

San Diego's Immigrants Get the Job Done

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Except where noted otherwise, data comes from the 2018 American Community Survey, the most recent Census data available as of the time of this publication.

2020 has been a year like no other. The pandemic, rapid economic decline and long unaddressed inequities collided with the force of a torrential storm. As the holidays come into view and businesses wonder whether a new season will bring any relief, the path forward still feels unsure. But diversity, creativity and resilience—strengths that put San Diego on the map for everything from fish tacos to phones, drones and genomes—uniquely position America's finest city to come back stronger by rebuilding with equity at the core.

An integral part of that diversity, creativity and resilience lies within the 25% of San Diegans who identify as immigrants and refugees—and contribute \$22 billion in spending power and \$9 billion in tax revenue to our local economy. In fact, nearly 1 in 3 San Diego County residents are immigrants or the minor children of immigrants. These new Americans continue to play a huge role as entrepreneurs, employees and community members, influencing not only how we survive this current moment but how we rebuild and thrive in various roles moving forward.

As Entrepreneurs

- As of 2017, there were 3.1 million immigrant entrepreneurs across the U.S. generating \$1.3 trillion in sales¹
- 9% of new Americans in San Diego are entrepreneurs or self-employed, as opposed to 6% of US-born San Diegans
- 25% of all businesses in seven of the eight sectors expected to grow the fastest over the next decade are started by new Americans²

New Americans foster wealth creation in our community. Businesses owned by immigrants provide millions of jobs for U.S. workers and generate billions of dollars in annual income.

Since new Americans are more likely to start a new business than the rest of the population, they are integral to creating new jobs in the community and provide critical services across a variety of industries. They also play a large role in founding both Main Street businesses and high-tech firms. This makes immigrant business owners an important engine of our recovery.

As a city with a growing Angel Investor community (our annual San Diego Angel Conference pledged up to \$1 million for the 2019 winner) and a vibrant border connection, San Diego is poised to attract new American entrepreneurs with technology, life science or biotech skills looking to take advantage of better weather and lower prices than northern California.

As Employees

- 31% of new Americans in San Diego have a bachelor's degree or above

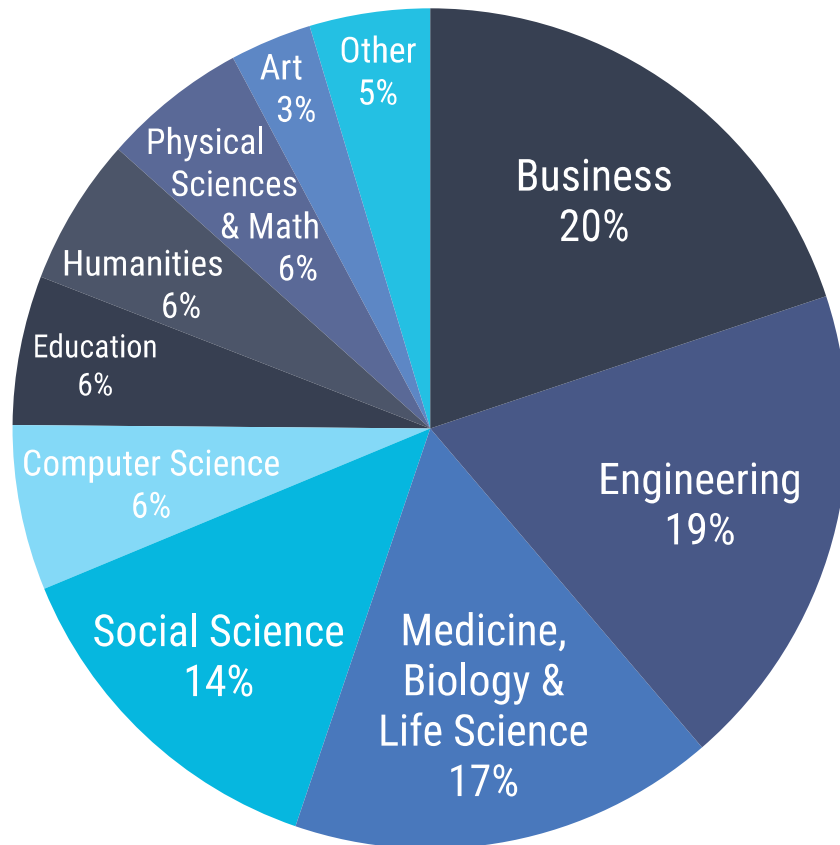
¹ <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/issues/entrepreneurship/>

² David Dyssegaard Kallick, "Bringing Vitality to Main Street: How Immigrant Small Businesses Help Local Economies Grow," *New York: Fiscal Policy Institute and Americas Society/Council of the Americas*, 2015.

