Immigrants have long contributed to the economic vitality of the state. As entrepreneurs, immigrants supply jobs, revitalize investment in areas that have declined and provide needed resources to community members. Immigrants also play an outsized role in the economy. Though they make up 7% of the state workforce, they account for 12% of all business owners and 20% of all Main Street business owners.

Cities like Detroit depend on immigrants to sustain a strong economy. In fact, Detroit is one of 31 metro areas across the country where immigrants make up all growth in small businesses.

Immigrant entrepreneurs are also helping to put money back into the economy. According to the American Community Survey 2016 5-year data estimates, all immigrant business owners collectively generated $1.3 billion in earnings, and immigrant Main Street business owners alone generated $336 million in earnings.

In an era of migration, it is important to have policies that enable all Michiganders to participate fully in the economy. Here are five steps policymakers can take to strengthen outcomes among immigrant entrepreneurs:

1. **Facilitating access to financing.** Raising capital is one of the most common barriers to successfully opening and operating a business. Growing the number of Community Development Fund Institutions (CDFIs) across the state can help provide access to loans for small businesses, banking services as well as business management training.

2. **Leveraging federal funds to support small business development.** The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) is a federal program that supports local and state community development initiatives. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) administers CDBG programs in Michigan, including ones that assist entrepreneurs. Targeted outreach to immigrant entrepreneurs and materials in languages other than English could help connect entrepreneurs with CDBG-funded programs across Michigan.

3. **Providing business planning and management training.** Providing culturally competent business planning and management training can go a long way in integrating immigrants in mainstream business networks and practices.

4. **Supporting immigrant and U.S.-born business owners while easing racial tensions.** Developing “welcoming city” initiatives that address the needs of both U.S.-born and immigrant entrepreneurs and residents can help ease racial tensions as demographics continue to change. Welcoming Michigan is one existing initiative that currently partners with 19 localities across the state.

5. **Providing access to official documentation.** Immigrants depend on official documentation like a state driver’s license to travel, open a bank account, apply for a loan and lease spaces for business, among others. Making driver’s licenses and state ID’s available for all workers regardless of citizenship is a crucial step in achieving full participation in the economy.

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**What Are “Main Street” Businesses?**

Main Street businesses are those businesses that are small-scale, less capital intensive and more locally oriented. They tend to fall into three broad sectors:

- Retail
- Accommodation and Food Services
- Neighborhood Services