

WELCOMING NASHVILLE: PERSPECTIVES AND TRENDS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report by the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce Research Center

Commissioned by Welcoming America

June 2015



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Over 80% of business and community leaders in Nashville feel that immigrants have helped businesses to reach a more global audience.

A large majority agree that it is important for there to be a continued climate of welcome, including continued support from local Nashvillians and access to a variety of services and programs to improve immigrants' full participation.

Seven of ten leaders believe immigrants help make Nashville a more innovative and productive economy.

Over half of business and community leaders believe that immigrants have been somewhat or very important to the success of their own organizations.

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Nashville has become a leading gateway city for immigrant integration. Migration to Nashville across recent years has been fueled by the opportunity in the area and its inclusive landscape. The economic gains of the Nashville area that have been supported by this migration and a welcoming climate provide a benefit to business and to all the new participants in its growth and success. Hailed as the “it city” by the New York Times in 2013, Nashville has for many years demonstrated economic growth and a reputation for creativity and innovation, which has coincided with Nashville becoming a more diverse and international city.

In late 2014 the Research Center of the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of Welcoming America, engaged an array of community and business thought leaders in survey research and interviews regarding Nashville as a welcoming city and region. Major findings from the research affirm strengths of the role of immigrants in the area economy and point to new insights about that role.



Research Finding Highlights:

Nashville’s efforts to welcome and incorporate a vibrant, growing immigrant population has helped create tangible economic gains across the city and across sectors.



Nashville’s competitive regional success relies on business opportunity to welcome immigrant workers, entrepreneurs, and knowledge.



Nashville’s successes in welcoming arise from many factors, including defeat of “English Only” proposals.



Continued efforts by both public and private organizations help Nashville realize the economic benefits that an increasingly diverse population offers.

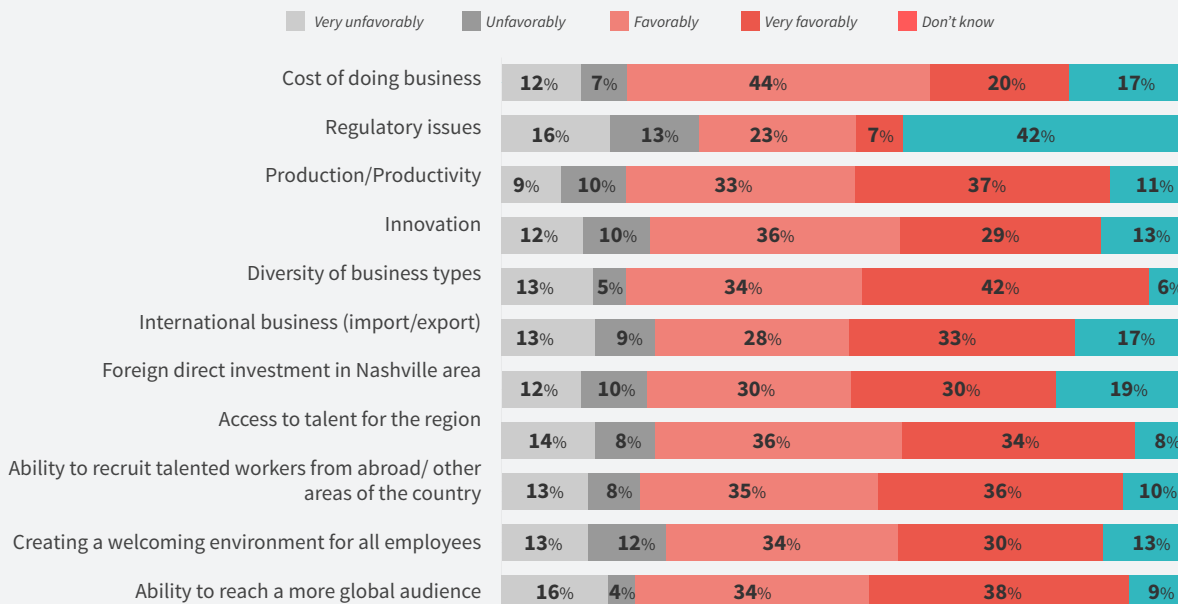


Nashville’s high level of entrepreneurship is significantly important. With 23% of Nashville area workers self-employed, this heritage of opportunity likely draws the attention of New Americans as relocating workers and entrepreneurs to the region.

Key Survey Results

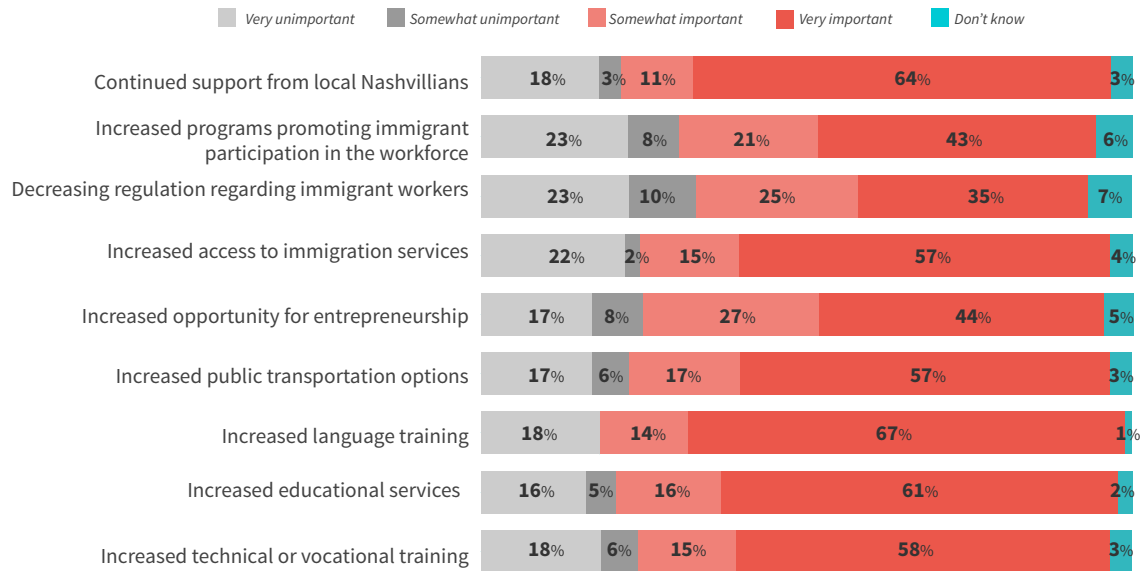
The perspective of some 200 community and business leaders in the Nashville area provides insight into ways that immigrant presence in the local economy has been a factor over the years.