- More than 400,000 people from Latin America live in San Diego
- 106 million border crossings happen annually³
- Over \$50 billion in trade occurs across San Diego borders each year⁴

New Americans provide a rich source of talent for San Diego companies, particularly in the areas of engineering, business, biology, life sciences, medical and health sciences, and social sciences—all common credentials among immigrants.

Degree fields for the 262,000 immigrants in San Diego with bachelor's degrees



In addition to credentials and work experience from their home countries, many new Americans also bring strong foreign-language fluency, cultural aptitude, creative thinking and resourcefulness to the workplace—all [essential skills](#) local employers view as crucial but hard to find.

These same skills position new Americans to help companies connect not only with San Diego's diverse market but with the global economy. For example, San Diego's strong border connection requires businesses to hire bi-lingual, bi-cultural employees who can serve clients

³ <https://smartbordercoalition.com/about-the-border>

⁴ <https://www.gsa.gov/about-us/regions/welcome-to-the-pacific-rim-region-9/region-9-newsroom/pacific-rim-press-releases/gsa-cbp-announce-start-of-otay-mesa-port-expansion-project>

from both sides of the border. In fact, the San Ysidro Chamber estimates 95% of their members' come from Mexico. "Every minute of wait time, every person that doesn't cross affects us."⁵ With San Diego's large Latinx population, employers can tap into a diverse set of skilled workers to staff cross border roles.

As Community Members

New Americans are also a critical part of the fabric of our community, making daily contributions through their voice, talent, perspective, engagement and buying power.

Voting Power

- 415,000 new Americans are eligible to vote
- 1 in 10 eligible voters is an immigrant

Both parties have begun to recognize the power of new American voices in the run up to the 2020 elections. Nationally, the number of immigrant voters is only projected to rise in the next decade, but foreign-born voters are already capable of deciding the outcome of local, state and national elections.

Talent Pipeline for Jobs of the Future

- 231,000 children born abroad or to immigrant parents are currently attending schools across San Diego County
- 50 languages and 161 countries are represented by students in San Diego County schools⁶

Diverse students are bringing their experiences and perspectives to the classroom. If San Diego can support and retain this talent, these students will surely figure prominently in the county's future economic growth and development.

Buying Power

- 163,000 new American families own homes representing \$105 billion in value
- Immigrant families wield \$22 billion in disposable income

As property owners, new Americans contribute not only to the tax base but the richness of our communities by serving in roles from HOA president to school board. Immigrant families also wield significant buying power and should not be overlooked as a consumer of goods or services.

Opportunity for Action

As we begin to rebuild, the business community can proactively move San Diego from conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion into action. Tapping into the potential of immigrant workers isn't a sidebar conversation; it is a real and present opportunity to ensure

⁵ <https://www.voiceofsandiego.org/topics/economy/san-ysidro-business-owners-say-new-pedwest-crossing-took-customers/>

⁶ <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/immigration/sdut-countries-languages-sd-unified-2016sep02-htmlstory.html>

businesses have the best talent and workers have good jobs, regardless of where they were born or the color of their skin.

An equitable future won't come from a single solution; it will be built by small changes to the practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities and outcomes for all.

Here are six steps you can take now to put equity in action:

1. **Partner with [workforce development](#) and community-based organizations to hire the skilled immigrant talent** present in San Diego county. Consider building internal promotion pathways through on-the-job work experiences that familiarize new Americans with the U.S. work environment while providing the business an opportunity to assess the worker's skills. Create mentoring opportunities to enable underrepresented individuals, such as immigrants and BIPOC, to gain exposure to new career fields.
2. When launching a new program or expanding a set of services, **pay for the expertise of the populations you wish to target to inform your design**, much as you would pay for legal, economic, or marketing skills. Paying for this insight provides you a trusted connection to the community and demonstrates that your organization's commitment to inclusion is about centering the population, not just serving them.
3. Review your current procurement processes and establish mechanisms to **improve your organization's track record for contracting with minority and immigrant-owned businesses**. Challenge your organization to expand your reach when soliciting proposals, make accommodations readily available for those who may need them and proactively articulate that diverse organizations are strongly encouraged to apply.
4. **Check your hiring policies** to remove practices that disincentivize diverse populations from applying. This includes examining where jobs are posted, whether U.S.-based degrees are required and how you recognize diverse skill sets such as language fluency in your competency and pay models. Consider "blind" resume reviews where candidate names are removed to reduce bias and establish internal targets to incentivize hiring managers to include non-traditional candidates including immigrants in their interview pools.
5. **Examine the makeup of your board**. Consider both the culture being established at the top as well as the representation. Codify equity policies into the bylaws so they remain a priority even as board members come and go. Recruit for skills from non-traditional sources and outline succession plans that encourage the development of future board members prior to the end of a term.
6. **Encourage your employees to engage in the work of diversity, equity and inclusion** by refreshing their reading lists with BIPOC and immigrant authors, participating in cultural events to learn about the rich history and culture of immigrant populations in San Diego and setting professional goals to implement inclusion in their daily work.