

Monday, May 4, 2020

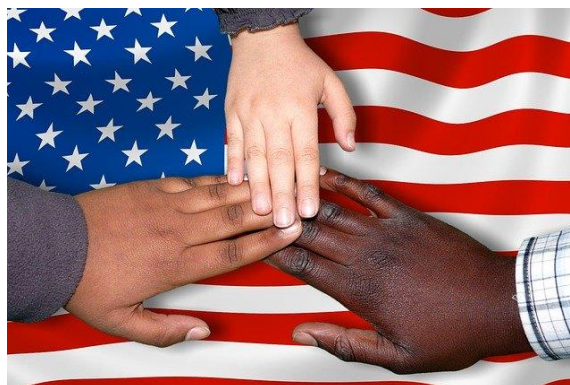
ED Now Feature | Immigration and Its Impact on Economic Development in Communities

On February 19, the state of the U.S. economy was such that Mick Mulvaney, then-acting White House chief of staff, [told a private audience in England](#) that the United States was “desperate, desperate for more people. We are running out of people to fuel the economic growth.”

What a difference a few months can make. In a six-week period from mid-March through late April, [almost 20 percent of U.S. workers filed for unemployment benefits](#) – about 30 million people. The official unemployment rate for March, 4.4 percent, jumped from 3.5 percent in February, but some economists believe the real rate is now 20 percent or higher.

Also in mid-March, the latest research project from IEDC’s Economic Development Research Partners (EDRP) program was well under way. The topic – how immigration contributes to economic development in the United States, and how economic development organizations can help integrate immigrants into their economies – had been chosen by the group based on a long period of very low unemployment, during which businesses everywhere were struggling to recruit and retain workers.

Now, however, in the midst of a pandemic and mass layoffs, the topic is less timely. As a result, EDRP members have chosen to shelve the project and pivot the research agenda to help EDOs respond to covid-19. However, the work done to date will be relevant again when the U.S. economy picks up and immigrants are still needed to fuel growth. In that light, below are the key research findings and case studies completed to date.



Immigrants in the United States: Some context

- Foreign-born individuals comprised 13.6 percent of the U.S. population in 2017
- Most immigrants – 77 percent – are in the United States legally
- Mexico is the top country of origin, accounting for roughly 25 percent of foreign-born U.S. residents in 2017
- China and India are the next two largest sources of immigrants, at approximately 6 percent each



Key research findings

The study focused on four primary ways in which immigrants benefit economic development: filling critical workforce needs; boosting population growth and revitalization; driving entrepreneurship; and creating connections for foreign direct investment and exporting.

Filling critical workforce needs. Immigrants supply both skilled and unskilled labor when there aren't enough native-born people to fill job openings. In fact, some industries, like agriculture, are viable only because of immigrants' willingness to do those jobs. Over the past two decades, foreign-born people accounted for about [half of the growth of the U.S. labor force](#).

(Their contributions remain critical in the time of covid-19. In fact, "[immigrants are overrepresented in nearly every job that is critical during this pandemic](#)," according to the Cato Institute. That includes nearly 1.7 million foreign-born medical and health care workers; those researching cures and treatments; those in cleaning occupations, in distribution and delivery of food and supplies, and in food and meat production.)

Boosting population growth and revitalization. Immigrants move into regions, communities and neighborhoods that are shrinking, as well as stores and houses that are underutilized or vacant, giving them a new life. Even in good times, in many places around the country, [population would be stagnant or declining without the arrival of immigrants](#). Four states – Connecticut, Illinois, Vermont and West Virginia – lost population over the last decade. Without immigration, nine more – Mississippi, New York, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Michigan, Ohio, Hawaii and Massachusetts – would have lost population as well.

As soon as 2030, immigration will account for more than half of U.S. population growth, according to Census Bureau projections. These are trends that covid-19 is unlikely to change.

Driving entrepreneurship. Immigrants start new businesses that range from local services such as landscaping, restaurants and construction to high-tech, exporting companies in manufacturing, technology and finance. According to the Kauffman Foundation, they are twice as likely to become entrepreneurs as native-born Americans.

Given the large number of businesses that are predicted to close permanently as a result of the pandemic, the United States will need all the risk-taking entrepreneurs it can get to re-open their businesses and start new ones.

Creating connections for foreign direct investment and exporting. Immigrants facilitate the location of foreign-based companies in U.S. communities and create channels and connections for U.S.-based businesses to export. As global trade returns and firms look to locate in (or reshore operations to) the United States, these connections will play an important role in economic recovery.



Case studies

Part of the research included the development of seven case studies that illustrate the ways in which EDOs and related organizations are working to integrate immigrants into their economies (full case studies are available below this article).

