

Welcoming Cedar Rapids: Action Plan



Prepared by: **IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**
Extension and Outreach
Community and Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2018, the City of Cedar Rapids and key partners including the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation, the Catherine McCauley Center, the Intercultural Center of Iowa, and YPN applied to participate in the Gateways for Growth program.

The purpose of this effort is to ensure that foreign-born residents have the education, preparation, and connections necessary to reach their ultimate potential. Immigrants have played a key role in developing the economy of Cedar Rapids, founding and supporting some of the most important local businesses. Making sure that our economy continues to work for all residents will maintain a high quality of life for all members of our community.

Making Cedar Rapids more attractive to international talent expands economic opportunity for all. **Immigrants in Linn County are 45.2% more likely to be entrepreneurs than their U.S.-born counterparts.** More than 10% of immigrants work for their own businesses. Additionally, immigrants make up a key part of the workforce in some of Cedar Rapids' most impactful industries. Although the foreign-born make up only 4.4% of the population, they **represent more than 15% of workers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math fields.** Because of the role immigrants play in the workforce, research from New American Economy estimates that **immigrants helped create or preserve 440 local manufacturing jobs.** The full research report "New Americans in Cedar Rapids, Iowa," prepared by New American Economy is available as an appendix to this action plan.

In addition to this research the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation and Gateways for Growth provided funding to support this action planning effort. The action steps outlined in this plan are not exhaustive. There are many organizations doing important work with immigrants. Instead these are short term catalytic actions we have identified that will ensure that Cedar Rapids remains welcoming and competitive into the future.

Nearly fifty individuals took part in the creation of this plan serving on the steering committee or on one of three working groups. This plan is the outcome of cross sector collaboration including representatives from local government, business, education, faith-based and non-profit entities, as well as other community leaders.

The three primary focus areas of this plan are:

- Creating a **Welcoming Community** – Cedar Rapids will become a destination of choice for international talent. Immigrants will feel welcomed, and immigration will be understood as a source of cultural and economic strength.
- Strengthening **Workforce and Education** – Education will continue to be responsive to the needs of immigrants and the business sector to address workforce challenges and ensure long-term solutions for the supply of qualified workers.
- Supporting **Business Development and Entrepreneurship** – A comprehensive continuum of support will exist to support immigrant entrepreneurs.

Three working groups refined these goals and developed action steps in each of these areas. Each working group spent four months researching, meeting with community stakeholders, and drawing from the experience of other cities across the country with similar efforts to develop recommendations specific to their area of focus.

Their work was supported by the data provided by New American Economy and interviews and focus groups conducted by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. These focus groups engaged with immigrants living and working in Cedar Rapids, business owners, human resource professionals, and service providers.

Overall, we heard many common themes:

- There are **excellent opportunities** in Cedar Rapids for immigrants.
 1. Many immigrants moved to Cedar Rapids from other communities in the United States for its **high quality education, low cost of living, and a strong local economy**.
 2. Many immigrants emphasized that Cedar Rapids is **a safe and welcoming community**.
- However, there are **barriers to career advancement and entrepreneurship. These include:**
 1. **Cultural difference in workplace expectations.** Many immigrants shared difficulties navigating American workplace culture.
 2. Immigrants and human resource managers alike expressed an interest in resources to help with **cross-cultural competency** for new and existing workers.
 3. The majority of immigrant business owners expressed feeling **isolated from existing business networks**.
 4. Immigrant entrepreneurs also expressed a need for **greater access to capital and connections** to start new businesses.

- Immigrants also expressed some **difficulties integrating into the local community**.
 1. For some, it took **years to make connections** outside of their ethnic community.
 2. Beyond language skills many immigrants and service providers shared the **need for life-skills training** for living in Cedar Rapids.
 3. Additionally, to support immigrant participation in the workforce **greater access to childcare, housing, and transportation** were common needs.

While not all of these challenges can be fully addressed within the scope of this plan, the working groups focused on targeted, high-value actions to make the most of limited resources for long-term change. Through this collaborative planning framework the three working groups developed concrete action steps to take advantage of the talents, skills, and resources around the table.

This action plan is focused on immediate actions to spark long term change. We have identified partners and next steps for all of the action items listed below. Although some adjustment will certainly be necessary, for every action step **we have a realistic plan to complete or make significant progress within the first year**. The items listed under “Future Focus” are other actions we identified, which will make a significant impact, but will take longer to complete.



WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Cedar Rapids will become a destination of choice for international talent. Immigrants will feel welcomed, and immigration will be understood as a source of cultural and economic strength.

Make resources and services highly accessible through a webpage

There are a wide range of local resources available, but it can be difficult for new arrivals to find what they need. Through this planning process we compiled a comprehensive list of local resources. Over the first year, we will work to create a central website available in multiple languages listing resources available to immigrants living in Cedar Rapids. Additionally, a printed version of the resource list will be made available to employers, service providers, and realtors.

Create a Welcoming Week committee to ensure its long-term success

Cedar Rapids will continue to participate in Welcoming America's annual Welcoming Week in mid-September. During this annual series of events, communities bring together immigrants and native-born residents to build strong connections across their communities. The newly established Welcoming Week Committee will coordinate outreach and networking with existing community organizations. For example, the Downtown Cedar Rapids Farmers Market could highlight vendors with international food to coincide with Welcoming Week.

Increase immigrants' social ties to Cedar Rapids through volunteer opportunities

Social ties are key to increasing quality of life and feeling rooted in the community. Throughout the planning process, immigrants expressed their desire to give back to Cedar Rapids. We will work with the existing volunteer program managed by the United Way of East Central Iowa to help immigrants expand their personal social networks. New volunteers will be recruited through targeted outreach in faith communities and ethnically based organizations.

Future Focus

In addition to these immediate actions, many immigrants and service providers indicated their desire for a physical "welcoming center" with resource navigators. The city and its partners will explore the long term-possibilities. Any new location will likely be co-located with an existing resource.

WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION

Education will continue to be responsive to the needs of immigrants and the business sector to address workforce challenges and ensure long-term solutions for the supply of qualified workers.

Support immigrants in the pursuit of post-secondary education & training

Often immigrants graduating from local high schools lack an understanding of what the next steps or opportunities are for them. As students leave high school their needs vary widely. Some need additional English language instruction or a high school diploma equivalent. Others are ready for workforce training, skilled labor, or a degree/certification program at a college or university. We will create a local resource guide for high school guidance counselors, English language instructors, and service providers, to explain options for secondary and post-secondary education.

Provide access to wide variety of resources to find, secure, and maintain employment

We will ensure that a wide variety of resources to find, secure, and maintain employment are easily accessible. All available career resources will be identified on the resource website. In addition, we will work to expand the Catherine McAuley Center's American Workplace Orientation and Kirkwood's Earn and Learn programs, which bring education to the workplace in partnership with employers. We will also partner with the University of Iowa's Labor Center to promote pre-apprenticeship programs for high-demand trades.

Support employers in implementing legal best practices

Many employers noted the complexity the U.S. immigration system. The diversity of legal statuses and responsibility on employers can make it a difficult process. We will promote nationally available resources to local employers including webinars that describe best practices and legal responsibilities for recruiting and hiring immigrants. We will also develop a local Frequently Asked Questions sheet for employers with contact information for local resources.

Future Focus

In addition to these immediate actions, it has become clear that a major issue is that immigrants are often unable to use their skills, experience, and education in Iowa because of licensing or credentialing issues. This is a complex issue and will require cooperation with partners statewide including state licensing agencies to facilitate recredentialing in various fields. Additionally, we will explore the creation of industry specific internships for immigrants seeking to enter fields of high need.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A comprehensive continuum of support will exist to support immigrant entrepreneurs.

Promote immigrant entrepreneur participation at resource fairs and conferences

The majority of immigrant owned businesses that were interviewed expressed that they were not aware of or had not accessed the wide range of business development services offered in Cedar Rapids. The working group will work with key immigrant advocates and influencers who will help with promotion of these services in their communities. We will work with existing business development conferences to be more inclusive including: creating an immigrant entrepreneur track, holding immigrant-focused panels, and sponsoring immigrant attendees. Additionally, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance will work with partners to organize an event promoting resources for local business development and entrepreneurship.

Provide ongoing business support and outreach

Immigrant business owners emphasized the need for ongoing relationship building and support, including entrepreneurship education offered in languages other than English. This will take a community effort to support the wide variety of businesses run by immigrants in Cedar Rapids. Jane Boyd's Empower program, a community-based business accelerator, will update their curriculum for a new cohort focused on immigrant entrepreneurs. The Catherine McAuley Center will also work to expand their existing childcare business development program and explore new microenterprise opportunities.