How selected aspects of Nashville’s economy are impacted by the role of immigrants



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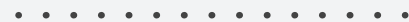
Important actions to further immigrant integration



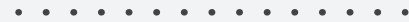
In many ways Nashville’s ability to integrate newcomers is a unique and distinctive facet of the city. Historically, Nashville has evidenced a pragmatism and acceptance that operates as part of the life of the city. An open society is a noteworthy feature of the Nashville experience- an openness to newcomers, new ideas, new leaders, and new partnerships. Integrating foreign born residents into a new society provides important two-way gains. Community leaders express a solid understanding of the more expedient types of actions to achieve this, indicating particular areas of importance for successful community integration.



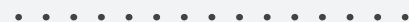
Community leadership readily articulate the positive contributions of foreign-born to the life of the region and its economy.



Integration occurs over short and long time frames. Some levels of integration may occur in the second generation of immigrants more robustly than for newcomers, highlighting the need for being proactive in services that foster economic mobility.



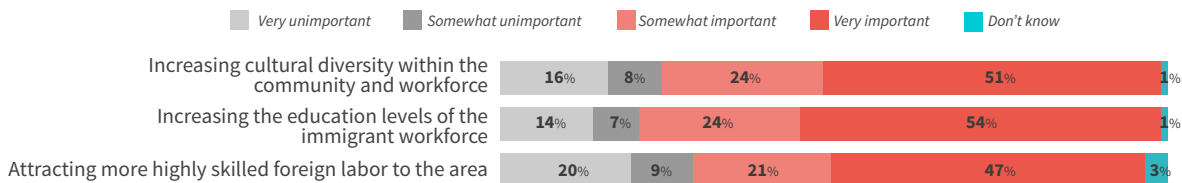
Shared purpose and goals should be fostered where possible between foreign-born and native Nashvillians, building bonds that are durable. Building on alliances and relationships, such as those formed in the defeat of English Only regulations, serve as foundations that ensure further positive actions toward integration.



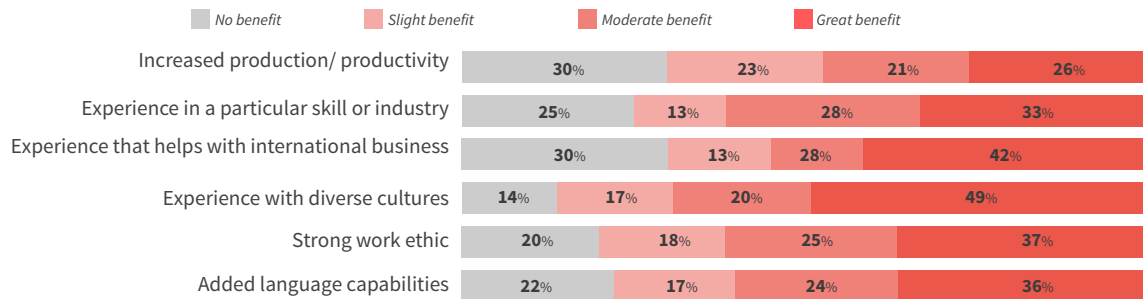
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Contribution of Immigrants into Life of Community

Importance of immigration in benefiting the Nashville economy



Benefits to one's business as a result of having immigrant workers and from interacting with immigrants as customers and clients



Research underscored how Nashville's diversity of cultures and experiences enriches the region. The ability of Nashville neighborhoods to integrate immigrants with US born populations serves as a positive example. Immigrant business creation and ownership has invigorated economic activity in many neighborhoods and corridors, as well as helping the city maintain net overall population growth.

Mainstream organizations and the business community at large are experiencing increasing interaction with the growing Nashville immigrant population. This provides familiarity and opportunity for dialogue concerning issues of immigrant integration. Mainstream organizations in the area were encouraged to look for opportunities to:

Adapt programs to unique needs and interests of foreign-born, particularly in areas of cultural differences.

Find new partner communities that can work together on topics that benefit the community as a whole.

Remain sensitive to generational aspects of integration, recognizing that second- and third-generation immigrants will often have quite different needs, interests, aspirations, attitudes and expectations about integration from first generation immigrants.

Guide and establish programs and outreach to immigrant communities that engage immigrant groups in new and different ways.

Foreign-born in-migration continues to make an important contribution not only to the population growth of Nashville, but increasingly to its economic and cultural life. This research confirms an informed leader sentiment pointing to pride in Nashville's 'can do' sense of endeavor that newcomers find attractive and useful in their own pursuits. This has allowed Nashville to welcome a vibrant, growing immigrant population that has helped create tangible economic gains across the city and across sectors.