

## **How immigrants can help revitalize America's cities**

*A new tool reveals the impact immigrants can have on neighborhoods through home ownership*

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*Sergio Martinez arrived in the U.S. at age 3. Pictured here in front of his Detroit home, he has been an active part in revitalizing his community, starting a block club to improve the neighborhood and renovate other vacant homes on his block. Photo by Deborah Hakes/Welcoming America*

Far from the rhetoric of the presidential election, local mayors, counties, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, and other community leaders quietly have been embracing immigrants as a source of economic growth and community revitalization. Nearly two-dozen initiatives across the Rust Belt have launched innovative programs that range from international student retention of STEM talent to immigrant entrepreneurship training programs. These relatively young programs collaborate through the Welcoming Economies Global (WE Global) Network, a project of Welcoming America in partnership with Global Detroit.

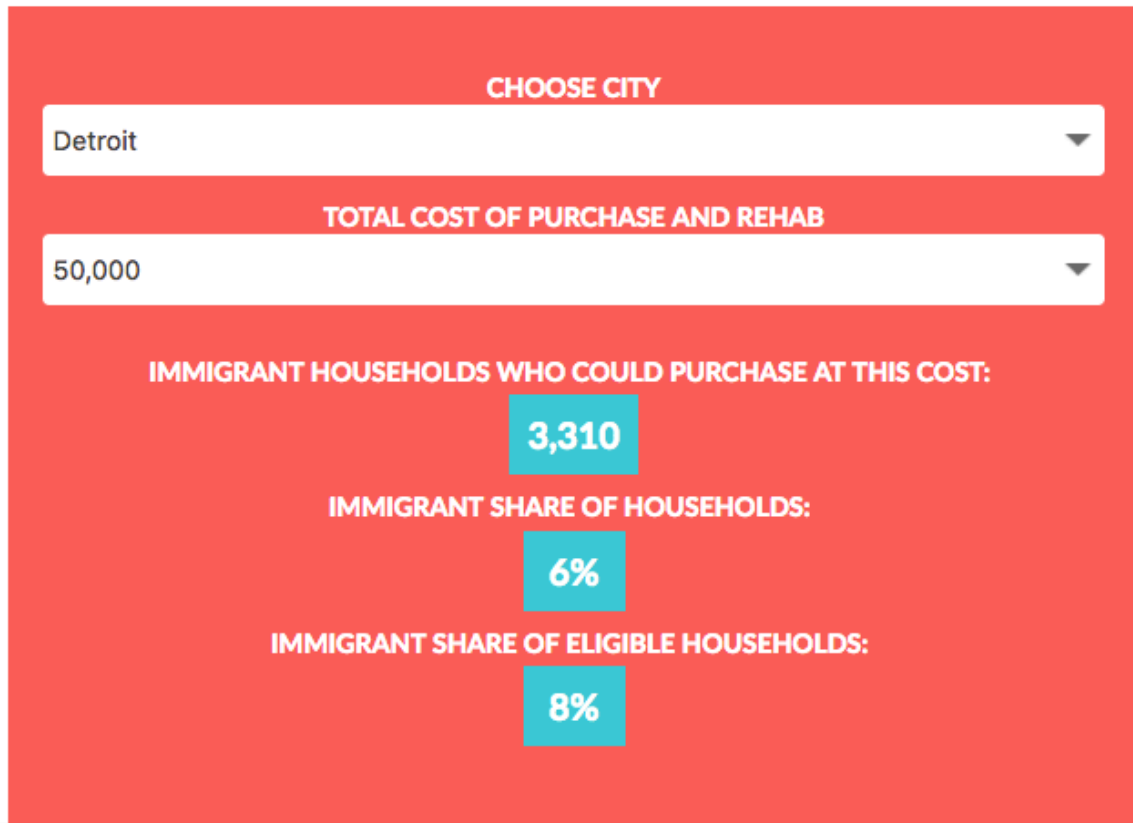
Earlier this year, Allstate and Atlantic Media awarded Global Detroit with one of its six inaugural Renewal Awards for innovative work tackling some of America's most pressing issues.

Since receiving this award, Global Detroit and WE Global have worked with the Fiscal Policy Institute on research that suggests that immigrants represent some of the brightest potential for revitalizing urban communities, especially those with vacant and distressed properties.

The research includes an online tool for cities, urban planners, community development leaders, and others working on blight and housing issues in 23 Rust Belt cities to instantly understand how many renter households could afford a vacant or rehabbed home based on selling price, needed repairs, and related mortgage, tax, insurance, and utility costs.

### Try the tool

How many immigrants in your city could buy and rehab an abandoned property?



The data reveals that in 22 of 23 cities, immigrant households have the highest prospect among existing renters to be able to afford such a home. While immigrants remain a smaller portion of the population of these cities (just 11 percent of the total), they remain a critical component for successfully revitalizing neighborhoods and stabilizing population loss. In fact, no great American city that lost population over the last 50 years

has been able to grow its population without substantial increase in immigrant population.

Global Detroit is keenly aware of the immigrant potential. Over the last two years, the organization has worked with Latino immigrants in the Mexicantown neighborhood in southwest Detroit to facilitate the purchase and transformation of 15 vacant tax-foreclosed homes.

Sergio Martinez is one of these new homeowners and one of the more than 700,000 DREAMers granted relief under President Obama's Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) program; he arrived in the U.S. at age 3. Currently a manager at Green Dot Stables, a popular local restaurant that serves an eclectic mix of gourmet sliders, Sergio has started a block club to improve the neighborhood around his new home and to renovate other vacant homes on his block.

Global Detroit's efforts to revitalize Detroit's "opportunity neighborhoods," as it calls them, is not limited to rehabbing vacant housing. Working with [ProsperUS Detroit](#) and the [Detroit Economic Growth Corporation](#), the organization has helped immigrant entrepreneurs apply for and receive grants to expand their businesses and create more jobs.

Global Detroit also recently completed a six-month engagement process in the Banglatown neighborhood that brought together Bengali, Yemeni, African-American, and white residents to identify common concerns and priorities and develop coordinated approaches to improving the neighborhood for all residents. Global Detroit is working with Detroit Mayor Michael Duggan's new Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Detroit City Council Immigration Task Force to create stronger and more vibrant neighborhoods across the city.

Far from the national demagoguery of the immigration issue, Global Detroit and the nearly two-dozen WE Global members across the Rust Belt are helping immigrants to better integrate into the economic and civic life of our cities. Through research and innovative programs, they are highlighting America's immigrant potential.

*Editor's note: The Renewal Project is made possible by Allstate.*

Link: <http://www.therenewalproject.com/heres-how-americas-immigrants-have-the-potential-to-revitalize-cities/>