- In St. Louis, The Mosaic Project is one of the first and most comprehensive immigrant welcoming programs in the United States, involving companies, schools, individuals, foreign students and others in multiple programs. It plays an important role in attracting foreign-owned firms and in retaining both domestic and foreign-owned companies.
- In Garland, Texas, a former Kmart, vacant for 10 years, became a thriving, multi-tenant Hispanic market with assistance from the city's economic development department.
- In Skagit County, Wash., a Latino Business Retention and Expansion Program, run by the Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County, has been in place for 15 years to help immigrants start and grow new businesses.
- In Sioux City, Iowa-Neb.-S.D., where immigrant labor is the backbone of the meatpacking industry, One Siouxland was launched to ease newcomers' integration into the community. Tyson Foods has been a major partner in the work.
- In Lancaster, Pa., recognizing the need for more workers to fill current and future jobs openings, the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce developed a strategy to engage immigrants as a deliberate workforce growth strategy.
- In Salt Lake County, a task force focused on making the community more attractive, welcoming and globally competitive for international talent and business resulted in the creation of the Mayor's Office for New Americans. The office runs programs to foster entrepreneurship, promote naturalization and increase access to English as a Second Language programs.
- In Southern Idaho, the Unity Alliance was created by the chamber, city and the largest employer in the community to provide education about the value of immigrants and support refugee integration. A backlash against the refugee resettlement program sparked the creation of the alliance.

Each of the case studies illustrates deliberate, thoughtful efforts to integrate foreign-born individuals into local economies, reflecting immigrants' unique value and contributions and aiming to leverage that to create greater prosperity for all. In many of the cases, convening multiple partners and forming coalitions was essential to address the challenges and opportunities involved with the work.

Covid-19 has in no way diminished immigrants' value; however, most EDOs currently find themselves with more pressing challenges than implementing any recommendations we could offer around integrating immigrants. So, our immigration research ends here for now, as we turn to task of helping economic developers navigate the covid-19 recession and eventual recovery.

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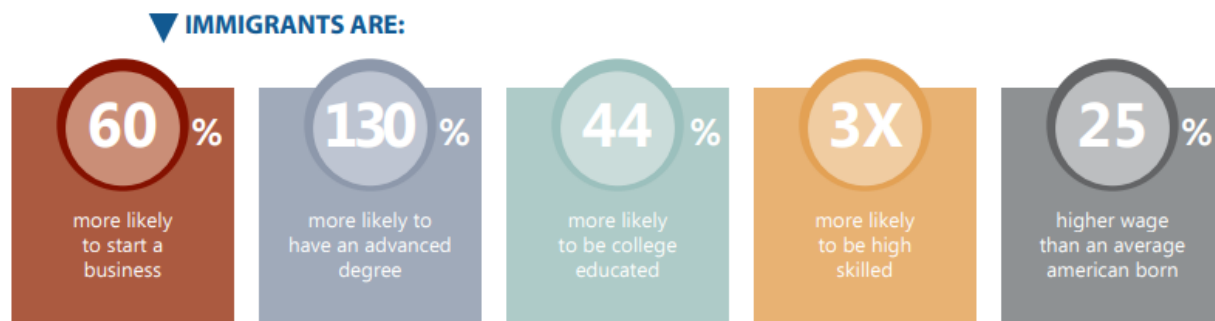
1. St. Louis Mosaic Project
2. Retail revitalization in Garland, Texas
3. One Siouland
4. Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County Latino BRE Program
5. Attracting New Workers to Lancaster County, Pa.
6. Salt Lake County, Utah's Mayor's Office of New Americans
7. The Dairy Industry in Southern Idaho

St. Louis Mosaic Project

The St. Louis Mosaic Project is one of the few, if only, immigrant welcoming programs housed within an economic development organization – the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership/World Trade Center St. Louis.

It's an arrangement that makes sense. As Executive Director Betsy Cohen notes, Mosaic is a marketing program, not a service provider. It plays an important role in the attraction of foreign-owned firms and in the retention of both domestic and foreign-owned companies.

The Mosaic Project launched in 2012 in response to a report that highlighted the economic opportunity that foreign-born individuals bring to the St. Louis region, and the relatively slow growth of their numbers compared to peer communities. Unlike many other immigrant-welcoming programs, Mosaic has very specific goals: to “transform St. Louis into the fastest growing metropolitan area for immigration by 2025 and to add 25,000 foreign born to the region 2016-2025, to promote regional prosperity through immigration and innovation.”



*The data above, for the St. Louis MSA in 2012, helped galvanize support for starting the Mosaic Project.
Source: Mosaic Project.*

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A 32-member steering committee led the program's development and continues to provide guidance. (Mosaic has two full-time and one part-time staff members.) It represents (and receives funding from) organizations across the spectrum, including businesses, civic and economic development agencies, academic and faith organizations and immigrant services groups.

"In the beginning, [the project] was about learning where the resources were, what the demographics were, and what the needs were, to have vibrant services that would be an attraction for others to come here," said Cohen.

Ultimately, Mosaic's goal is to create a receptive, welcoming community that would allow foreign-born people to thrive in the region. To do that, Mosaic focused on ways to connect people to the right resources, whether those were other people, services or organizations.