Future Focus

In addition to these immediate actions we will work towards the creation of multi-cultural business support groups. We will also work with partners from across the state to bring a state-wide resource fair or conference focused on immigrant entrepreneurship to Cedar Rapids.

MOVING FORWARD

The completion of this plan is just the beginning. Now the real work begins. This initiative's next steps are to disseminate the findings of New American Economy's research on the economic impact of immigrants and to begin implementing the steps outlined in this plan.

We will schedule a meeting every six months to check in on the progress of the plan as a whole and adjust action steps as needed. This meeting will be in coordination with the Immigrant Concerns Committee managed by the Catherine McAuley Center. The Immigrant Concerns Committee brings together dozens of immigrants and service providers every month and will serve as a general advisory body going forward. Throughout implementation we will continue our outreach to local governments, non-profits, and businesses in the area.

To learn more or to get involved please contact: **welcomingcedarrapids@cedar-rapids.org**.

The partners listed below are key participants in at least one of the action steps in this plan:



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THANK YOU!

Hundreds of community members were involved in building this plan, but a few deserve particular recognition.

Steering Committee

Jasmine Almoayyed – City of Cedar Rapids
Sravanthi Baddam – Collins Aerospace
Kim Becicka – Kirkwood Community College
David Connolly – City of Cedar Rapids
Les Garner – Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation
Paula Land – Catherine McAuley Center
Brandy Lindsey – Nordstrom
William Micheel – City of Cedar Rapids
Rama Muzo – Intercultural Iowa
Michael Oldman – Nordstrom
Alejandro Pino – YPN
Stefanie Rupert – Collins Community Credit Union
Jamie Toledo – Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance
Ashley Vanorny – City of Cedar Rapids
Leslie Wright – United Way of East Central Iowa
Sara Zejnic – Catherine McAuley Center

Business Development and Entrepreneurship Committee

Sravanthi Baddam – Collins Aerospace
Maurice Davis – Jane Boyd
Elize Dushimimana – Eastern Iowa African Diaspora
James Klein – Cedar Rapids Bank and Trust
Paula Land – Catherine McAuley Center
Victor Oyervides – Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
Peggy Rubero – Catherine McAuley Center
Lemi Tilahun – Lift Global Group / Eastern Iowa African Diaspora
LaSheila Yates – Cultural Perspectives, LLC
Julie Zielinski – Entrepreneurial Development Center

Welcoming Community Committee

Andrew Agyemang – Alliant Energy
Elizabeth Cwik – Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation
Melissa Drzycimski – Parent Education Consortium
Katie Hallman – Theatre Cedar Rapids
Susan Koch – Double Tree Hilton
Kala Liebe – Hands UP Communications
Gilbert Nunez – Alliant Energy
Julie Stow – Tourism Cedar Rapids
Sara Zejnic – Catherine McAuley Center

Workforce and Education Committee

Sarah Blakeney – Catherine McAuley Center
Morgan Boniface – Parent Education Consortium
Tara Brokovich – Kirkwood Community College
Rohit Dalal – Coe College
Anne Dugger – Catherine McAuley Center
Jean De Dieu Havugimana – HACAP
Stephanie Hasakis – Kirkwood Community College
William Micheel – City of Cedar Rapids
Jacquie Montoya – HACAP
Becky Streff – ESP International

Finally, we wish to thank the New American Economy and Welcoming America for their catalytic and continuing support of our collaborative effort. In particular, we appreciate the efforts and support of Kate Brick and Molly Hilligoss who lent us their expertise, data and research capabilities, and support throughout this process.

New Americans in Cedar Rapids, Iowa

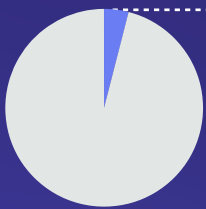
The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County¹



State & Local

Population Growth

Immigrants made up



4.4%

of the total population in Linn County, Iowa, in 2017.

47.1%

of total population growth in the county was attributable to immigrants.

Between 2012 and 2017, the immigrant population in the county increased by:

61.8%

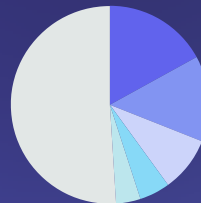
The overall population grew by:

3.7%

9,576

immigrants lived in the county in 2017. Their top five countries of origin were:

1. India.....17.0%
2. Mexico.....13.6%
3. Vietnam.....8.8%
4. Canada.....5.1%
5. China.....4.3%



Spending Power & Tax Contributions

Given their income, immigrants contributed significantly to state and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state and local governments.

