



Immigration Recommendations for St. Louis Region: How can we Jump-Start Growth?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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This report provides an overview of the characteristics of the immigrant population in the St. Louis metropolitan statistical area (MSA) and the services available to them; analyzes immigration programs and policies of ten metropolitan areas¹ comparable to St. Louis on a range of factors including population size, economic performance, and regional location; and makes recommendations intended to make St. Louis a national leader in attracting, integrating and retaining immigrants in the coming years. The study on which this report is based did not investigate the responsiveness of the St. Louis community to the immigration initiative and did not develop detailed strategies for implementing the recommendations presented. This paper instead is a first step in a multi-year effort to improve the immigration climate in St. Louis and increase the region's foreign born to reverse the region's demographic decline and improve the economic environment for all people in our region.

St. Louis Immigrant Population

St. Louis has less than 5 percent foreign-born living in our region, placing our region with one-quarter the immigrants of other major MSAs.² The St. Louis MSA ranks in the top 20 in population, but 42nd in the size of the foreign born population. While St. Louis attracts 3,000 to 6,000 immigrants each year, they come from an extremely diverse range of countries of origin. Data for 2005 through 2011 show that while about one quarter of immigrants came from the three countries of Bosnia, India, and the People's Republic of China, more than half were groups of less than 600 persons from 128 different countries. The foreign-born population in metropolitan St. Louis is not only small and diverse, but also dispersed. Even among the largest ethnic/national groups, there are few enclaves.

The St. Louis foreign-born population matches up well against comparable cities on a number of economic factors. St. Louis is average in terms of non-fluent English speakers, immigrants receiving food stamps, and immigrants below the poverty line. St. Louis is above average in percentage of the foreign-born community with high school and college degrees. However, St. Louis is comparatively low in terms of employment for immigrants, with only 65% of the foreign-born community active in the labor force.

The rationale behind our efforts should be continually stressed. Increasing immigration can help St. Louis close our jobs gap. Over the past decade, St. Louis has lost 25,700 jobs compared to gains of

¹ Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Detroit, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Louisville, Nashville and Pittsburgh.

² The St. Louis region or MSA includes 8 counties and St. Louis City in Missouri as well as eight counties in Illinois.

36,800 in Kansas City, 101,300 in Nashville, 63,000 in Indianapolis and 94,000 in Baltimore. These cities also have attracted substantially more immigrants. Immigrants lead to job creation for two reasons. The foreign-born tend to be more entrepreneurial; e.g., the Kauffman Foundation shows that immigrants are twice as likely to start small businesses as native-born. Small businesses lead to further job creation by direct hiring but also by increasing economic activity through local purchasing of services and supplies. Additionally, business location theory posits that an educated, skilled workforce is a critical factor in a firm's decision to locate in particular regions; firms require an array of different skills sets, and immigrants can be an important component of an increasingly specialized work-force. St. Louis' aging workforce and negative net migration of native born further imply the need for immigrations to slow the region's demographic decline. Lastly, note the focus on foreign born inflows is only part of the region's emphasis on improving the economic climate of the area. For instance, the St. Louis Regional Chamber is coordinating efforts among business leaders on increasing the educational profile of all our citizens; its goal is that the region will become the 10th most educated workforce as measured by college degrees. The Census shows our immigrants are already highly educated; hence, the Immigration Initiative could be a critical component of the region's plan to significantly boost the competitiveness of St. Louis workforce over the next decade.

St. Louis Immigration Resources

While St. Louis has resources to address the major needs of the immigrant community there are several characteristics that should be understood and addressed

- The organizations that provide services to immigrants are highly fractionalized compared to other cities. St. Louis has many smaller organizations providing immigration services and many organizations that provide services to non-specific communities (i.e., both native and foreign born). St. Louis has the resources available to support increased immigration, but lacks the overall coordination and integration of these services under a cohesive strategy to increase immigration. And there are fewer resources directed at newly arrived immigrants compared to settled immigrants or the refugee community.
- There is a lack of support for foreign-born college students. No doubt, there are a number of resources for these students available through their schools. However, these resources do not appear to be integrated with the larger network of immigration organizations. Efforts should be made to integrate these resources to capitalize on the strong reputation of our local colleges and universities and to try to retain these students after graduation. A survey of international graduate students at

universities in St. Louis documented they are interested in pursuing local internships and potentially in working in the region if an opportunity arises. However, follow-up information shows that few foreign-born students are encouraged to pursue internships.