Mosaic's first major initiative was the **Connector Program**, modeled on a [successful initiative in Halifax, Nova Scotia](#) (winner of an IEDC Gold Award for Excellence in Economic Development). The Connector Program aims to help work-authorized, foreign-born professionals connect with St. Louisans to help them feel welcome and find employment opportunities. The Connector Program has several components:

- **Professional Connectors:** The program introduces skilled, job-seeking immigrants to local "connectors" for a cup of coffee, career networking referrals to other professionals, and job-seeking advice.
 - **Professional Shadowing Program:** Mosaic rolled out the Professional Shadowing Program in early 2020 (on Groundhog Day). The program offers work-authorized international professionals an opportunity to observe the daily working routine of a U.S. professional in their area of interest.
- **International Spouse Program:** The International Spouse Program connects more than 400 women from 90 countries to each other for ongoing friendships and shared experiences.
 - **International Mentoring Program:** New within the last couple of years, the program has matched more than 100 international women with local mentors. Participants meet with their mentors each month for a year and form friendships to get better integrated into the St. Louis region. It has been particularly helpful to the families of executives whose companies have moved to town. (A pilot Expat Men's Club is underway to provide similar social connections for international men.)

Mosaic's **Ambassador Program** encourages individuals, schools, and companies to take specific actions aimed at making the St. Louis region more globally welcoming.

- **Individual Ambassadors:** Mosaic Ambassadors, now numbering more than 850, help promote the Mosaic Project and commit to taking steps such as visiting restaurants of varying cuisines and inviting a foreign-born friend or acquaintance home for dinner or out for coffee.
- **Ambassador Schools:** Sixty-five Ambassador Schools have committed to reinforcing an internationally welcoming and inclusive culture in ways that are unique to each school.

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- **Ambassador Companies:** Started in 2015, Mosaic now has 32 Ambassador Companies. The requirements to be an Ambassador Company vary between Silver, Gold, and Platinum levels, but all engage in actions that promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace, maintain an internationally welcoming work environment, spread awareness of the Mosaic Project, and encourage employees to become Mosaic Ambassadors.

“With the low unemployment rate, our companies really need to recruit talent, so they see it as an imperative,” said Cohen.¹

Mosaic started an **Immigrant Entrepreneur Program** in recognition of the fact that foreign-born individuals in St. Louis are 60 percent more likely to start a business than the native-born. The program aims to connect immigrant entrepreneurs to the resources to start a successful business and has multiple components, including:

- Immigrant Entrepreneurship Advisory Board
- Neighborhood Business Entrepreneur Program
- High-tech business entrepreneurship program
- Annual Immigrant Entrepreneur award
- St. Louis fellow, a local entrepreneur who works part-time with foreign-born entrepreneurs to connect them to tools and resources

Another initiative, just started in early 2020, is STL Fashion Meets, through which Mosaic aims to help foreign-born talent connect with emerging and established designers, small and growing businesses, entrepreneurs and influencers in the region’s fashion industry. Mosaic continually pushes stories of immigrant businesses and profiles of their owners, particularly in industries such as fashion and food, out to the media.

And of course, the 9,000-plus international students studying at various colleges and universities in the region are great candidates to become future residents.² Mosaic’s **Global Talent Hiring Program**, like other Mosaic programs, has multiple initiatives in place to help retain some of those students, including:

- Mentoring by St. Louis business leaders (often leading to internship offers)
- Immigration consulting to companies regarding hiring an international student

¹ April 2020 note from Executive Director Betsy Cohen: “In the first seven years, the low employment meant a great need for workers of all skill levels. Even with rising unemployment numbers in 2020 and forward, a high percentage of the foreign born have skills in STEM, IT, and scientific/medical fields that will be in increased demand with not enough native born talent to fill those jobs. And the service fields of health care, food service and other direct service industries are likely to depend on a high number of foreign-born workers as unemployment starts high and comes down with economic recovery.”

² April 2020 note from Executive Director Betsy Cohen: “The region usually has about 9,000 international students through the region’s many universities. While these will probably drop over the short term in terms of international students residing in St. Louis region, the many that are still in the region have a high percent of degrees in IT, Scientific, STEM, Data Analytics and other fields that will be in high demand to aid in economic recovery.”

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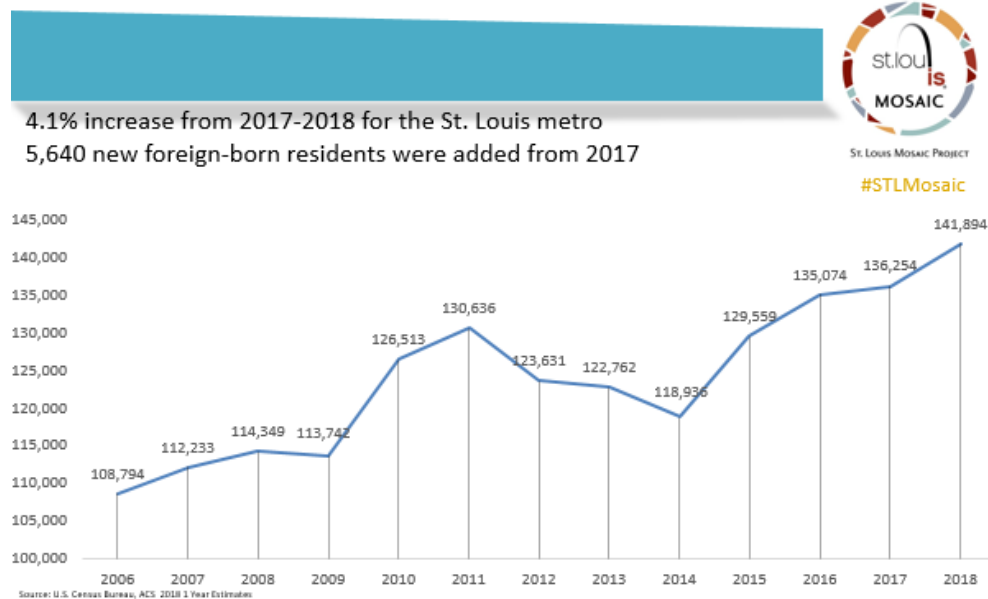


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- Commitments by local universities to share information regarding hiring global talent with employers visiting their campuses
- Sharing among 14 local universities of best practices for student programming that better explain courses, visas, job interviewing, etc.

