

ARKANSAS:

Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Innovation, and Welcoming Initiatives in the Natural State

In Arkansas, there is no doubt that immigrant entrepreneurs and innovators play an important role. Immigrant entrepreneurs bring in additional revenue, create jobs, and contribute significantly to the state's economy. Highly skilled immigrants are vital to the state's innovation economy, and to the metropolitan areas within the state, helping to boost local economies. Furthermore, local government, business, and non-profit leaders recognize the importance of immigrants in their communities and support immigration through local "welcoming" and integration initiatives.

Immigrant entrepreneurs contribute significantly to Arkansas' economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 6,171 new immigrant business [owners](#) in Arkansas,¹ and in 2010, 5 percent of all business [owners](#) in the state were foreign-born.²
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners³ had a total net business income of \$286.7 million, which is 4.7 percent of all net business [income](#) in the state.⁴
- Arkansas had a 160 percent increase in Hispanic-owned businesses, growing from 2,094 businesses in 2002 to 5,457 in 2007, according to Census Bureau [data](#).⁵

Highly skilled immigrants are vital to Arkansas' innovation economy.

- High-skilled immigrant workers contribute to the success of many Arkansas-based companies and institutions with a significant presence in the state, [including](#) Wal-Mart Associates Inc., the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, UST Global Inc., Cognizant Technology Solutions, and the University of Arkansas-Little Rock.⁶
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 1,534 H-1B labor certification [applications](#) in Arkansas, with an average annual wage of \$58,443,⁷ which is higher than Iowa's median household [income](#) of \$40,149 or per capita income of \$21,833.⁸
- An [expansion](#) of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 2,500 new jobs in Arkansas by 2020.⁹ By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) around \$956 million to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$900 million.¹⁰ The following are [examples](#) of metropolitan area demand for high-skilled foreign-born workers.
 - The Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway metropolitan area had 455 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 53.1 percent of H-1B visa-holders

working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations.¹¹

- o The Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers metropolitan area had 749 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 86.3 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹²

While the numbers are compelling, they don't tell the whole story.

- Hispanic immigrant-owned businesses are popping up in many neighborhoods around Arkansas, including southwest Little Rock. In particular, these businesses include *mercados* (groceries), *panaderias* (bakeries), and *taquerias* (taco restaurants) catering to not only a growing Latino immigrant population, but to the evolving tastes of the broader population.
 - o Maura Lozano-Yancy, owner of the Hispanic newspaper *Hola! Arkansas*, [says](#) “We’re entrepreneurs, so when we see the opportunity, we go for it. I can see growth in the businesses. Hispanic companies are coming up everywhere.” She also states there are three main areas of growth for Hispanic business owners in the area: restaurants, construction, and mom-and-pop-style groceries.¹³
 - o For over a decade, Saul Gutierrez and his family have run Mercado San Jose Grocery and Bakery. At one point, due to the growing popularity of their baked goods, they had to expand to a larger location. From the perspective of the Gutierrez family, Arkansas provides a lot of [opportunity](#) for immigrant business owners.¹⁴
- In many [towns](#) throughout northwest Arkansas, such as Bentonville and Springdale, home to Walmart and Tyson Foods, new Hispanic immigrant businesses owners have opened up restaurants, shops, markets, and auto repair shops catering to the needs of a growing immigrant population.¹⁵
 - o Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce President Steve Clark [stated](#), “Our Hispanic community has grown significantly. That diversity is very good for us. We have a Spanish language radio station now, which is something we would not have had five years ago...The diversity is very smart for us. If we want to attract new jobs, you have to have a very culturally and diverse community to do that.”¹⁶

Some localities have begun recognizing and supporting immigration through local “welcoming” and integration initiatives.

- The **Arkansas United Community Coalition (AUCC)**, founded in 2010, [aims](#) to “bring together Arkansas-based organizations and individuals, across sectors, with the mission to promote meaningful immigrant integration at the local and state levels, supporting immigrants and other multicultural communities to be agents of positive change in Arkansas.”¹⁷

- o As part of its long-term [vision](#), “AUCC envisions an Arkansas that is elevated to its full civic, economic and social potential through the development of inclusive and equitable communities where all multi-ethnic groups, newcomers and native-born Arkansans work together to enhance their collective quality of life.”¹⁸
- o Mireya Reith, founder of AUCC, [says](#) that a key focus of the organization is to bring multiple voices to the table. She says that since there are many organizations out there addressing various aspects of immigration issues, it’s important that they all sit down at the same table and cultivate long-term relationships.¹⁹

Endnotes

¹ Robert W. Fairlie, [Open for Business: How Immigrants are Driving Small Business Success in the United States](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2012).

² Ibid.

³ The sample of new immigrant business owners during the time period includes individuals who do not own a business in the first survey month and report starting a business in the second survey month with 15 or more hours worked per week.

⁴ Robert W. Fairlie, [Open for Business: How Immigrants are Driving Small Business Success in the United States](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2012).

⁵ Alejandra Matos, “[Hispanic-owned businesses booming, especially in the South](#),” *Seattle Times*, July 16, 2010.

⁶ Neil G. Ruiz, Jill H. Wilson, and Shyamali Choudhury, [The Search for Skills: Demand for H-1B Immigrant Workers in U.S. Metropolitan Areas](#) (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2012).

⁷ Office of Foreign Labor Certification, [Annual Report: October 1, 2010 – September 30, 2011](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, “[State & County Quick Facts: Arkansas](#)” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

⁹ Frederick R. Treyz, Corey Stottlemeyer, and Rod Motamedi, “[Key Components of Immigration Reform: An Analysis of the Economic Effects of Creating a Pathway to Legal Status, Expanding High-Skilled Visas, and Reforming Lesser-Skilled Visas](#),” (Amherst, MA: Regional Economic Models, Inc., 2013).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Neil G. Ruiz, Jill H. Wilson, and Shyamali Choudhury, [The Search for Skills: Demand for H-1B Immigrant Workers in U.S. Metropolitan Areas](#) (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2012).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ THV 11, “[Hispanic business is booming in Arkansas](#)” (Little Rock, AR: THV 11, March 24, 2006).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Will Skowronski and Leonard Sparks, “[Latinos transform northwest Arkansas, but political clout elusive](#)” (College Park, MD: University of Maryland Philip Merrill College of Journalism, 2009).

¹⁶ Alejandra Matos, “[Hispanic-owned businesses booming, especially in the South](#),” *Seattle Times*, July 16, 2010.

¹⁷ Arkansas United Community Coalition, “[Mission/Vision](#)” (Fayetteville, AR: 2011).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Meredith Martin-Moats, “[Supporting immigrants and equitable communities: Arkansas United Community Coalition](#)” (Arkansas: *The Boiled Down Juice*, October 2, 2012).

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Arkansas

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$286.7
million**

*in total net business
income*



5%

*of business owners in
Arkansas are immigrants*

Read more at ImmigrationPolicy.org

6,171

*immigrants became new business
owners in Arkansas between
2006-2010*

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