

Montana: Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Innovation, and Welcoming Initiatives in the Treasure State

In Montana, there is no doubt that immigrant entrepreneurs and innovators play an important role. Immigrant entrepreneurs bring in additional revenue, create jobs, and contribute 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 Montana's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 1,061 new immigrant business [owners](#) [1] in Montana, and in 2010, [1.5 percent](#) [1] of all business owners in Montana were foreign-born.
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners had a total net business [income](#) [1] of \$44 million, which is 1.4 percent of all net business income in the state.

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

- Immigrants contribute to Montana's economic growth and competitiveness by earning degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields from the state's research universities. In 2009, over [22 percent](#) [2] of STEM graduates from the state's research-intensive universities were foreign-born, and over 36 percent of graduates earning PhDs in engineering in Montana were not born in the U.S.
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 128 H-1B labor certification [applications](#) [3] in Montana, with an average annual wage of \$58,979, which is higher than both Montana's median household [income](#) [4] of \$45,456 and its per capita income of \$25,002.
- An [expansion](#) [5] of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 760 new jobs in Montana by 2020. By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) [5] around \$342 million to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$317 million.

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 across Montana, 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 Billings, Fan Fu Li, originally from China, along with his niece and help from other relatives, [opened](#) [6] Grand Garden restaurant on Grand Avenue in 2007 on the west side of the town.
 - Also in Billings, Nelly and Juan Nuño, U.S. citizens originally from Mexico, [started](#) [7] Guadalajara Family Mexican Restaurant in 1995. Previously, they owned a restaurant in Washington state.
 - In Butte, Magdaleno Barragan, from Mexico, [started](#) [8] his Melaque restaurant business over a decade ago. Within three years, he had also opened Melaque

Mexican restaurants in six Montana cities: Butte, Anaconda, Bozeman, Belgrade, Great Falls, and Helena.

- In Helena, the state's capital, immigrant-owned restaurants add to the city's culinary offerings. For example, Chang Uyou, originally from China, [opened](#) [9] Mongolian BBQ and Chinese Buffet, which he started after leaving his previous restaurant in New York City.
- Also in Helena, the Wongs, a couple from China who are now U.S. citizens, [own and operate](#) [10] Wong's Chinese Kitchen on the city's west side, which they opened around three decades ago. One regular customer who has known the Wongs for years said, "They are some of the hardest working people I've ever known. They always remember our kids and they light up with joy whenever they see people they know. They're a real asset to the community."

In Montana, some localities have begun recognizing and supporting immigration through local "welcoming" and integration initiatives.

- Based in Helena, the Montana Human Rights Network, with affiliates in Flathead Valley, Anaconda, Ravalli County, Flathead Reservation, Bozeman, and Missoula, [works on](#) [11] immigrant justice with a goal to educate Montanans about the state's "rich history of immigrant contributions, while at the same time creating awareness of the unfair reality of the country's current immigration system."
 - In particular, the [program](#) [11] uses "a foundation of human rights values in an effort to create inclusive and welcoming communities for immigrants to Montana." As Montana is "home to a number of emerging immigrant communities that can feel isolated and vulnerable," the program is working to create "communities where recent immigrants can fully participate."
 - The program works to achieve its [goals](#) [11] through holding community events that examine the myths and facts in the current immigration debate; running "know your rights" training for the immigrant community; supporting community building and organizing work with the immigrant community; and educating Montanans on proposed legislation related to immigration.
- In 2009, the Montana state legislature [considered SB 413](#) [12], a bill designed to encourage immigrant welcoming and promote immigrant integration in Montana communities. According to the [ACLU of Montana](#) [13], the bill, "after being heavily amended, requires the state and local governments to protect the human rights of immigrants and to prevent racial profiling."
 - Although the bill was [approved](#) [13] by the state Senate, it failed in the House State Administration Committee. However, the fact that such a piece of legislation was introduced in Montana suggests that there are members of the state government, along with their constituents, interested in Montana pursuing an inclusive path of welcoming immigrants.

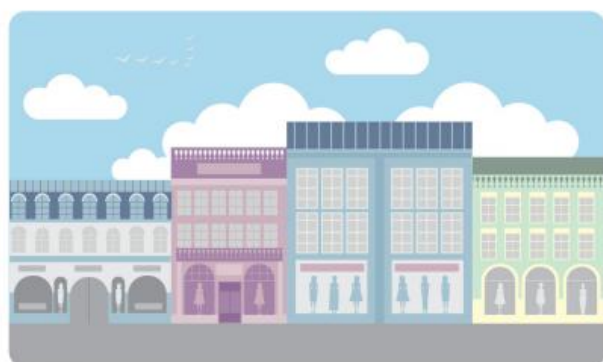
Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Montana

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$44
million**

*in total net
business income*



1,061

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

1.5%

*of business owners in
Montana are immigrants*

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

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- [1] <http://www.renewoureconomy.org/sites/all/themes/pnae/openforbusiness.pdf>
- [2] <http://www.maptheimpact.org/state/montana>
- [3] http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/2011AR_FINAL.pdf
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- [7] http://billingsgazette.com/entertainment/enjoy/weekly-webb-quest-for-tacos-reveals-pride-in-mexican-culture/article_c0863255-cb49-57f7-9497-3bc38a768a4e.html
- [8] http://helenair.com/business/filling-a-need-mexico-native-starts-restaurant-empire-in-montana/article_37f3f05a-53a8-5f71-b710-7ec8ddc41051.html
- [9] http://helenair.com/business/new-restaurants-tease-town-s-taste-for-adventure/article_293797f6-e54e-5f60-bb67-2c489e51ca0e.html
- [10] http://helenair.com/news/in-search-of-a-better-life/article_1c4021cc-cbe3-5c4a-894b-1538aa2674b6.html
- [11] <http://www.mhrn.org/immigration.html>
- [12] <http://bordercrossinglaw.com/bill-sponsored-by-christine-kaufmann-welcomes-immigrants-and-promotes-integration-in-montana-communities/>
- [13] <http://aclumontana.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2009endofsessionreport.pdf>
- [14] <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/ipc/Montana.pdf>
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