In addition to programs for foreign-born individuals already in the region, Mosaic is part of the recruitment team that goes on trade missions and talks to international companies looking to expand or locate in St. Louis. As well, “it’s the aftercare of the employees and their families, connecting them to the community, that’s powerful,” said Cohen.

The program’s efforts clearly have had an impact. From 2017-2018, St. Louis’s foreign-born population grew by 4.1 percent (5,640 people), the third-fastest rate among the U.S.’s 20 largest metros.



“When we started seven years ago, companies were more interested in how the program served the community as a whole,” said Cohen. “Now they are saying, ‘I want to be a preferred employer among the foreign-born talent pool.’” They benefit from the exposure they get through Mosaic, offering to host events and tours at their workplaces.

Cohen attributes Mosaic’s success to its 200-plus community partners and to continually adding to its offerings: “We attract foreign-born individuals because we keep innovating with new programs to meet new needs, geared toward economic development through population and workforce growth.”

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Retail revitalization in Garland, Texas

It's been a rough time for retail properties across the United States. The 2008-2009 recession, evolving shopping preferences and the explosion of e-commerce have combined to leave thousands of brick-and-mortar stores empty. One silver lining to the disruption (prior to the outbreak of covid-19) has been the backfilling of these spaces by ethnic-serving retailers, who are bringing vibrancy back to formerly vacant stores.

In Garland, Texas, in the Dallas metro area, finding a new use for a shuttered Kmart was a particularly thorny problem. The very large property (approximately 100,000 square feet), located in a regional retail center at the intersection of two major thoroughfares, sat empty for 10 years. The city tried to figure out how to re-activate the site, but “we couldn't get a retailer big enough to take the space,” according to David Gwin, the city of Garland's director of economic development.

Then in 2015, a developer came in with a plan to turn it into a Latino-oriented, multi-tenant, indoor marketplace. Initially, city officials and neighbors were not thrilled with the idea. Similar conversions had taken place in nearby communities, and the resulting facilities had image problems – seen as unattractive, carrying flea-market-quality goods, and sometimes spawning public safety problems.

Though city officials were nervous about what was about to happen, “we knew that trying to stop it wasn't the way to go,” said Gwin. Instead, the city got on board. “We wanted to get together and see what we could do to make it a better project.”

Flexibility and trust

To deliver on the project, both sides – the developer and the city – had to do two things: be flexible and learn to trust each other. The city had to warm up to the idea of having multiple retailers in a space that was originally designed for one mega-retailer. The plan was particularly challenging to the city's building code, but treating the project more like a mall helped city staff and leaders conceptualize what they had to do to make it work.

The city requested that the developer change the interior plans to create defined, single-occupancy spaces for retailers, and use higher-end finishes. This prevented a scenario in which vendors sold from tables in a large, open space – the flea-market feel the city wanted to avoid.

“It took a lot of hand-holding,” said Gwin – but “the developer would tell you he gets better rents” for the higher-quality spaces. And it cost the city only staff time and creative thinking to get a use into the space that it wasn't intended for originally.

Plaza Garland today

The former Kmart, now known as Plaza Garland, opened in 2017 at full occupancy. With more than 100 vendors, it's now a source of pride for the city; Plaza Garland has had none of the problems that have shown up in other similar projects and about which city officials were concerned. And of course, the

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project brought a very visibly blighted corner of the community back to life, which Gwin considers to be one of the project's biggest wins.

Plaza Garland also demonstrated that embracing a culturally different type of retail activity can benefit the entire community. "It represents our best attempt to create an indoor mall-type shopping experience that is organized around a cultural theme – Hispanic/Latino – but a place where any other member of our community could go in and have a good experience," said Gwin.

"If you talk to most of the Anglo population who lives around there, they have probably been in there multiple times," he said. "It builds a bridge for our community, showing that the cultural and ethnic changes occurring in the community aren't as scary as they thought."

Gwin is working now on a Hispanic grocery store project. As he notes, ethnic-serving retail appeals to people who "like shopping close to home, with people who have products they recognize and value. I can't remember when we last worked on a mainstream grocery project. Specialty market grocery retailers are definitely in our future."

Unexpected FDI

In addition to many Hispanic community members, Garland has a sizeable population from several Asian countries. Six years ago, the South Korean firm Nutribiotech surprised city leaders by announcing its intention to build a manufacturing plant for its food supplements. It has since expanded twice, most recently making an \$85 million investment; the project can be directly attributed to connections to the Korean community in Garland.