- Few St. Louis organizations provide services targeted at the local business community. This includes both services directed at helping local business hire immigrants and services to help immigrant entrepreneurs. This is a key area to attract and retain immigration. Efforts to increase services in this area could be tied to efforts to retain foreign-born college students by assisting local businesses in the process of sponsoring work visas and internships.
- Very few active organizations have statewide or regional affiliations. A pro-immigration strategy should attempt to increase linkages between St. Louis organizations and other groups active at the state and regional level to facilitate information sharing, identify additional resources, and strengthen efforts to advocate for pro-immigration policies at the state level.
- Not many of the immigrant services organizations are affiliated with a religious organization. Other cities have found success in reaching out to the local religious community, particularly as a means to build support for immigration in the native-born population. Our religious community efforts so far including Catholic charities have been low profile and their efforts need more engagement with the overall effort to raise their visibility in the community.

Best Practices from Comparable Metropolitan Areas

Welcoming initiatives in other cities were either focused on improving social services or attracting educated foreigners to fill highly skilled positions in business. The most effective initiatives were those led by a strong public leadership. Several of the initiatives have community engagement activities that were targeted at the native-born population. In terms of initiatives improving social services, cities such as Cincinnati and Nashville have engaged non-profit organizations, leaders of foreign-born communities and other individuals in crafting recommendations to the city to increase immigration. Many cities using business initiatives as a strategy were interested in attracting foreign talent to fill skilled jobs to help grow their industry. Global Detroit and Global Cleveland are both based on this premise.

Another factor that showed up several times was directives from local governments. Several cities have created departments in the Mayor's Office for Globalization to oversee immigration policy, providing a directive to resources and inclusivity initiatives. The City of Louisville has an Office for Globalization, which sponsors International Councils and offers a relocation guide with relevant information about moving there. The Mayor of Baltimore recently passed an anti-discrimination order. Nashville uses the

strong leadership and influence of the Mayor and Chamber of Commerce to endorse immigration initiatives and push them forward. Such high-profile leadership provides additional advantages in increasing the publicity of the effort to attract immigration.

Recommendations

- (1) *Coordination, Communication and Assessment.* Many cities have a regional coordinator of immigration efforts who works on initiatives, organizes initiatives among different NGOs and government agencies as well as communicate these efforts to the public. Global Cincinnati and others push social media and branding; Pittsburgh has a program called Connecting Bridges, and like most cities coordinate through their World Affairs Council. Global Detroit is part of a “wide-range of activities that welcome and retain foreign-born residents and investment into the region, as well as help position the transformation of the economy in southeast Michigan.” St. Louis has more than 400 fragmented organizations that provide services to immigrants; many are local chapters of national organizations, while others are home-grown. The number of organizations is not necessarily a weakness, as there are a wide range of diverse organizations interested in helping immigrants, and likely implies the region has unused capacity in handling increased immigrants. Additionally, many cities involve religious organizations more than St. Louis in providing immigrant needs. It would be useful not only to assess these organizations’ role and learn from their successful activities but also to coordinate and communicate with them to achieve a common goal of improving the immigrant experience in the region.
- (2) *Launch a Welcoming Center with local government involvement.* The region ranks well in accommodating refugee needs (due to the International Institute along with many smaller organizations); however, we do not service employment based immigrants and their families well. Other cities do a better job of connecting people with each other and companies including for instance cultural events, and educational events aimed at children of immigrants; e.g., Global Cincinnati has a variety of activities aimed at K-8 including cultural presentations.
- (3) *Create a Virtual Ethnic Enclave.* The research clearly shows that immigrants are attracted to cities with other immigrants. St. Louis has thousands of Bosnians, Chinese, Filipinos, Germans, Indians, Koreans, Mexicans, Russians and Vietnamese; further, we have hundreds of foreign born from more than two dozen other countries. We should try to leverage our numbers by connecting them together online and in person. The Welcoming Center can host events including speakers, potluck dinners and entertainment for our diverse population. Our universities and top BioTech research facilities often hire immigrants whose spouses and families are isolated from members of their own country. If we want to continue to hire top talent, we need to make St. Louis immigrants not feel isolated or overwhelmed; therefore, it is critical to engage and integrate the spouses with the community. Louisville has events for immigrant professionals; this program would target all immigrants. We need to set St. Louis apart, and create unique initiatives that connect our immigrants to each other and the community.

