

January 2014

KANSAS:

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

In Kansas, 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 to Kansas' economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 7,378 new immigrant business [owners](#) in Kansas¹ and in 2010, [5.7 percent](#) of all business owners in Kansas were foreign-born.²
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners³ had a total net business [income](#) of \$351 million, which is 5 percent of all net business income in the state.⁴
- Kansas is home to successful companies with at least one founder who was an immigrant. In 1989, Kansan Gary Burrell and Taiwan native Min Kao [founded](#) Garmin, with headquarters in Olathe, Kansas.⁵ Garmin develops consumer, aviation, and marine products with GPS (Global Positioning System) technology. The company currently employs over 9,200 people and generates over \$2.7 billion in total revenue.⁶

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

- Immigrants contribute to Kansas' economic growth and competitiveness by earning degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields from the state's research universities. In 2009, [over half](#) of STEM graduates earning masters or PhD degrees from these universities were foreign-born, and nearly four out of five graduates earning PhDs in engineering in Kansas were not born in the U.S.⁷
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 1,531 H-1B high-skilled visa labor certification [applications](#) in Kansas, with an average annual wage of \$62,335,⁸ which is higher than Kansas' 2012 median household [income](#) of \$51,273 per capita income of \$26,845.⁹
- An [expansion](#) of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 2,700 new jobs in Kansas by 2020.¹⁰ By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) around \$1.1 billion to Gross

State Product and increase personal income by more than \$1 billion.¹¹ The following is an [example](#) of metropolitan area demand for high-skilled foreign-born workers.

- o The Wichita metropolitan area had 262 H-1B visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 66.7 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹² A major employer with a need for H-1B high-skilled workers is Wichita State University.

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

- Immigrant entrepreneurs not only contribute to large innovative companies, but also to small businesses in local communities. In cities across Kansas, 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.
 - o As *New York Times* [observes](#), “Hispanics are arriving in numbers large enough to offset or even exceed the decline in the white population in many places. In the process, these new residents are reopening shuttered storefronts with Mexican groceries...and, for now at least, extending the lives of communities that seemed to be staggering toward the grave.”¹³
 - o Additionally, over the last decade, as the *New York Times* [states](#), “Hispanic residents have pushed from hubs like nearby Dodge City, Garden City and Liberal into ever smaller communities, buying businesses, homes and farmland on the cheap, enticed, they say, by the opportunity to live quiet lives in communities more similar to those in which they were raised.”¹⁴
- Carlos Gomez, President of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Greater Kansas City, [speaking](#) in 2013 at the Topeka Independent Business Association, said Hispanics are the fastest-growing group when it comes to starting businesses.¹⁵
 - o Along Topeka's S.E. 6th Avenue, [businesses](#) catering to the growing Hispanic immigrant population contribute to the bustling business retail corridor. For example, Salvador Lopez, from Mexico, owns and operates Miscelanea el Rodeo, which sells a wide variety of products, from fresh produce and other food items, to clothing and music.¹⁶
 - o Other Hispanic- and immigrant-owned businesses in this area of Topeka include restaurants, butcher shops referred to as *carnicerias*, mom-and-pop grocery stores or *tiendas*, bakeries called *panaderias*, and other retail.¹⁷ In fact, “many of the Hispanic-operated businesses along S.E. 6th occupy spaces that often were vacant until this new set of Latino entrepreneurs recognized a market,” the *Topeka Capital-Journal* [observed](#).¹⁸
- Rural towns across the Great Plains, such as [Garden City](#), Liberal, and Ulysses, Kansas, are examples of places that have benefitted from immigrant entrepreneurship, according

to ongoing research by Kansas State University [sociologist](#) Matthew Sanderson.¹⁹

- o Sanderson [notes](#) that “this is a significant issue now, and it will be for the foreseeable future, especially as much of rural Kansas continues to face the prospects of long-term population loss. Immigration is preventing these communities from declining further.”²⁰
- o Immigrants, many from Mexico, have [revived](#) the rural community of Ulysses, Kansas by opening restaurants, bakeries, clothing stores, car dealerships and computer repair shops.²¹
- o In Liberal, another rural community in southwest Kansas, immigrants have opened a variety of [small businesses](#), including restaurants, bakeries, and other businesses, including Spanish-language radio.²²

