

RHODE ISLAND:

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

In Rhode Island, 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 Rhode Island's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 6,478 new immigrant business [owners](#) in Rhode Island,¹ and in 2010, [14.4 percent](#) of all business owners in Rhode Island were foreign-born.²
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners³ had a total net business [income](#) of \$360 million, which is 13 percent of all net business income in the state.⁴

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

- Immigrants contribute to Rhode Island's economic growth and competitiveness by earning degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields from the state's research universities. In 2009, [45 percent](#) of STEM graduates from the state's research-intensive universities were foreign-born, and more than 68 percent of graduates earning PhDs in engineering in Rhode Island were not born in the U.S.⁵
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 921 H-1B labor certification [applications](#) in Rhode Island, with an average annual wage of \$67,787,⁶ which is higher than both Rhode Island's median household [income](#) of \$56,102 and its per capita income of \$30,005.⁷
- An [expansion](#) of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 1,400 new jobs in Rhode Island by 2020.⁸ By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) around \$447 million to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$516 million.⁹ The following is an [example](#) of metropolitan area demand for high-skilled foreign-born workers.

- The Providence-New Bedford-Fall River metropolitan area had 1,065 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 65 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹⁰ A major employer with a need for H-1B high-skilled workers includes Brown University.

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 throughout Rhode Island, 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.
- In Cranston, Haruki Kibe, from Japan, opened his first [restaurant](#) in 1986 called HARUKI, specializing in sushi. Haruki has since expanded to Providence with Haruki East in Wayland Square and Haruki Express on Waterman Street.¹¹
- In Providence, Omar and Cesin Curi, brothers originally from Bolivia, own and operate [Los Andes restaurant](#) on Chalkstone Avenue, serving Bolivian and Peruvian cuisine.¹²
 - Today, Los Andes restaurant is [thriving](#) and is widely popular among the broader community, as indicated by hundreds of positive reviews on Yelp, TripAdvisor, and other review sites. Additionally, in 2012, *Providence Monthly* and *Rhode Island Monthly* awarded Los Andes as “Best Dining Experience”, “South American Cuisine of the Year”, and “Best Exotic Menu”.¹³
- Also in Providence, photographer Berge Ara Zobian, originally from Syria, but who grew up in Lebanon, [opened](#) his own art gallery in 2001. Gallery Z is located on Atwells Avenue, and was one of the first fine art galleries in Federal Hill.¹⁴
- Patrick Griffin, originally from Ireland, [owns and operates](#) Patrick's Pub on Smith Street in Providence, which he opened in 1992. The pub, not far from the Rhode Island Capitol, presents an Irish atmosphere with traditional Irish and American food and beverages, and provides Irish entertainment, music, and dancing. After starting his bar, Griffin noticed there was no Irish parade in Providence. Today, Griffin is Providence's Saint Patrick's Day Parade committee president.¹⁵

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

- **Welcoming Rhode Island**, an affiliate of [Welcoming America](#),¹⁶ is an initiative [designed](#) to “shift the topic of immigration away from contentious debate and to encourage rational and respectful dialogue.”¹⁷

- o Specifically, Welcoming Rhode Island’s [mission](#) is to “bridge the divide between foreign-born newcomers and U.S.-born Rhode Islanders to foster a more inclusive and welcoming atmosphere.”¹⁸
- o Welcoming Rhode Island is guided by a statewide [advisory committee](#) and is comprised of community leaders and organizations from a variety of backgrounds and sectors around the state, including community agencies, law enforcement, business, local government, and faith-based groups.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 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: Rhode Island”](#) (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: Rhode Island”](#) (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 Welcoming Rhode Island, [“Haruki Kibe”](#) (Providence, RI: Welcoming Rhode Island, 2012).

¹² Jenna Delgado and Brianna Smith, [“Omar and Cesin Curi”](#) (Providence, RI: Welcoming Rhode Island, 2012).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Welcoming Rhode Island, [“Berge Ara Zodian”](#) (Providence, RI: Welcoming Rhode Island, 2012).

¹⁵ Welcoming Rhode Island, [“Patrick Griffin”](#) (Providence, RI: Welcoming Rhode Island, 2012).

¹⁶ Welcoming America, [“Welcoming America”](#) (Atlanta, GA: Welcoming America, 2013).

¹⁷ Welcoming Rhode Island, [“About Us”](#) (Providence, RI: Welcoming Rhode Island, 2012).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Rhode Island

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$360
million**

*in total net
business income*



14.4%

*of business owners in
Rhode Island are immigrants*

Read more at ImmigrationPolicy.org



6,478

*immigrants became new business
owners in Rhode Island
between 2006-2010*
