Regional Economic Development through Immigrant Integration: The Philadelphia Experience

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The Local Picture

- Philadelphia is a “Re-Emerging Gateway” for immigrants
- More than **500,000** immigrants in the region; more than **170,000** in the city
- Local immigration is notable for its racial/ethnic diversity, and for the high levels of college education (**38%** of immigrants vs. **32%** of US-born adults)
Over Time, Increasing Immigration in City & Metro Area

City of Philadelphia Immigration Growth

Greater Phila Metro Area Immigration Growth

Source: US Census Bureau.
“Among its peer regions, metropolitan Philadelphia has the largest and fastest growing immigrant population.”

*Brookings Institution, Recent Immigration to Philadelphia: Regional Change in a Re-Emerging Gateway. (2008)*

“This is Not a Misprint: Philadelphia’s Population is Up”

March 10, 2011
Many Factors Contributed to This Growth

Today, we’ll focus on the Welcoming Center.
What We’ve Done: Some Accomplishments

- Placed **2,000** legally work-authorized immigrant jobseekers in employment
- Assisted **300** entrepreneurs in launching or improving their businesses
- Helped **400** adults to learn English, civics, or prepare for the GED exam
- Published **14** major publications, (including *Career Guides* and *How to Start a Business* guides), plus **2** research studies and **11** detailed data snapshots
How We Got Here: The Process

Founder Anne O’Callaghan’s contribution: Seeing the nonprofit immigration services landscape through a physical therapist’s eyes.

- Evaluate the problem
- Develop a treatment plan
- Know that improvement will be incremental
- Use benchmarks to gauge progress

Welcoming Center Founder
Anne O’Callaghan
Step 1: Assess the Landscape

- We began by **gathering data** about the region’s demographics, existing service providers, and gaps.
- We looked to New York, Chicago, Boston for ideas.
Step 2: Review and Analyze the Data

Our founder began this work with no existing Welcoming Center programs -- and thus no vested interest in a particular finding.

Three major findings:

- **New workers were needed** to replenish PA's aging workforce
- Immigrant jobseekers had **no specialized workforce services available** to them
- English was vital for employment, yet **no comprehensive list of English classes** existed
Step 3: Share Our Findings

- We reached out to policymakers, practitioners, and others.

- The conclusion: There was a **serious lack** of workforce and economic development services for immigrants, and no organization stepping up to remedy it.
Central Insight in Founding of Welcoming Center: Use an Economic Development Lens

- **Immigrants** are not burdens or victims; they are **assets**.
A Different Approach to Immigration Services

- Multiethnic – not specific to any one group
- Not faith-based (those groups already existed)
- Regional, working actively in suburbs as well as city
- Committed to non-duplication of services (and funding!)
- Keen interest in empirical data, statistics, and evaluation
Outcomes First
Then Figure Out the Services That Lead You There

• “No one thrives without a job” – employment services

• “Why is it so hard to figure out how to get a city permit?” How to Start a Business guides

• “Why does it take years for a skilled immigrant to navigate the re-credentialing process?” Career Guides
Becoming Re-credentialed in a Professional Field

Immigrant engineers, doctors, and accountants who seek to practice in the US typically undergo a lengthy process:

It often takes 3-5 years.

The Welcoming Center has published Career Guides for popular professions.
Many immigrants arrive in the US already speaking English.

Others are getting their first “real world” experience of a language they learned from books.

The Welcoming Center offers English, civics, and GED classes.

Resource: ESL Class Database  www.welcomingcenter.org/immigrants/learn-english
Launching a Small Business

From retail shops to pharmaceutical research companies, **immigrant entrepreneurs** are a crucial ingredient in the economic vitality of the Philadelphia region.

*Importantly, our small business services are open to US-born entrepreneurs as well.*
Merchants in small retail businesses who have limited English skills may be more isolated.

EFE builds practical skills, such as:

- Increased competence and confidence in communicating
- Strategies to resolve misunderstandings and defuse conflict
- Improved customer service skills
- Increased cultural sensitivity and positive community interaction
How We Are Funded

- Federal Workforce Investment Act Title I funds (distributed through state Department of Labor & Industry and local Workforce Investment Boards)

- Federal & state adult education funds through WIA Title II, AEFLA (distributed through state Dept. of Education)

- Federal Community Services Block Grant and related funds (through state Dept. of Community & Economic Development; city Dept. of Commerce)

- Private foundations, corporate support, and individual donors
Where We Are Heading

Continuing to Gather & Analyze Data
to measure impact on individuals, communities, and our region

Improving & Expanding Services
through new partnerships and use of technology

Building a Global Community, Locally
by cultivating our alumni as ambassadors, advisors, donors
We provide consulting services to municipalities, chambers of commerce, business associations, and others who seek to improve regional economic vitality through immigrant integration.
Peter Gonazles, President & CEO
1617 John F. Kennedy Blvd.
Suite 555
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-557-2626
peter@welcomingcenter.org