AQS, another South Korean firm that builds motherboards for electronics components, announced a \$10 million project less than a year ago. Both Nutribiotech and AQS purchased, rather than leased, their facilities, giving the projects an air of permanence.

"After the first major announcement, we got it," said Gwin. "Now we are plugged in" to marketing Garland in Asia. "Those announcements are directly related to embracing the demographic changes in our community."

One Siouxland

The unemployment rate has been at historic lows in regions across the United States for several years. In the Sioux City, Iowa-South Dakota-Nebraska metro area, it was hovering under 3 percent in 2016, when pork processor Seaboard Triumph Foods announced plans to open a 925,000-square-foot, 2,000-employee plant in the area.

The meat packing industry has had a significant presence in the region for decades. A dozen or so major meat-processing facilities operate there – Tyson Foods employs about 4,500 in Sioux City – and many smaller ones (along with multiple other types of food processors). It's difficult work, and like many other

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tough, labor-intensive industries, it employs a high percentage of immigrants relative to their share of the general population. (As of 2016, immigrants comprised nearly one-quarter of all manufacturing employees in the region.)

Seaboard Triumph knew from the start that it would need to import much of the workforce required to staff the plant. So it brought in people from across the United States and the world, including a large number from Micronesia in particular.³

Community leaders were concerned about the impact of a large influx of foreign-born workers on the region's housing supply, school systems, service providers, and other aspects. (Even before the announcement of the plant, between 2010 and 2015, immigrants accounted for more than 75 percent of Sioux City's population growth.) Did the community have the resources it needed to help new residents settle in successfully? And if 2,000 people came in for jobs that have a 40 percent turnover rate after 18 months, what would happen then? Would there be enough other jobs for them? Would the plant find enough other workers to stay?

One Siouxland – the initiative

So in 2017, One Siouxland was launched to address these concerns and to smooth the integration process both for newcomers and for long-time residents. One Siouxland is a multi-sector, collaborative initiative, not an organization; rather than providing services or developing programs, it looks at systemic needs and partners with government, businesses, schools, and service providers to implement solutions and to better connect existing programs.

The Partnership for a New American Economy provided One Siouxland with significant data on the economic impact of newcomers on the Siouxland region. One Siouxland applied for and received a Gateways for Growth challenge grant (see text box) with matching funds provided by the Siouxland Chamber of Commerce. The grant award was used to create the One Siouxland Strategic Plan for Welcoming & Integration.

Launched in December 2015, the Gateways for Growth Challenge is a competitive opportunity for local communities to receive direct technical assistance from New American Economy and Welcoming America to develop multi-sector plans for welcoming and integrating immigrants. New American Economy also provides tailored research on the contributions of immigrants and matching grants to select communities as part of the Challenge.

Source: [New American Economy](#)

One Siouxland also received early funding from Sioux City government, and has received various grants since its inception. Located at the chamber for two years, it is now financially administered by the

³ Formerly part of a U.S.-administered territory, Micronesia has an agreement with the United States that allows its citizens to work there without visas or green cards.

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Siouxland Community Foundation (from which it also received funding for its website and part of its welcoming plan strategy). It is staffed by one part-time consultant.

One Siouxland – the work

One Siouxland's work is organized around five pillars of a welcoming community (based on Welcoming America's framework). Those include equitable access; civic engagement; connected, safe and healthy communities; education and workforce development; and economic development.

One of its education and workforce development initiatives is the Rising Leaders Academy, a leadership development program to help underrepresented populations gain the skills and social capital to become leaders. One Siouxland also supports and connects organizations that are working to increase postsecondary attainment, through career academies and other vehicles that help students get an associate's degree or certifications before leaving high school. In addition, it aims to help refugees and immigrants who are currently underemployed because of language barriers and restrictions around transferring foreign credentials.

In regard to economic development, One Siouxland connects foreign-born entrepreneurs to mentors, information, training, and other tools to help them plan and grow a business (the resources are primarily statewide initiatives in Nebraska and Iowa that are not specifically targeted to immigrants, such as Iowa's West Coast Initiative, Nebraska's Rural Enterprise Assistance Program program, and the local Small Business Development Center). To widen access to entrepreneur support, a local Somali business owner provides business development training and one-to-one business coaching in Somali.

One Siouxland also provides consulting and customized trainings for businesses to help them understand how to connect with, support, and cultivate leadership in their foreign-born workers. Focused primarily on human resources professionals and supervisory staff, One Siouxland's support aims to help internal processes function more efficiently and safely, and to boost employee retention and recruitment.

Tyson Foods, a key partner

Tyson Foods has been a major partner in One Siouxland's work. In 2018, wanting to help ensure that its team members feel welcome in the community and plan to stay, Tyson provided an \$85,000 grant to help One Siouxland implement its strategic welcoming plan. Part of the grant has been used to fund dozens of workshops on topics ranging from winter safety to health and nutrition, developing and running a small business (offered in Somali, as well as English), civic engagement (with information about the census, voting, the process to naturalize) and more. The remainder of the grant has been used to provide coaching support for One Siouxland's coordinator and for other leaders in the community, such as elected officials, the police chief, the city's immigration attorney and others, with each choosing priorities for which they needed support, ideas and strategies.

