

Manufacturers to be surveyed
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New Jersey business leaders are backing the launch tomorrow of a nationwide survey designed to gauge the readiness of U.S. manufacturers to compete in the world market, and to help them do better.

A letter will go to New Jersey's 12,000 manufacturers asking them to answer an online questionnaire about innovation, exports and other performance issues, said Robert Loderstedt, president of the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program, a non-profit agency that helps companies become more efficient.

The survey, called "Next Generation Manufacturing Survey, is backed by Gov. Jon Corzine and the state's biggest business groups, including New Jersey Business and Industry Association and the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, both of Trenton.

The survey's aim is to find the strengths and weaknesses of the nation's manufacturing sector and provide information to help shape public and private policy, Loderstedt said.

"For the first time ever, we will have a statically significant sampling of manufacturing in the state who will have identified needs, issues and areas of opportunity," he said.

The survey will look at six issues: efforts at innovation, training and retention of talented workers, competitive processes, supply chain management and energy reduction efforts.

Business owners can remain anonymous in the 30-minute survey, he said. But those who identify themselves will receive a comparative report on how their business is ranked on different performance criteria, he said.

"Their contribution will enable us to have the hard information, with the gaps, to be able to sit with the state government, public sector folks, private sector folks, and figure out a strategy," Loderstedt said.

Loderstedt said manufacturers account for 10 percent of the state GDP. Manufacturing accounted for about 7.3 percent of the state's workforce in December, or 293,000 jobs.

The state, which has lost about 125,000 manufacturing jobs in the last eight years, lost 16,000 manufacturing jobs in 2008.

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