Amount earned by immigrant households in 2017:

\$305.6M

\$53.9M

went to federal taxes.²

FEDERAL

\$26.1M

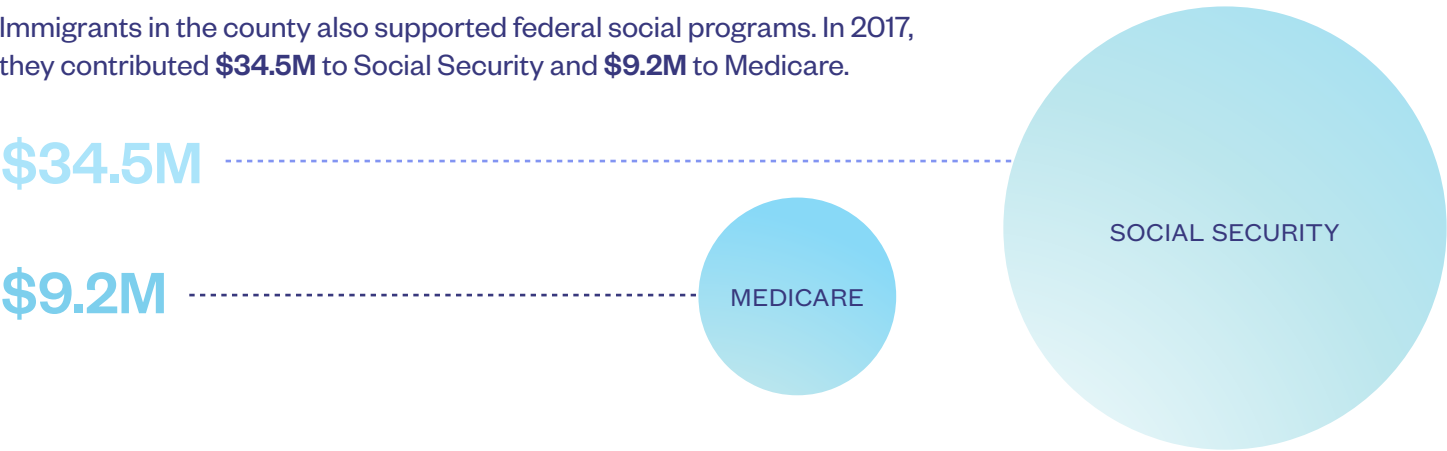
went to state and local taxes.³

STATE AND LOCAL

Leaving them with **\$225.6M** in spending power.

Spending Power & Tax Contributions (Continued)

Immigrants in the county also supported federal social programs. In 2017, they contributed **\$34.5M** to Social Security and **\$9.2M** to Medicare.



18.7%
of immigrants in the county received Medicare or Medicaid, compared with **30.6%** of U.S.-born residents in 2017.



78.2%
of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while **18.7%** had public healthcare coverage in 2017.

Workforce

Although the foreign-born made up **4.4%** of the county’s overall population, they represented **5.3%** of its working-age⁴ population, **5.0%** of its employed labor force, and **15.1%** of its STEM⁵ workers in 2017.



SPOTLIGHT ON

Minouche Bandubaila

HOME VISITOR, YPN AFRICA PARENT CAFE

Minouche Bandubaila won the Diversity Visa Lottery in 2007—a lucky break she couldn't refuse despite the circumstances. Some 13.2 million people globally applied for the shot at a U.S. Green Card that year; 50,000 won.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Rohan Bhatnagar

SENIOR ENGINEERING MANAGER,
COLLINS AEROSPACE

Rohan Bhatnagar is originally from Jaipur, a city in India rich in cultural heritage. He spent his school years, however, in Lagos, on the coast of Nigeria, where his father took a finance job. And, after graduation, Bhatnagar pursued his own professional passion on yet another continent, enrolling in 2008 at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida, where he earned an engineering degree and an MBA. "I've had an interesting journey," he says.

Bhatnagar is now a senior engineering manager at Collins Aerospace, where he leads a team of 13 engineers who bring their own varied stories. "My diverse background has contributed to my success," Bhatnagar says. "Once you've seen so many things in your life, and assimilated into completely different cultures, you begin to see people really well."

