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IDAHO:

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

In Idaho, 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 industries 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 Idaho's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 4,051 new immigrant business [owners](#) in Idaho,¹ and in 2010, [5 percent](#) of all business owners in Idaho were foreign-born.²
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners³ had a total net business [income](#) of \$192 million, which is almost 5 percent of all net business income in the state.⁴

Highly skilled immigrants are vital to Idaho's innovation industries, which in turn helps lead American innovation and creates jobs.

- Immigrants contribute to Idaho's economic growth and competitiveness by earning degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields from the state's research universities. In 2009, around [30 percent](#) of STEM graduates from the state's research-intensive universities were foreign-born.⁵
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 551 H-1B high-skilled visa labor certification [applications](#) in Idaho, with an average annual wage of \$65,359,⁶ which is higher than Idaho's median household [income](#) of \$46,890 or per capita income of \$22,788.⁷
- An [expansion](#) of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 1,200 new jobs in Idaho by 2020.⁸ By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) around \$544 million to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$511 million.⁹ The following is an [example](#) of a metropolitan area's demand for high-skilled foreign-born workers.
 - The Boise City-Nampa metropolitan area had 360 H-1B visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 81.9 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹⁰

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

- Immigrant entrepreneurs not only contribute to large innovative companies, but to small business formation in local communities. In towns across Idaho, immigrant family-owned small businesses contribute to the vitality of their local communities. Although initially aimed at other immigrant customers, many businesses quickly see an expansion of their clientele to include a diverse array of immigrant and native-born customers alike.
 - Lucio Prado, originally from Mexico, has opened more than half a dozen restaurants and a satellite television company in several communities around Treasure Valley, an area that includes Boise.¹¹ Prado is also the [chairman](#) of the Idaho Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.¹²
 - Also in Boise, Ayad Al-Mansuri, from Iraq, was previously a dishwasher at a chain restaurant. By 2008, he was running his own company, A.H.A. Lawn Care, employing 12 and bringing in revenue close to half a million dollars.¹³

In Idaho, localities have begun recognizing and supporting immigration through “welcoming” and integration initiatives.

- **Welcoming Idaho**, part of the Idaho Community Action Network and an affiliate of [Welcoming America](#), states that their organization [seeks](#) to “foster dialogues in our communities about our shared values...Welcoming Idaho celebrates our differences and our common values.”¹⁴
 - The initiative, which [launched](#) in 2007,¹⁵ [notes](#) that “An essential part of creating a welcoming Idaho is to create real opportunities for everyone in our communities.” The organization’s [values](#) include acceptance, opportunity, compassion, fairness, and respect.¹⁶
- In Boise, the **Idaho Office for Refugees** is a private, statewide [initiative](#) that “promotes mutual understanding between refugees and the larger community by sharing information, encouraging social interaction and developing opportunities for refugees to participate in all aspects of community life.”¹⁷
 - The organization, along with the City of Boise Mayor’s Office, has [led efforts](#) to “more fully integrate refugees into the community and create a more welcoming environment for all newcomers.”¹⁸
 - Furthermore, “through the successful [engagement](#) of dozens of community partners, this effort has led to the development and implementation of Boise’s first Refugee Community Plan.”¹⁹

- In Wilder, a small farming community in southwest Idaho, local officials approved a [resolution](#) in March 2009 that “affirms the city’s multicultural nature, urges respect and acceptance of all people and welcomes immigrants to the community.”²⁰
 - Specifically, the resolution [states](#) that residents of Wilder, “composed of native Idahoans from all backgrounds and a large Hispanic community, contribute to the shared responsibility of welcoming new community members who have traveled thousands of miles to resettle with their families in the United States.”²¹
 - The resolution goes on to [encourage](#) the U.S. Congress “to enact responsible, sensible, and humane immigration reform.” The town of Rupert, in southern Idaho, has adopted a similar measure.²²

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 this 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 Partnership for a New American Economy, [Map the Impact of Immigrants Across America: Idaho](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2013).

⁶ Office of Foreign Labor Certification, [Annual Report: October 1, 2010 – September 30, 2011](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, [State & County Quick Facts: Idaho](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

⁸ 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).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 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).

¹¹ Brad Talbutt, “Hispanic chamber gets national honor” (Boise, ID: *The Idaho Statesman*, November 4, 2008).

¹² Idaho Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, [Board of Directors](#) (Boise, ID: Idaho Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, 2013).

¹³ Anna Webb, “Micro loans help Valley immigrants build better lives” (Boise, ID: *The Idaho Statesman*, January 13, 2008).

¹⁴ Welcoming Idaho, [Welcoming Idaho](#) (Post Falls, ID: Welcoming Idaho, 2013).

¹⁵ Leo Morales, [Welcoming Idaho initiative launches with messages on Boise bus benches: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’](#) (Boise, ID: Idaho Community Action Network, November 13, 2007).

¹⁶ Welcoming Idaho, [Our Values](#) (Post Falls, ID: Welcoming Idaho, 2013).

¹⁷ Idaho Office for Refugees, [About Us](#) (Boise, ID: Idaho Office for Refugees, 2013).

¹⁸ The White House, [Champions of Change: Jan A Reeves](#) (Washington, DC: The White House, 2013).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bryan Dooley, [Wilder resolution welcomes immigrants into community](#) (Nampa, ID: *Idaho Press-Tribune*, March 11, 2009).

²¹ Jason Margolis, [Dear Immigrants: You’re \(officially\) Welcome in Wilder, Idaho](#) (Boston, MA: *PRI’s The World*, September 19, 2013).

²² Ibid.

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Idaho

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$192
million**

*in total net
business income*



5%

*of business owners in
Idaho are immigrants*

Read more at ImmigrationPolicy.org



4,051

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

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