- (4) *Promote Policies through Political Leadership.* Dayton and other cities received considerable positive press through their leadership's announcements of a more welcoming city/region. Pittsburgh Mayor signed the Partnership of New Americans, which brings together mayors and corporate leaders. A St. Louis announcement could include welcoming immigrants, highlighting successful immigrants and their contributions, announce new initiatives such as a coordinating body, a Welcoming Center, business community interaction, police sensitivity training and more. A reoccurring theme of the Immigrant survey is that St. Louis needs to raise the profile of immigrants' contributions in the area and improve attitudes towards them. A central finding is that: "Successful initiatives, at least in the words of the organizations and news stories about them, have come from local government. This strong public leadership attracted media attention to the initiative which, in the case of Dayton, has pushed it forward and held the City accountable."
- (5) *Engage the Business Community.* The St. Louis Regional Chamber, the Regional Business Council, Civic Progress, Partnership for Downtown St. Louis and others have indicated their support for the immigration initiative as a method of creating both consumers and workers for their businesses. We need their continued support and leadership in communicating to their members that increasing immigration is a goal that will make the region more business friendly. Additionally, the St. Louis Business Community needs to provide sponsorships for particular immigration programs and activities as a way of promoting St. Louis and rejuvenating the community.
- (6) *Connect to the Local Community.* We need to broadcast our efforts to the local Community and make them more aware of the necessity of encouraging more immigrants to our region as well as provide a more welcoming environment from the grassroots level. Behind the scenes work includes engaging important local constituencies including the African American community, regional chambers, local municipal governments and religious institutions. The Chicago Immigration Project is designed as a bipartisan project, and brings in law enforcement officials, advocacy groups, Democrats, Republications, Muslims, Christians, the Jewish Federation and students. Many cities cited a failure to engage with those opposed which then slowed down efforts.
- (7) *Include International Students.* Our survey of international students had several interesting findings. It shows that nearly 80 percent of international students want a local internship that may lead to a possible job. At the same time, very few international students were encouraged to obtain internships; there is a large perceived gap between actual and desired internships by international students. The survey also indicated international students were happy at our local institutions, and would consider staying in St. Louis if an opportunity arose.
- (8) *Communicate with MO, IL and DC Legislators.* Missouri lags behind other states in efforts to integrate immigrants including *professionally recertification* to make their degrees/education count. We should coordinate further with Kansas City, other large cities in MO and Southern Illinois near St. Louis. Additionally, we should continue to communicate to our legislators in D.C.

(9) *Open up to new ideas both big and small.* To be the fastest growing immigrant destination, we need to invite ideas from our community. The Welcoming Center and Coordination leader should solicit ideas from our foreign-born, our native-born, our businesses and universities. We need to broadcast our efforts to solicit people to come here. Immigrants create jobs, and we need to let our native-born know this, so they can aid in helping more immigrants come to this region. Recent discussions with members of the immigration panel have highlighted an entire range of ideas to increase immigration. For instance, suggestions include highlighting our efforts in the local ethnic newspapers and eliciting their support and suggestions as well; promote success stories of both our first and second generation immigrants – from a CEO to an excellent student who has won an award at a local school – as a way of generating local support; leverage what St. Louis excels at – Biotech and Healthcare and University Education as a way of generating support for encouraging immigrants in the STEM fields; at the same time, promote an environment of inclusiveness – solicit suggestions of how to welcome immigrants who engage in low skilled work – as they are needed in many growing fields including healthcare. Their children will grow-up as St. Louisans enjoying Cardinal’s baseball. This means that for St. Louis to grow, we should welcome the foreign born and their children as part of building the community and attracting even more immigrants in the future.

**Immigration Initiatives for St. Louis
Study Summary**

Opportunity

Recommendation

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