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

- Across Kansas and the broader Great Plains and Midwest region, local places recognize the importance of immigrant entrepreneurs in their communities. According to the [Chicago Council of Global Affairs](#), “Public and private-sector groups across the region have launched business incubators for immigrant entrepreneurs, sponsored networking opportunities with local employers, and helped skilled immigrants translate their foreign credentials to maximize their economic potential in the United States.”²³
 - o Specifically, the Council [states](#) that “the Midwest cannot hope to keep up with other regions or international competitors without a vital entrepreneurial sector...Immigrants, risk takers by nature, are unusually successful entrepreneurs, more than twice as likely as native-born Americans to start their own firms.”²⁴
 - o They go on to [suggest that](#) “the Midwest needs this kind of entrepreneurial energy, but historically the region has had some trouble attracting and retaining this talent. Business incubators in immigrant communities, microloan programs, and other initiatives to make credit available can make a difference.”²⁵
- [Welcoming Kansas](#), an affiliate of [Welcoming America](#), utilizes three approaches to encourage and facilitate a welcoming environment for immigrant integration in Kansas: local leadership development, strategic communications, and public engagement. Efforts around these strategies will help “promote healthy dialogue in communities.”²⁶
- Dodge City, an affiliate of Welcoming America’s [Welcoming Cities and Counties](#) initiative,²⁷ motivates welcoming and integration through its [Cultural Relations Advisory Board](#).
 - o The purpose of the Board is to “advise the City Commission related to or affecting minority communities within Dodge City, to monitor the policies and

practices of the City of Dodge City to issue fair and equitable application, and to act as a resource for intercultural awareness, education, and celebration among all people.”²⁸

- As part of [National Welcoming Week](#) activities in September 2013, the Cultural Relations Advisory Board sponsored a “[Walk with your Neighbor](#)”²⁹ event to inspire welcoming and interaction among neighbors—newcomers and long-time residents.
- In Garden City, city leaders decided early on that they would [embrace](#) newcomers. As Levita Rohlman, who was part of a group that helped encourage Garden City’s welcoming perspective, stated, “The vision was: We have these people here; are we going to accept them as a blessing or are we going to consider them a curse.”³⁰
- In 2011, the then mayor of Ulysses, Thadd Kistler, [remarked](#) about the town’s demographic changes due to aging and out-migration of the native-born and immigration to his city: “We’re either going to change or we’re going to die. This is Ulysses now, this is the United States now, this immigration is happening and the communities that are extending a hand are going to survive.”³¹

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: Kansas](#)” (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2013).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Office of Foreign Labor Certification, [Annual Report: October 1, 2010 – September 30, 2011](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, “[State & County Quick Facts: Kansas](#)” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

¹⁰ 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).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² 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).

¹³ A. G. Sulzberger, “[Hispanics reviving faded towns on the plains](#)” (New York City: *The New York Times*, November 14, 2011).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Megan Hart, “[KC Hispanic leader: Immigration reform will boost business](#)” (Topeka, KS: *The Topeka Capital-Journal*, May 14, 2013).

¹⁶ Bill Blankenship, “Businesses catering to influx of Hispanics: Block after block on S.E. 6th has Latino flair” (Topeka, KS: *The Topeka Capital-Journal*, July 12, 2009).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Angie Haflich, "[K-State immigration study focuses on southwest Kansas](#)" (Garden City, KS: *Garden City Telegram*, August 3, 2013). Roy Wenzl, "[K-State professor studying Hispanic immigration to southwest Kansas](#)" (Wichita, KS: *The Wichita Eagle*, July 22, 2013).

²⁰ Greg Tammen, "[Immigration focus of sociology research in southwest Kansas](#)" (Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University, July 22, 2013).

²¹ A. G. Sulzberger, "[Hispanics reviving faded towns on the plains](#)" (New York City: *The New York Times*, November 14, 2011).

²² Randal C. Archibold, "[For Latinos in the Midwest, A Time to Be Heard](#)" (New York City: *The New York Times*, April 25, 2006).

²³ Tamar Jacoby, [US Economic Competitiveness at Risk: A Midwest Call to Action on Immigration Reform](#) (Chicago: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2013).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Advocates for Immigrant Rights Coalition, "[Welcoming Kansas](#)" (Kansas City, KS: Advocates for Immigrant Rights Coalition, 2014).

²⁷ Welcoming America, "[Welcoming Cities and Counties](#)" (Atlanta, GA: Welcoming America, 2013).

²⁸ Dodge City, "[Cultural Relations Advisory Board](#)" (Dodge City, KS: Dodge City, 2013).

²⁹ Dodge City, "[Walk With Your Neighbor Event](#)" (Dodge City, KS: Dodge City, September 22, 2013).

³⁰ Peggy Lowe, "[A Midwestern Meatpacking Town Welcomes Immigrants](#)" (Washington, D.C.: *NPR.org*, December 11, 2013).

³¹ A. G. Sulzberger, "[Hispanics reviving faded towns on the plains](#)" (New York City: *The New York Times*, November 14, 2011).

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Kansas

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$351
million**

*in total net
business income*



5%

*of business owners in
Kansas are immigrants*

7,378

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

[Read more at ImmigrationPolicy.org](http://ImmigrationPolicy.org)