In addition, Tyson has started an initiative called Upward Academy. In it, Tyson partners with the local community college – using state workforce development funding – to offer worksite classes in English as

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a second language, citizenship, and GED attainment. (Tyson expected 300 to 400 people to enroll in the program, but nearly 800 registered; more than 50 people have naturalized so far. The company reimburses its workers the \$700-plus in expenses the U.S. government charges as part of the naturalization process.) Tyson also holds celebrations for employees who have earned citizenship and for ESOL progress.

Finally, Tyson is One Siouxland's biggest partner in ensuring a complete count in the 2020 census, and has generated interest from other leading corporate chamber members in the effort.

One Siouxland has been and continues to be involved in multiple other initiatives. Currently, it is implementing a grant to promote access to citizenship resources, as well as working to create a Community Resource Center that would provide access to social, health and other services residents need.

Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County Latino BRE Program

Skagit County, Washington, pop. 128,000, is located halfway between Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia. It has deep agricultural roots, attracting a significant Latino population over the years – currently comprising about 18 percent of county residents, 30 percent in the county seat of Mt. Vernon, and over 50 percent in the school district.

In 2004, aiming to address the high rate of failure among Latino-owned businesses, the Economic Development Association (now Alliance) of Skagit County (EDASC) started the Latino Business Retention and Expansion Program. According to program director Diana Morelli, some of the obstacles that cause Latino-owned businesses to fail, or deter potential entrepreneurs from trying, include:⁴

- Limited (or no) access to capital for launching a new business or expanding an existing business;
- Inadequate (or a complete lack of) business information in their preferred language regarding rules, regulations, and government policies relating to entrepreneurship and small businesses;
- Lack of venues for communication and/or lack of confidence to search for and request assistance;
- Insufficient role-model mentors and guides for strategic planning;
- Inexperience in organizational planning, sales, and marketing; and
- Non-existent management and leadership training at the level Latino owners need to apply to their businesses.

In many ways, EDASC's Latino BRE program is the same as other small business assistance programs, but a few key aspects set it apart – the fact that it's offered in Spanish being a big one. Beyond language, the program offers a deep understanding of cultural differences as well. As Morelli says, her clients come

⁴ "Mindsets that Build Bridges Across Cultures and Champion Latino Small Businesses," IEDC Economic Development Journal, Fall 2013.

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from an agrarian culture, and are learning how to be knowledge workers. Perceptions about time, the use of calendars, the appropriateness of promoting oneself, and many other cultural differences – in addition to low education levels – add to the complexity of starting and running a business. The goal is to “meet the person where they are,” she says.

Patently building trust also is critical. “It takes time to gain the rapport of her business clients,” says EDASC CEO John Sternlicht of Morelli’s work. “They might spend a while talking about family at first.”

Over 15 years, the program has provided free, one-to-one counseling to hundreds of businesses. (Most of the client businesses provide local services such as landscaping, housecleaning and restaurants.) The program assists with tasks such as developing a business or strategic plan, marketing, getting a business license, networking, and applying for a loan. It also hosts events where agencies and service providers present information in Spanish on topics such as complying with state regulations or paying taxes.

Working with bankers is a big part of Morelli’s job. She has identified lenders who are willing to lend to her clients even though they may lack perfect credit scores. She often accompanies a client to the bank to help get a loan, noting the difficulty of completing an application in English. Her work has also helped bankers see how better to treat the program’s clients, making the loan application process feel less like an inquisition. As a result, Morelli has helped clients secure more than \$3 million in loans over 15 years.

Attracting New Workers to Lancaster County, Pa.

The goal behind the Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Chamber of Commerce’s immigrant integration efforts is simple: Fill the workforce pipeline.

Lancaster County is experiencing growth in childbirths and international migration, but not national migration. Childbirth, while an important source of growth, is a long-term workforce pipeline strategy; immigrants, on the other hand, are mostly working-age – a near-immediate solution.

Attracting people “is critical for filling our future workforce needs,” said Heather Valudes, the chamber’s community impact director. “We aren’t going to grow ourselves out of this workforce challenge.”

Lancaster County has a long history of refugee resettlement. In fact, it took in more refugees per capita than anywhere in the country in 2016. That was the same year when the chamber started engaging around immigrants as a deliberate workforce growth strategy.

“Our focus was not about a border wall or any of the issues that have caused a quagmire in D.C., but about the positive

About Lancaster County

- Located two hours west of Philadelphia, one hour southeast of Harrisburg
- 542,000 residents in 2017, about 5 percent of whom are foreign-born
- Largest city: Lancaster, pop. 65,000
- Key industries: Manufacturing, construction, agriculture, tourism, and healthcare
- Heart of Pennsylvania Amish countryside

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impact of immigrants and refugees in our economy,” said Valudes. “We have stuck to that narrative and are unapologetic about it.”

From the start, the chamber realized it lacked good data about the contributions of foreign-born residents to the local economy – e.g., the types of jobs they were filling, tax contributions, educational attainment, naturalization rates, etc. It got research assistance from the Partnership for a New American Economy (NAE) to learn more about its foreign-born population, then applied for and became a Gateways for Growth community in 2017. A resulting grant allowed the chamber to compile a strategic plan to welcome immigrants and refugees and bring them into the workforce.

