

LOUISIANA:

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

In Louisiana, 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.

Immigrant entrepreneurs contribute to Louisiana's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 14,726 new immigrant business [owners](#) in Louisiana,¹ and in 2010, [8.2 percent](#) of all business owners in Louisiana were foreign-born.²
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners³ had total net business [income](#) of \$691 million, which is 6.7 percent of all net business income in the state.⁴

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

- Immigrants contribute to Louisiana's economic growth and competitiveness by earning degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields from the state's research universities. In 2009, almost [60 percent](#) of STEM graduates from the state's research-intensive universities were foreign-born, and almost 73 percent of graduates earning PhDs in engineering in Louisiana were not born in the U.S.⁵
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 1,329 H-1B high-skilled visa labor certification [applications](#) in Louisiana, with an average annual wage of \$60,916,⁶ which is higher than Louisiana's median household [income](#) of \$44,086 or per capita income of \$23,853.⁷
- An [expansion](#) of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 3,800 new jobs in Louisiana by 2020.⁸ By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) around \$1.7 billion to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$1.5 billion.⁹ The following are [examples](#) of metropolitan area demand for high-skilled foreign-born workers.
 - The New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner metropolitan area had 566 H-1B [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 47.3 percent of visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹⁰ Major employers include Tulane University, Comtec Consultants Inc., and the

Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center.

- The Baton Rouge metropolitan area had 512 H-1B [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 51 percent of visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹¹ Major employers include East Baton Rouge Parish School System, and the Louisiana State University and A&M College.
- Innovative immigrants contribute to the success of many large companies. For example, immigrants are found in leadership roles of New Orleans-based [Pan American Life Insurance Group](#), which serves customers throughout the Americas.
 - José S. Suquet, originally from Cuba, currently [serves](#) as chairman of the board, president and CEO of the company, while Carlos F. Mickan, from Colombia, is executive vice president and chief financial officer.¹²
 - In 2012, the company [ranked](#) at number 15 on the Hispanic Business 500 list, had revenue of \$560 million, and employed almost 1,400 people.¹³

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

- Immigrants not only contribute to large innovative companies, but to small business formation in local communities. In towns across Louisiana, 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.
- According to Darlene Kattan, executive director of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Louisiana, “There’s been an explosion of [new Latino and Hispanic businesses](#). A lot of the businesses are mom-and-pop shops. But more and more of them are professional businesses...growing really quickly.”¹⁴
 - Some of the strongest business [growth](#) has been on the West Bank of New Orleans and in Kenner, according to Kattan. As she stated, “I see growth especially in the number of grocery stores and restaurants because that is a very visceral connection for people. But it keeps on building on itself after that.”¹⁵
- New Orleans, as the state’s largest metropolitan area and a [historic hub](#) of shipping, commerce, and tourism, contains many examples of immigrant business activity.¹⁶
 - Williams Boulevard, near the New Orleans airport in Kenner, has become locally known as an international corridor of Hispanic and Asian businesses. Here, merchants from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cuba, and other Latin American countries, have opened and expanded stores, markets, and restaurants.¹⁷

- According to the Migration Policy Institute, Louisiana attracted [refugees](#) from Vietnam beginning in the mid-1970s. Over the last quarter century, many Vietnamese have opened small businesses, “from restaurants and small grocery stores to commercial fishing operations.”¹⁸
- Two areas of New Orleans are known for their Vietnamese businesses. The [neighborhood](#) around Alcee Fortier Boulevard and Chef Menteur Highway east of the city¹⁹ is known in particular for its Saturday [Vietnamese Farmers’ Market](#).²⁰ Another community is found in the West Bank portion of the metro area, at Behrman Highway and Carol Sue Drive in Terrytown.²¹
- After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, immigrants and immigrant business owners were a part of the rebuilding effort in many Louisiana communities, including a [Vietnamese community](#) in New Orleans.²²
 - In the [Vietnamese immigrant community](#) in east New Orleans, around Alcee Fortier Boulevard and Chef Menteur Highway, neighbors and business owners were quick to rebuild their homes and reopen their businesses.²³
 - Rev. Van Nguyen, pastor of the community’s Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church, [estimated](#) that 45 of the approximately 50 Vietnamese-owned businesses in the neighborhood were back up and running by the spring of 2006.²⁴ Two nearby commercial strip malls were [examples](#) of the neighborhood’s quick resurgence, including beauty salons, grocery stores, video rental shops, eateries, and at least one pharmacy.²⁵

