

West Virginia: Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Welcoming Initiatives in the Mountain State

In West Virginia, 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 to West Virginia's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 1,486 new immigrant business [owners](#) [1] in West Virginia, and in 2010, [2.7 percent](#) [1] of all business owners in West Virginia were foreign-born.
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners had a total net business [income](#) [1] of \$139 million, which is 5.1 percent of all net business income in the state.

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

- Immigrants contribute to West Virginia'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 [55 percent](#) [2] of STEM graduates from the state's research-intensive universities were foreign-born, and 76.3 percent of graduates earning PhDs in engineering in West Virginia were not born in the U.S.
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 377 H-1B labor certification [applications](#) [3] in West Virginia, with an average annual wage of \$69,080, which is greater than West Virginia's median household [income](#) [4] of \$40,400, but higher than its per capita income of \$22,482.
- An [expansion](#) [5] of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 1,300 new jobs in West Virginia by 2020. By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) [5] around \$537 million to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$505 million.

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

- Immigrant entrepreneurs and innovators not only contribute to large innovative companies, but to small business formation in local communities. In cities across West Virginia, 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 and around West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle, including the town of Martinsburg, Hispanic [immigrant-owned businesses](#) [6] dot the landscape. Such businesses include day-care centers, beauty shops, restaurants, caterers, grocery stores, and interpretation and translation services.
- In downtown Charleston, the state's capital, immigrant-owned restaurants cater to a variety

of tastes.

- Miguel Aguirre, from Mexico, runs Rio Grande on Court Street, which he and four others opened in 1990.
- Abe Ganim, from Israel, opened Sahara Catering and Restaurant in 2003 on Summer Street.
- Harbhajn Singh Teja and his family opened one of the first Indian restaurants in the state in 1994, on Lee Street in Charleston.
- Haruko Sugawara and her husband Kimiyoshi Ito, originally from Japan, own and operate Sushi Atlantic on Shrewsbury Street.
- Carina Kwok, from China, runs Main Kwong Chinese restaurant on Washington Street.
- Innovative immigrants also contribute to West Virginia. In Charleston, the state's capital, Grant Cooper serves as the artistic director and conductor of the [West Virginia Symphony Orchestra](#) [7]. Cooper, an immigrant from New Zealand, helms the state's premier performing arts organization, which [presents](#) [8] more than fifty concerts each year to broad audiences throughout West Virginia.

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

West Virginia

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1,486

*immigrants became new business
owners in West Virginia
between 2006-2010*

2.7%

*of business owners in
West Virginia are immigrants*

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[1] <http://www.renewoureconomy.org/sites/all/themes/pnae/openforbusiness.pdf>

[2] <http://www.maptheimpact.org/state/west-virginia/>

[3] http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/2011AR_FINAL.pdf

[4] <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/54000.html>

[5] <http://www.remi.com/immigration-report>

[6] <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/w-va-cities-sees-increases-173238761.html>

[7] <http://www.wvsymphony.org/meet-the-orchestra/maestro-cooper>

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