The chamber developed a plan with three goals: changing the narrative around immigrants; integrating immigrants in the workplace; and advocacy to promote economic opportunity, civic participation and social cohesion for all residents. (The strategic plan ties the chamber in with multiple community partners to work toward the three goals.)

Changing the narrative. The goal has been to share compelling data and stories about immigrant contributions to the region’s economy and change false perceptions about negative impacts. The chamber undertook multiple actions on this front, some of which include:

- Launching a webpage that features NAE’s research report and stories of immigrant business owners in the community
- Holding a “New Americans in Lancaster” event, featuring NAE representatives and a panel of resources and business leaders sharing the positive impact of immigrants in the community
- Featuring immigrants’ contributions to the local economy at a State of the County event, where an immigrant guest speaker shared her story of thriving in the community
- Publishing several articles and editorials in the local newspaper (e.g., [“Immigrants, refugees make our economy more vibrant”](#))
- Holding a facilitated discussion with its Young Professionals Network

The chamber also develops and promotes stories of individual immigrants and refugees – how they got to Lancaster County and their contributions to the community – to put faces to the facts and figures. “They are faces that some people might know but not thought about” the fact that they are foreign-born, says Valudes.

Immigrant Integration in the workplace. During and after the strategic planning process, the chamber surveyed business representatives about their beliefs and experiences working with immigrants (e.g., perceived barriers to hiring immigrants, beliefs about immigrants as workers, etc.), conducted a “listening tour” and held employer roundtables. Specific actions based on the feedback have included:

- Holding quarterly panels for human resources professionals to share best practices related to hiring and integrating immigrants
- Holding job fairs to connect employers to foreign-born populations
- Referring employers to community resources that can support their companies’ employment of immigrants and refugees

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- Providing access to information about re-credentialing of professionals with degrees and certificates from other countries

Advocacy to promote economic opportunity, civic participation and social cohesion. Three strategies advance this goal:

- Supporting Lancaster City’s application to be designated “Certified Welcoming” by Welcoming America
- Promoting citizenship, e.g., by working with community organizations to increase the number of naturalization workshops available
- Advocating for a) immigration reforms that create a streamlined system with clear rules and boundaries for immigrants, citizens, and employers, and b) visa and green card reforms, and implementation of temporary worker programs for skilled workers and international students. One way it does this is by getting information in front of local, state and federal elected officials so they can better understand the value foreign-born individuals bring to the community.

The chamber’s president, Tom Baldrige, is the vocal proponent of the work, and its board of directors are involved and supportive as well – both key elements to the initiative’s success.

“We’ve seen mindset shifts” as a result of the work, says Valudes. “We are doing a lot to say ‘this is important to our community.’ Because we come at it purely from an economic and workforce angle, we get a lot of great feedback.”

For communities considering similar initiatives, Valudes notes that it’s critical to engage community partners who can help advance the work – then, “to recognize what each is trying to do and define lanes. Having partners know where they are focused and how it all ties together has been critically important for our efforts.”

Salt Lake County, Utah’s Mayor’s Office for New Americans

Similar to other communities that have creating welcoming and integration plans for immigrants, Salt Lake County’s initiative was born out of the need for more workers.

Initiated by then-County Mayor Ben McAdams (now a U.S. congressman), Salt Lake County and the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce launched the Welcoming Salt Lake Initiative and the New Americans Task Force in March 2016. The task force, comprising 80 business, government and community leaders, developed the plan around the goals of making the community more attractive, welcoming and globally competitive for international talent and business.

One of the plan’s recommendations was to create a county office to shepherd the initiative. The Mayor’s Office for New Americans (MONA) was the result, led by director Ze Min Xiao.

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Many elements of the Welcoming Salt Lake plan are similar to initiatives in other communities. Three distinct approaches – to improving access to English language instruction, fostering entrepreneurship, and promoting naturalization – are highlighted below.

- **Advancing access to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.** Lack of English proficiency frequently prevents immigrants from entering or advancing in the workforce. MONA has been working with the chamber and other partners to devise incentives that will encourage employers to provide ESL classes. One of those efforts has been in laying the groundwork to introduce a bill in the state legislature that would provide large employers a tax incentive to offer ESL to employees.

One model employer is Intermountain Healthcare, a large, Utah-based hospital system, which has partnered with Salt Lake Community College to offer ESL courses to employees during worktime.

- **Fostering entrepreneurship.** Salt Lake has many resources for entrepreneurs, but immigrants and refugees are not necessarily connected to them; bridging those gaps is one goal. The county also has supported Spice Kitchen, a business incubator started by the International Rescue Committee. Spice Kitchen helps refugees develop successful food businesses by providing technical assistance, training, and access to commercial kitchen space. The curriculum also includes ESL instruction.
- **Promoting naturalization.** Earning citizenship increases a foreign-born individual's economic and civic potential; more than 22,000 legal permanent residents, in Salt Lake County alone, are eligible to naturalize. In 2018, MONA partnered with the Salt Lake Chamber to secure \$100,000 from the state legislature to support "United for Citizenship," a multi-sector initiative to boost the resources available to help people naturalize. Actions taken include implementing a citizenship awareness campaign and increasing the capacity of organizations that provide legal services, citizenship classes, and other related services.

