

The Detroit News

WE Global – Leading Rust Belt Immigrant Innovation

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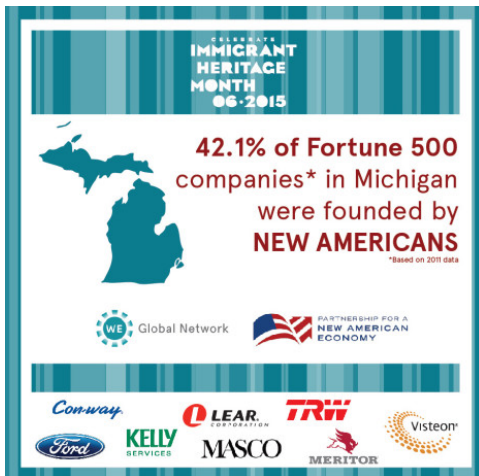


Innovation. Entrepreneurship. Equity. Inclusion. Global cities. Future cities. Forward cities. Growth. Revitalization. Diversity. These are the buzzwords of today's new economy, social innovation, and urban policy thinkers. Today, Rust Belt cities are quietly re-inventing themselves in ways that national media—as well as new economy, social innovation, and urban policy leaders—have largely missed.

Last week, the Welcoming Economies Global Network (WE Global) held its third annual convening in Dayton, Ohio (following 2013 and 2014 convenings in Detroit and Pittsburgh, respectively). The convening has grown to 300 local economic development, local and state government, and nonprofit leaders from nearly 20 communities across the Rust Belt. The WE Global Network is comprised of local immigrant economic development initiatives across nearly two-dozen Rust Belt cities. WE Global is a project of Welcoming America in partnership with Global Detroit.

While the WE Global convening attracted the attention of the White House and enjoyed keynote remarks from Felicia Escobar, President Obama's chief immigration policy advisor, the group focused on the local and state efforts to build upon the contributions that immigrants and refugees make to the Rust Belt.

David Kallick, Senior Fellow at the Fiscal Policy Institute, shared research with the convening that immigrant business owners account for 28 percent of all the Main Street business owners (including 58 percent of all the dry cleaners, 53 percent of all the grocery stores, and 38 percent of all the restaurants) in America. Kallick's research also notes that immigrants accounted for 48 percent of overall growth of business ownership in the U.S. between 2000-2013 and all of the growth in Main Street business in 31 of the country's 50 largest metropolitan areas, including Detroit.

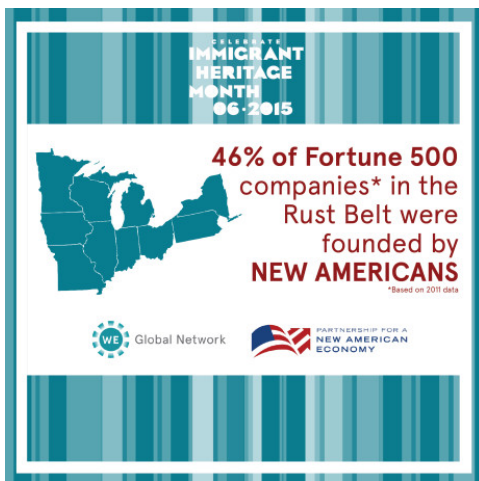


In addition to growth in Main Street businesses, immigrants are at the source of most of the population growth for America’s 50 largest metros, and virtually all the growth in Rust Belt cities. As Rust Belt cities seek to combat a half-century of population loss, there is no other urban policy or solution that can hold a candle to the impacts that foreign-born immigrants and refugees have had on stabilizing and reversing population loss in America’s cities.

The WE Global Network Convening did more than just highlight broad national or regional policy themes and data. It chronicled the innovations that local immigrant economic

development actors are implementing across the Rust Belt. The Convening included the release of Welcoming America’s Guide to Immigrant Economic Development to provide local and state economic development practitioners, local chambers, local government officials, and nonprofit organizations with an overview of the innovations being implemented in entrepreneurship this field.

Global Detroit is a leader in this movement and the WE Global Network. A 2010 report issued with support from the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce serves as the strategy template of how embracing immigrants can serve as a foundational element in the city’s rebirth, as well as in the region’s economic recovery, as a means to benefit all of us—not just the immigrants.



Much like the immigrants that built the Rust Belt into the world’s apex of prosperity in the 20th century, today’s immigrants seek the economic opportunity to pursue the American Dream. While largely lost in the national debate about immigration reform, Global Detroit, WE Global cities, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, and Michigan Governor Rick Snyder are embracing immigrants and turning to them to reinvent our cities and economies. The promise is another century of economic prosperity.

For more information about how WE Global is leading Rust Belt immigrant innovation, visit www.weglobalnetwork.org.