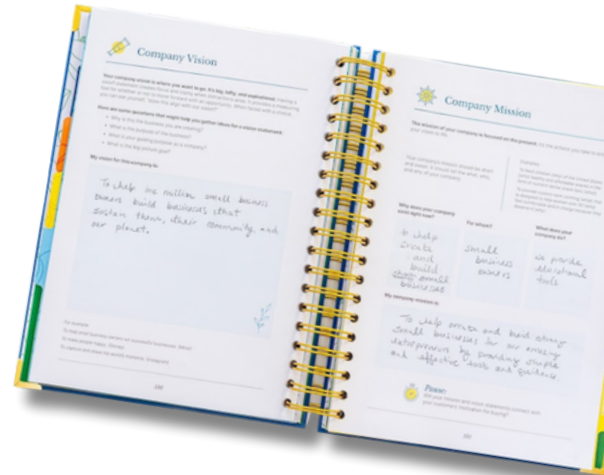


Baton Rouge Community College Participant

"This has been hands down the most helpful class I've taken the past 5 months."



Baton Rouge Community College Participant





Startup Acceleration & Idea Launch Program

— IN NEW HANOVER AND PENDER COUNTY —

HOW TO APPLY

After reviewing all program expectations and requirements, and confirming that the program schedule fits your availability, you may apply at no cost by clicking the “Apply Now” button, scanning the QR code below, or visiting www.tinyurl.com/sail2026. The application deadline is **Saturday, July 27th at midnight. Participants accepted into the program will be able to attend and participate at no cost.**

If you have any questions about the application process, or any issues applying, please contact Jenna O’Neal at jloneal998@mail.cfcc.edu



FAQs



1

What is the program like?

The first class will meet in person on Thursday, August 20th, 2026 at the CFCC Small Business Center in downtown Wilmington. During this session, participants will receive their copy of The Guided Small Business Planner™, meet the instructor and program organizers, and have the opportunity to network with fellow attendees.

The remainder of the program will be held virtually every Thursday afternoon from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM. This is a 10-week program, with one session per week and a scheduled break midway through. The ninth session will focus on pitch preparation, and the tenth and final session will conclude with an in-person Pitch Competition. Throughout the program, participants are expected to develop a comprehensive business plan and create a pitch deck.

2

What is the cost of the program?

The program is free for anyone to apply, and free for the 15 attendees that are selected to participate in the program.

3

What are you looking for in applicants?

The SAIL Program is designed for aspiring entrepreneurs who have a strong business idea and are ready to take the next step toward launching a business. We are looking for motivated individuals who are committed to learning, building a business plan, and participating fully in the program.

FAQs



4 What is the prize for who wins the Pitch Competition?

The Pitch Competition will award \$4,000 for first place, \$2,500 for second place, and \$1,500 for third place. Prize funds will not be distributed directly to participants. The Small Business Center will administer the funds to pay approved subject matter experts for startup support expenses such as:

- Legal/Business Structure
- Financial/Accounting
- Marketing/Customer Acquisition
- Product Development
- Sales Systems /Infrastructure

The Small Business Center will work with each award recipient to determine the highest-impact use of funds and will disburse payments directly to approved vendors or service providers.

5 Who has a say in who wins?

Judges will evaluate all pitch presentations. Judges will score each participant independently using a standardized scoring rubric. Judges will not engage in group discussion prior to submitting scores. The Small Business Center Director will document all scores on the day of the Pitch Competition, and judges will review and confirm the accuracy of recorded scores.

Scoring criteria will include: class attendance, participation during sessions, presentation quality, creativity, and economic impact potential. Final award decisions will be based on aggregated judge scores from a scoring matrix.

6 What other prizes can attendees win?

All program participants will receive The Guided Small Business Planner™ at the start of the program. Attendees will keep this planner, which will be used throughout the program to develop and refine their business plan.

On the day of the Pitch Competition, all participants will receive a complimentary professional headshot provided by Cape Fear Community College Marketing Department. Participants will also leave the program with valuable networking connections, mentorship opportunities, and clear, hands-on guidance to confidently take the next steps toward launching their business.



Startup Acceleration & Idea Launch Program

— IN NEW HANOVER AND PENDER COUNTY —

Sponsored by  Bank OZK

QUESTIONS?
WE ARE HERE
TO HELP YOU!

Contact Jenna O'Neal at
jloneal998@mail.cfcc.edu
or at 910.362.7216



Visit www.cfcc.edu/sbc for additional
startup resources and guidance.