The Salt Lake Chamber helps advance the Welcoming Salt Lake plan in many ways. In advocating for naturalization, it highlights the benefits that the process brings to both individuals and businesses. Studies show that when employers support employees in naturalization, the employees become more invested in the company.

The chamber also collaborates with MONA to hold trainings for businesses that employ or would like to employ immigrants, and shares stories about their contributions to the economy. It hosts an American Dream Award event where it honors "New Pioneers," immigrants who have put down roots in Salt Lake and become successful. It also engages in national-level advocacy, writing letters to oppose proposed fee increases for certain visas and green cards, among other activities.

A key initiative going forward is to establish pathways to get foreign credentials recognized. Many foreign-born individuals have skills that are in high demand in the region – particularly in fields such as healthcare and engineering – yet are unable to use them. A task force is under way to identify and evaluate the requirements of certain high-demand professions, the barriers to recertification, and ways to remove barriers and streamline recertification processes.



The Dairy Industry in Southern Idaho

In 2011, Chobani – then a relatively small Greek yogurt company based in central New York – was looking to expand its operations significantly to meet skyrocketing demand for its products in the United States. They agreed to develop a state-of-the-art dairy processing facility in Twin Falls, Idaho, now the world’s largest yogurt plant.

For a town of just 44,125 people (pop. in 2011), it was a huge business attraction win built on its strong dairy industry cluster. Such a project – emerging in the aftermath of the Great Recession, when local unemployment was higher than 10 percent – would also be immensely helpful to the local economy. For every \$1 that goes into dairy production, the local economy gets \$5.30 - \$7 back.⁵

The U.S. dairy industry relies heavily on immigrants, particularly from Central and Latin America. According to Rick Naerebout, CEO of the Idaho Dairywomen’s Association, the dairy industry workforce is about 90 percent foreign-born. Although the industry has become highly automated, dairy plants still need workers with technical expertise to operate machines and to take care of the cows. As Travis Rothweiler, Twin Falls City Manager, puts it, “the same way we can have the best equipment to fight the fire, [we still] need people to get to the fire. [It’s the] same for dairy.”

But the work is hard. In Idaho, the industry needs a workforce that is willing to work in cold winters and hot summers. Many farmers are actively looking for ways to improve working conditions in their dairies, but it still takes hardworking and dedicated individuals. They are not typically born in the United States.

Despite being one of the premiere dairy-producing regions in the country, Southern Idaho struggles to attract labor to work in plants like Chobani’s yogurt facility, even with the government and businesses willing to train employees. “People are the scarcest product we have,” said Rothweiler. “So the idea that refugees and immigrants are taking jobs away is not real – especially when industries like dairy, in regions of the country like Twin Falls, need the workers.”

Chobani 2011 deal figures

Initial investment: \$100 million

Direct jobs created: 400

Average wage: \$14/hr plus full benefits

Total payroll: \$135 million

Indirect Jobs created: 3,028

Source: Agro Farma and City of Twin Falls Project FactSheet

Chobani impact in Twin Falls in 2019

Direct jobs: 1,000 (at the plant)

Contribution to regional GDP: \$700 million annually

Indirect jobs created: 5-6 jobs per direct job created

Source: Curbed.com

⁵ Source: Agro Farma and City of Twin Falls Project Factsheet

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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Twin Falls is also home to a refugee resettlement center at the local community college which helps place approximately 300 refugees a year. The program was established in 1980 and is managed federally. An abundance of low-paying jobs in the dairy industry, affordable housing, and a small community with abundant social services provides a great “soft landing” for refugees and immigrants. The refugee resettlement program and the immigrant population in Twin Falls actually weren’t factors during the negotiations with Chobani. With such a high unemployment rate in 2011, difficulty hiring workers was not on anyone’s mind.

In 2016, the city drew national attention when a small but vocal minority of residents began publicly and vehemently opposing the refugee resettlement program and spreading rumors, using fear tactics against Muslims, refugees and immigrants in general. It started about a year after the announcement that Idaho would receive Syrian refugees, even though none had settled in the region when the backlash started. Chobani CEO Hamdi Ulukaya, a Turkish immigrant, also got caught in the conspiracy. Several elected leaders received death threats and local law enforcement had to get involved.

Community leaders initially struggled to contain the negative media, but later realized that the vast majority of the community didn’t align with this vocal group and didn’t view immigrants negatively. Chobani, the local chamber and the dairymen’s association formed the Unity Alliance to support the local immigrant population. The Unity Alliance educates the community and helps build bridges between existing residents and the foreign-born population by highlighting the value of immigrants to the community and to the dairy industry, which is a major economic driver for the region.

Chobani now has an explicit focus on hiring refugees at its Twin Falls plant and provides support to new workers through English language assistance and other programs. The city also has created its first local-level committee on diversity and inclusion, and works more closely with the refugee resettlement center, though the national program has been cut back by the Trump administration. The city wants to remain on the forefront of inclusive strategies, particularly immigration, going forward.