

UTAH:

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

In Utah, 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 Utah's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 9,229 new immigrant business [owners](#) in Utah¹ and in 2010, [8.5 percent](#) of all business owners in Utah were foreign-born.²
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners³ had a total net business [income](#) of \$388 million, which is 6.1 percent of all net business income in the state.⁴
- Utah is home to many successful companies with at least one founder who was an immigrant or child of an immigrant. For example, the child of German immigrants [founded](#) Smith's Food and Drug Centers, which is headquartered in Salt Lake City.⁵

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

- Immigrants contribute to Utah'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 [29 percent](#) of STEM graduates earning masters or PhD degrees from these universities were foreign-born, and more than half of graduates earning PhDs in engineering in Utah were not born in the U.S.⁶
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 1,206 H-1B high-skilled visa labor certification [applications](#) in Utah, with an average annual wage of \$63,414,⁷ which is higher than both Utah's median household [income](#) of \$57,783 and the per capita income of \$23,650.⁸
- An [expansion](#) of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 2,800 new jobs in Utah by 2020.⁹ By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) around \$1.3 billion to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$1.2 billion.¹⁰ The following are [examples](#) of metropolitan area demand for high-skilled foreign-born workers:

- o The Salt Lake City metropolitan area had 909 H-1B visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 71.2 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹¹ Major employers with a need for H-1B high-skilled workers include the University of Utah, Goldman Sachs & Co., and Overstock.com, Inc.
- o The Provo-Orem metropolitan area had 257 H-1B visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 65.6 percent of visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹² A major employer includes IM Flash Technologies LLC.

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 Utah, 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 Salt Lake City, [South State Street](#) is home to a variety of immigrant-owned restaurants, markets, specialty shops, services, and other businesses.
 - o The Limantzakis family, from Greece, owns and operates Greek Market and Deli on South State Street. With many of the shop's products imported from Greece, the [business](#) offers a variety of specialty food products to the broader community.¹³
 - o Carlos Roman, from Peru, owns La Pequenita, a [market](#) catering to Utah's Latino community. With products from many Latin American countries, Roman stated that his customers come from near and far: "We have customers that come from Bountiful, Clearfield, Layton, Logan, Idaho, Orem, Provo, and Grand Junction, Colorado."¹⁴
 - o Dr. Minghua Zhang, from China, operates Ming's Oriental Health and Wellness Clinic, which offers Chinese herbal [medicines](#) and acupuncture procedures. She was originally a cardiologist in China, but decided to start her business in Utah after participating in an exchange program with the University of Utah.¹⁵

In Utah, localities have begun recognizing and supporting immigration through "welcoming" and integration initiatives.

- Welcoming Utah, an initiative of [Communities United](#) and an affiliate of [Welcoming America](#),¹⁶ is an [initiative](#) to strengthen relationships between Utah's native-born and foreign-born residents.¹⁷

- o Welcoming Utah hosts a variety of [activities](#), film screenings, workshops, and community dialogues that encourage Utahans old and new to embrace opportunities to share their stories with one another and discuss immigration.¹⁸
- o Welcoming Utah also [promotes](#) awareness and education about the contributions immigrant make to the state and the different ways new residents contribute to the cultural fabric of places and help strengthen communities.¹⁹
- The Utah Compact, which a variety of state and local leaders and organizations developed in 2010, is a “[declaration](#) of five principles to guide Utah’s immigration discussion.”²⁰
 - o The [five principles](#) include: recognizing that immigration is a federal policy issue; encouraging local law enforcement to focus on criminal activity, not civil violations of federal code; opposing policies that erode family unity and championing those that support families and improve health, education, and well-being; acknowledging the economic role immigrants play as workers and taxpayers; and noting that Utah has immigrant neighbors who are integrated into their communities, and Utah should be a place that welcomes people of goodwill.²¹
 - o The Utah Compact grew as a response to other states that had adopted negative policies towards their immigrant populations, such as [Arizona’s S.B. 1070](#) legislation. The New York Times editorial board [described](#) the Utah Compact as “a statement of principles meant to address, with moderation and civility, ‘the complex challenges associated with a broken national immigration system.’”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: Utah](#)” (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: Utah](#)” (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 Ibid.

¹³ Dave Anderton, "[Main Drag is right spot for many ethnic businesses](#)" (Salt Lake City, UT: *Deseret News*, November 6, 2003).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Welcoming America, "[Our Affiliates](#)" (Decatur, GA: Welcoming America, 2013).

¹⁷ Communities United, "[Welcoming Utah](#)" (Salt Lake City, UT: Communities United, 2009).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The Utah Compact, "[The Utah Compact](#)" (Salt Lake City, UT: The Utah Compact, 2013).

²¹ Ibid.

²² New York Times, "[The Utah Compact](#)" (New York: *The New York Times*, December 4, 2010).

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Utah

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$388
million**

*in total net
business income*



8.5%

*of business owners in
Utah are immigrants*

Read more at ImmigrationPolicy.org



9,229

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

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