In Louisiana, local leaders have begun recognizing and supporting immigration through “welcoming” and integration initiatives.

- In May 2013, the New Orleans City Council [passed a resolution directing](#) Orleans Parish Sheriff Marlin Gusman to draft a new immigrant detention policy. In particular, the City Council asked that the Sheriff stop detaining suspected undocumented immigrants for federal officials.²⁶
 - Subsequently, in August 2013, the Orleans Parish Sheriff [agreed](#) to reject ICE detention requests unless they are specifically for people who have committed serious crimes.²⁷
 - New Orleans provides an example of local leaders and local law enforcement officials “[declining](#) to participate in aspects of federal immigration enforcement in the interest of strengthening relations with immigrant populations and creating safer communities” in an effort for community building within their own municipalities.²⁸

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: Louisiana”](#) (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: Louisiana”](#) (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 Ibid.
- ¹² Pan American Life Insurance Group, [“Biographies”](#) (New Orleans, LA: Pan American Life Insurance Group, 2013).
- ¹³ Hispanic Business, Inc., [“Details for Pan-American Life Insurance Group”](#) (Santa Barbara, CA: Hispanic Business, Inc., 2013).
- ¹⁴ Jaquetta White, [“Minority-owned business grew in Louisiana over 5-year period”](#) (New Orleans, LA: *The Times-Picayune*, June 26, 2011).
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Katharine Donato and Shirin Hakimzadeh, [“The Changing Face of the Gulf Coast: Immigration to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama”](#) (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2006).
- ¹⁷ Christine L. Bordelon, “Expanding market – Hispanic-owned firms flourishing in Kenner” (New Orleans, LA: *The Times-Picayune*, June 6, 2004).
- ¹⁸ Katharine Donato and Shirin Hakimzadeh, [“The Changing Face of the Gulf Coast: Immigration to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama”](#) (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2006).
- ¹⁹ C. Airriess, “Scaling central place of an ethnic-Vietnamese commercial enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana,” in D. Kaplan and W. Li (eds.), *The Landscapes of Ethnic Economy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).
- ²⁰ Seth Kugel, [“In New Orleans, vivid flavors of Vietnam”](#) (New York: *The New York Times*, February 5, 2013).
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Karen J. Leong, Christopher A. Airriess, Wei Li, Angela Chia-Chen Chen, and Verna M. Keith, [“Resilient History and the Rebuilding of a Community: The Vietnamese American Community in New Orleans East”](#) *The Journal of American History* (2007), 94, 3: 770-779.
- ²³ Ann M. Simmons, [“A community wastes no time starting over”](#) (Los Angeles, CA: *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 2006).
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Richard Rainey, [“New Orleans City Council directs parish sheriff to draft new immigrant detention policy”](#) (New Orleans, LA: *The Times-Picayune*, May 16, 2013).
- ²⁷ Laura Matthews, [“Immigration Reform 2013: New Orleans Sheriff agrees to reject ICE detention requests”](#) (New York: *International Business Times*, August 13, 2013).
- ²⁸ Matthew Kolodziej, [“Local immigration enforcement harms community policing and public safety”](#) (Washington, D.C.: *ImmigrationImpact.com*, September 13, 2013).

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Louisiana

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$691
million**

*in total net
business income*



8.2%

*of business owners in
Louisiana are immigrants*

14,726

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

Read more at ImmigrationPolicy.org