In Nigeria, Bhatnagar saw disease outbreaks, dictatorship, coups, and war. "I've driven to school and seen bodies on the road," he says. When he landed in America at age 18, he was put in a small dorm suite with five other freshmen, "every one of them white and from the United States."

"Initially it was rough because I was kind of the lone wolf," he says. "They were not able to grasp the kind of background I came from, the kind of poverty and illiteracy I experienced."

"But they welcomed me with open arms. They learned a lot about me, my culture, and I learned a lot about them. That really eased the transition for me."

The pattern repeated itself in Cedar Rapids, where his colleagues embraced him and he met a local woman whose American family did as well. They are now married with a new baby. He is working with the Friends of India Association, and would like to see Cedar Rapids organizations actively reach out to include other new Americans.

"People underestimate the importance of a strong social group for a new immigrant in the process of assimilation," Bhatnagar says. "That group that I had around me—my college friends, my work friends—it was instrumental. It's kind of the main thing that made me succeed and got me to where I am in the community."

Bandubaila was 23, married, and pregnant. And, for financial reasons, her husband would have to stay behind in Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where they are both from. He would not join her for seven years, after she became a U.S. citizen. "When I came here I was pregnant, I stayed home with the baby, I didn't have much support," she recalls. "It was hard, especially the medical system."

The visa lottery was created in 1990 to help diversify the immigrant population, and is offered only in countries with low levels of immigration to the United States. Winners must pass a security and health screening and be able to support themselves financially. Beyond those assurances, however, it is largely up to receiving communities to help these new Americans integrate and thrive.

Bandubaila had an undergraduate law degree and an uncle in Cedar Rapids she could live with. But, while fluent in French, Swahili and Lingala, she spoke no English, and was lost when it came to navigating the medical system. It took her more than two years to find her way to English classes and work as a hotel housekeeper. Afterward, she thrived, going on to work as a certified nursing assistant and dedicating her free time to helping other new immigrant mothers.

"I was assisting getting them to hospital, I would stay all night through the birth," she says. "I don't want them to go through what I went through, just doing it by myself."

Bandubaila is now a home visitor for YPN's Africa Parent Cafe—work that is straightforward yet has profound implications: finding a mom a ride to the grocery store; or telling a new arrival about jobs that match their training and desire.

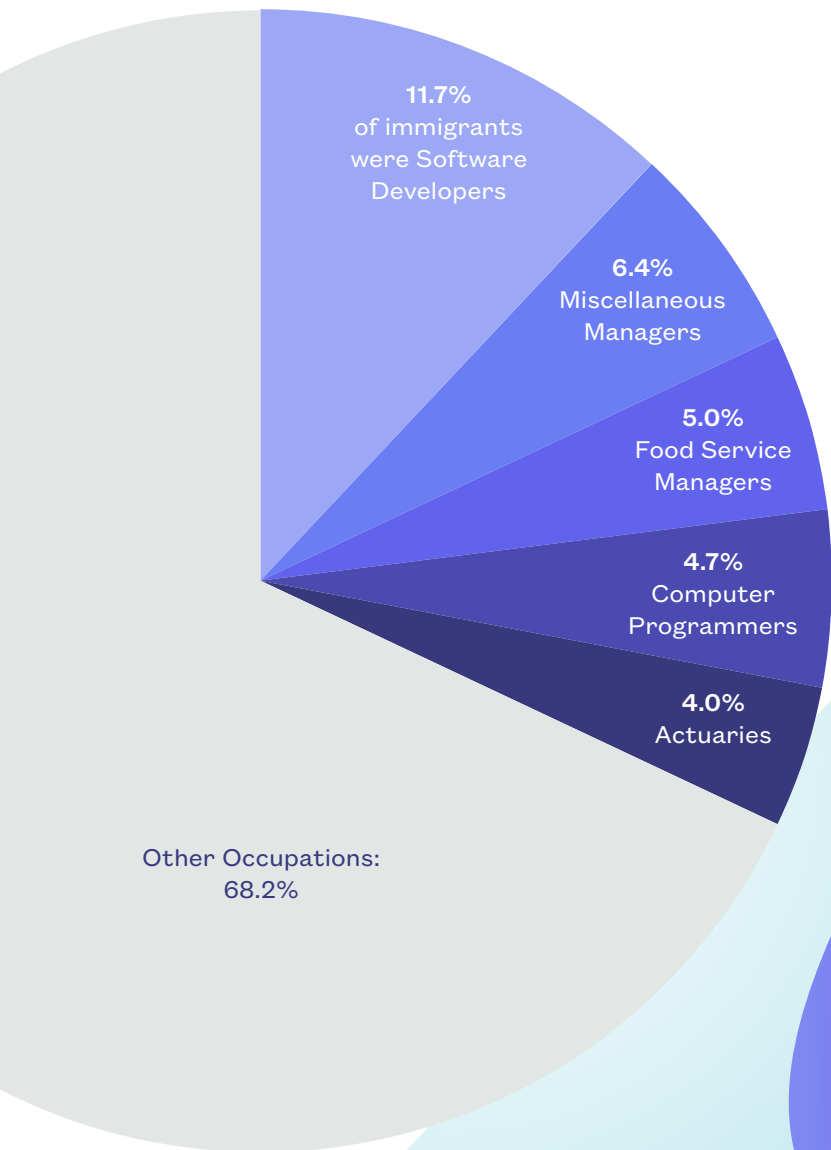
"When you are coming to the U.S., it depends on where you land," she says, "But you are the only agent of your happiness and success."

