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MAINE:

Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Innovation, and Welcoming Initiatives in the Pine Tree State

In Maine, 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 Maine's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 2,711 new immigrant business [owners](#) in Maine,¹ and in 2010, [3.2 percent](#) of all business owners in Maine were foreign-born.²
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners³ had a total net business [income](#) of almost \$120 million, which is 3.3 percent of all net business income in the state.⁴
- Maine is home to many successful companies with at least one founder who was an immigrant or child of an immigrant, [including](#) well-known companies such as Fairchild Semiconductor International, which employ nearly 8,000 people and produces more than \$1.5 billion in revenue.⁵

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

- Immigrants contribute to Maine'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 [32.9 percent](#) of STEM graduates from the state's research-intensive universities were foreign-born, and almost 42 percent of graduates earning PhDs in engineering in Maine were not born in the U.S.⁶
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 474 H-1B labor certification [applications](#) in Maine, with an average annual wage of \$68,431,⁷ which is higher than both Maine's median household [income](#) of \$48,219 and its per capita income of \$26,464.⁸
- An [expansion](#) of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 1,300 new jobs in Maine by 2020.⁹ By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) around \$514 million to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$495 million.¹⁰ The following is an [example](#) of metropolitan area demand for high-skilled foreign-born workers.

- o The Portland-South Portland-Biddeford metropolitan area had 282 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 76.1 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹¹ A major employer with a need for H-1B high-skilled workers is Rite Pros Inc.

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 cities across Maine, 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 “In communities throughout Maine,” [said](#) Garrett Martin, executive director of the Maine Center for Economic Policy, immigrants “are opening new businesses, hiring new employees, and making new investments that are contributing to and strengthening local economies.”¹²
 - o Claude Rwaganje, originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, is the founder of the Community Financial Literacy Board, based in Portland. He [noted](#) that many people are unaware of the large impacts immigrant entrepreneurs make in Maine’s small business community.¹³
 - o Additionally, Charles Colgan, a professor at the University of Southern Maine, [estimates](#) that, in Portland, Maine’s largest city, around half of newly established small retail businesses in the past several years are immigrant-owned.¹⁴
- In Portland, [immigrant-owned restaurants](#) are a vibrant component to the city’s culinary landscape.¹⁵ Examples include Tandoor Bread, a Middle Eastern bakery, as well as Boda, a Thai restaurant whose chefs, Danai Sriprasert and Nattasak Wongsachua, were [nominated](#) for the prestigious James Beard award in 2012.¹⁶
- In Lewiston, Somali refugees have established a variety of small businesses. Hussein Ahmed, for example, came to Lewiston in 2003, and quickly opened a convenience store. As he [stated](#), such “businesses are vital for this community.”¹⁷
- In Bangor, Maria and Alejandro Rave, from Colombia, own the popular Thistles Restaurant [featuring](#) a variety of international cuisine. The Rave’s are also found volunteering in the community, contributing to charities, and providing jobs. Their restaurant, along with other establishments, contributes to Bangor’s downtown revitalization, helping bring the city “back from economic stagnation.”¹⁸

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

- Community Financial Literacy, in Portland, is an [organization](#) that [teaches](#) the basics of finance to new immigrants and refugees in Maine.¹⁹ One of the organization’s goals is to empower refugee and immigrant communities in Maine with the financial skills to become more productive members of the community.²⁰
 - Specifically, the organization [offers](#) three free financial literacy courses to immigrants and refugees, including Basic Money Management in America, Saving to Build Wealth, and Microfinance.²¹
- The City of Portland views immigrants as beneficial to the community. Gregory Mitchell, the city’s economic development director, [says](#), “Our economic development plan recognizes the value of the immigrants community and fosters immigrant entrepreneurship to grow Portland’s economy.”²²
 - In particular, the city’s [economic development plan](#) encourages ways to attract and support entrepreneurs, including minority entrepreneurs, as a “means of diversifying the local economy.”²³

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

⁶ Ibid.

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: Maine”](#) (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 Jody Harris, [“Immigrants: Fueling Maine’s Economy”](#) (Augusta, ME: Maine Center for Economic Policy, July 11, 2012).

¹³ Kirsten Sylvain, [“Does Maine’s immigrant community hold untapped economic potential?”](#) (Bangor, ME: *Bangor Daily News*, October 25, 2013).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Alexandra Alvarez and Jody Harris, [“Maine Communities Foster Immigrants’ Small Businesses,”](#) *Communities and Banking* (Boston, MA: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 2013).

¹⁶ Meredith Goad, “[Maine chefs, restaurants are James Beard semifinalists](#)” (Portland, ME: *Portland Press Herald*, February 21, 2012).

¹⁷ Alexandra Alvarez and Jody Harris, “[Maine Communities Foster Immigrants’ Small Businesses](#),” *Communities and Banking* (Boston, MA: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 2013).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kirsten Sylvain, “[Does Maine’s immigrant community hold untapped economic potential?](#)” (Bangor, ME: *Bangor Daily News*, October 25, 2013).

²⁰ Community Financial Literacy, “[About Us](#)” (Portland, ME: Community Financial Literacy, 2013).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Alexandra Alvarez and Jody Harris, “[Maine Communities Foster Immigrants’ Small Businesses](#),” *Communities and Banking* (Boston, MA: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 2013).

²³ City of Portland, [Economic Development Vision + Plan: Portland, Maine](#) (Portland, ME: City of Portland, 2011).

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Maine

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$120
million**

*in total net
business income*



3.2%

*of business owners in
Maine are immigrants*

Read more at ImmigrationPolicy.org



2,711

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