Workforce (Continued)

Immigrants played an important role in several **key industries** in the county. This included:



Immigrants tended to work in these **occupations** in the county in 2017:

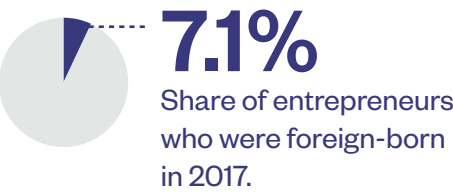


Because of the role immigrants play in the workforce helping companies keep jobs on U.S. soil, we estimate that:

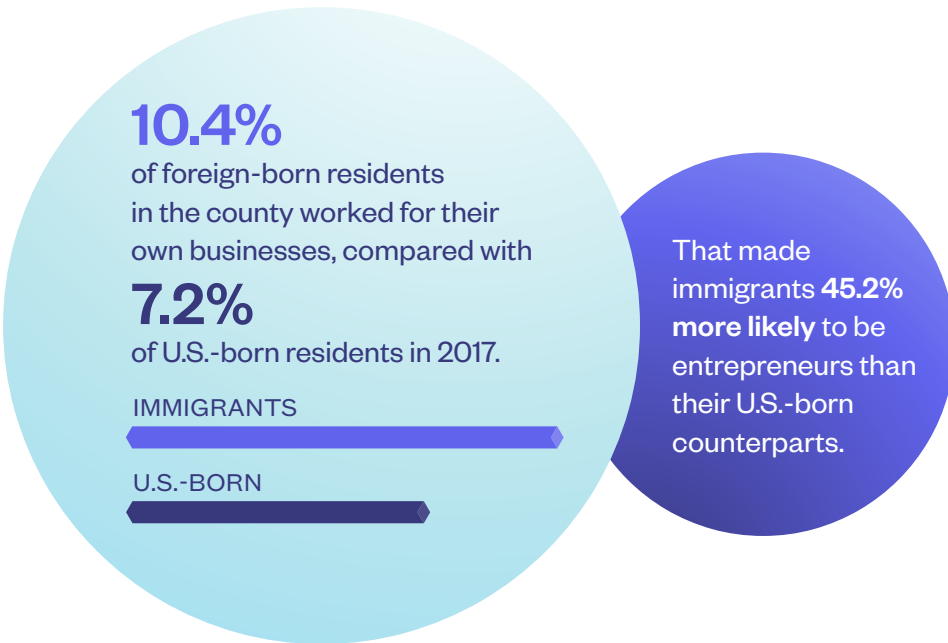
*Immigrants living in the city helped create or preserve **440 local manufacturing jobs** that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere by 2017.⁸*

Entrepreneurship

Despite making up **4.4%** of the population, immigrants made up **7.1%** of the business owners in county in 2017.

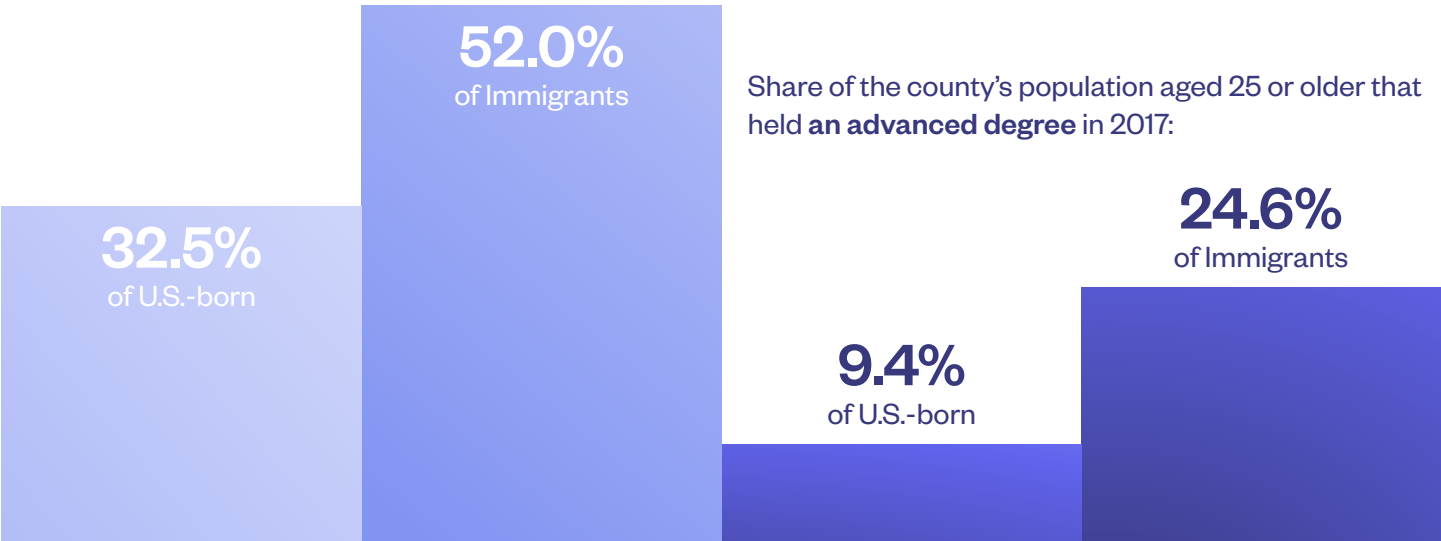


Businesses in the Region, 2012	Sales Revenue	Number of Paid Employees
AFRICAN AMERICAN-OWNED	\$15.3M	129
ASIAN-OWNED ⁹	\$84.7M	572



Education

Share of the county’s population aged 25 or older that held a **bachelor’s degree or higher** in 2017:



Education (Continued)

535

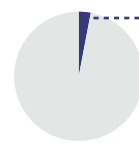
students who were enrolled in colleges and universities in the county during the fall of 2015 were temporary residents.¹⁰

66

local jobs were supported by international students.

\$13.2M

was spent by international students in the 2017-18 academic year.¹¹

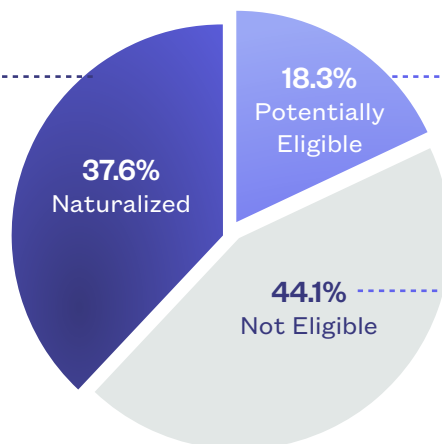


3.1%

of public school students under 18 were born abroad.

Naturalization

Share of immigrants in the county who were naturalized U.S. citizens.



Share of immigrants in the county who were likely eligible to naturalize.

Share of immigrants ineligible for naturalization for various reasons including: temporary visas, residency requirements, and undocumented.

1 Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 5-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2012 and 2017 and figures refer to Linn County, Iowa.

2 U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2016. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2013."

3 Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2015. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

4 We define working age as 16-64 years of age.

5 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

6 Professional services: Most of these industries include professions that require a degree or a license, such as legal services, accounting, scientific research, consulting services, etc.

7 General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.

8 Vigdor, Jacob. 2013. "Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to Strengthening the Housing Market." New American Economy.

9 2012 Survey of Business Owners, U.S. Census Bureau

10 Data on total student enrollment in the county is derived from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics. Temporary residents refer to people who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

11 Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA, the association of international educators.