

White Paper on Immigration

**QC Chamber of Commerce Federation
Community Leadership 2009**

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Introduction

The Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce Community Leadership Course commissioned our team to write a paper on immigration. Specifically, we were to address the question, “What can be done to change the current culture of ‘foreigners take jobs away from Americans?’”

In writing this paper, our team explored several issues related to immigration in the United States. We discussed the history of immigration in our country and the many viewpoints about immigration, both negative and positive. Our team also completed extensive research on the current economic impacts of immigration, both perceived and actual. The majority of research we found indicated that immigration has a positive impact on the economy:

- Statistically, immigrants pay taxes well in excess of benefits they receive and provide essential support for Social Security and Medicare₁
- Immigration and immigrant birth rates (typically higher than native-born) are necessary for maintaining a work force conducive to economic growth₁
- Immigrants tend to fill job types that experience severe shortfalls in worker availability – without immigrants, many of these jobs would more likely be outsourced than taken by Americans₁

Based on the many benefits immigration and immigrants bring to our growing economy, we believed it was imperative to address this issue. Through our discussion, interviews and research, we developed a proposed solution to change the culture that ‘foreigners take jobs away from Americans’ here in the Quad Cities region.

Abstract / Business Case

In this paper, we propose a solution to change the attitude held by many Americans that foreigners take their jobs. The solution is locally based in the Quad Cities; however, it is a grassroots campaign/program that we believe could spread to other regions if successful in this area. In order to change the culture, we believe it is imperative that this mindset be challenged through aggressive education. Those who hold these beliefs need to be exposed to the actual, local impacts of immigration. This exposure/education needs to be very direct and must command their attention and entice them to want to know more. In order to do this, our team will propose the implementation of a new community program called *We Live Here*. The overall concept for this program is based on an existing Scott County community organization called *I Live Here*, which highlights and organizes community cleanups and draws attention to local environmental efforts. This is accomplished by displaying eye-catching ads, with local Quad Citians who are making a difference through individual efforts holding signs that say, “I Live Here.” The ads display our website, ilivehereqc.org and give the audience just enough information to want to know more. Through *We Live Here*, our citizens will be educated about immigration, and newly arriving immigrants to our area will have a centralized program that will assist them in all aspects of assimilation in both our area and the U.S. in general.

Problem Statement

Changing the cultural concept that ‘foreigners take jobs away from Americans’ will not be an easy challenge, as it has been ingrained in our society for hundreds of years. Native Americans represent the only population not derived via immigration in this country, yet native-born Americans of all descents have continually treated immigrants with disdain. In the mid-1800’s, the U.S. experienced a large wave of Irish immigrants who fled their homeland to escape famine. These immigrants were persecuted because of their religious beliefs, and they were largely discriminated against. It wasn’t until the next wave of immigration in the late 1880’s of Italian and Jewish people that Irish immigrants began being more accepted by native-born Americans. ²

This culture of not welcoming immigrants into either our country or our community will cause irreparable damage to our economy if it is not addressed and challenged soon. In the Quad Cities region, our population is rapidly declining and we are currently facing a crisis. We actually need foreigners to come here to help keep our economy strong, as we have not seen the continual population growth required to sustain and develop the necessary workforce for our area. The US Census states that the population in our region dropped by nearly 4 percentage points from 1980 to 2000. ³ This concern is heightened by the fact that the Quad Cities will require nearly 51,000 trained employees to replace retiring workers and to expand businesses by the year 2014. ⁴ We must ask ourselves, “Where will these workers come from?”

Without new people coming into our region, businesses will need to address the shortage of qualified workforce. This may be done by relocating to areas where ample workforce is established; or employees may be commuted in, which does not help the overall economy of our region. According to Richard Longworth, embracing and encouraging immigration is the best way to ensure economic prosperity in America. ⁵ The U.S. requires annual immigration levels to increase to 3.5 million just to cover people aging out of the work force. ⁶ Our inability to address this issue will ultimately prevent us from sustaining our existing economy and will inevitably limit any new economic development.

Proposed Solution

Introduction of Solution

Our team is proposing that the local chambers of commerce work together to develop and implement a regional program called *We Live Here*. This proposed program was inspired by *I Live Here*, a Scott County organization dedicated to environmental stewardship on the local level. The primary goals of our program are to educate our community about the importance of immigration and multiculturalism and to create a virtual welcome wagon for immigrants that have recently moved to our region. *We Live Here* will draw attention to the global representation already residing in the Quad Cities and to the positive impacts of immigration on our nation and the Quad Cities specifically. The program will have board members from Davenport One, QC Chamber of Commerce and Bettendorf Chamber of Commerce. In addition, we propose to include individuals from local cultural organizations as well as religious groups such as QC Interfaith, Progressive Action for the Common Good, and QC Alliance of Immigration and Refugees. These groups can provide insight to the services that immigrants coming into our area would find helpful.

Application of Solution

Marketing:

In order to educate those in our community on immigration and bring awareness to the issues, we propose an aggressive marketing campaign to draw attention to the issue and to use actual immigrants in the Quad Cities through billboards, theater ads and public transportation ads.

Some examples of facts we would like to educate Quad Citians on are:

- The Quad Cities needs nearly 51,000 new workers by 2014 to keep our economy alive ⁴
- Nearly 15,000 foreign-born people live in the Quad Cities ⁷
- Over 70 religions are practiced in the Quad Cities ⁸
- 7% of people in the Quad Citians speak a language other than English at home ⁹
- The US government is up to 15 years behind in reviewing visa applications for Mexican immigrants ¹⁰
- Immigrants account for all population growth in the Quad City area¹¹
- 510 immigrants arrive in the Quad City Area each year, while 1,780 native-born citizens leave. ¹¹

Additional issues we would like to bring to attention are the number of immigrant-owned businesses in the Quad Cities, the number of people employed by immigrant-owned companies in our community and the diverse population of people residing in this area. However, in researching these topics, it became apparent to our team that no community or governmental organization collects this type of data at this time. Many of the organizations we spoke with indicated that not only is this information necessary to educate the community about the immigration issues, they require it to qualify for funding and grants. Along with these types of statistics, each of our ads will show immigrants throughout our community. The ads will provide enough information to entice the audience to want to read more on the website, which will also be displayed on every ad.

Website: Most of the in-depth data on immigration will be housed on our website. The website will be focused on the Quad Cities region specifically, and it will emphasize both how important it is to attract immigrants to our area, and how immigration positively impacts our economy and our community. It will act as a centralized site for immigrants to find local cultural organizations, churches and agencies or individuals that can assist them in assimilating into our country and our community. In addition, the website will provide resources for assistance with applying for citizenship.

Results / Conclusion

Summary

Our team is aware that changing minds and attitudes is typically a slow process. That is why we believe a strong, consistent, and visual presence can have a cumulative psychological impact over a long period of time. In the meantime, the same visual presence will be encouraging to those already aware of the issues and supportive of our message. Similarly, the campaign will help the Quad Cities appear to visitors as a welcoming, progressive community, with the potential to literally change its identity as it draws newcomers. It is our hope that by having this program in place, we will be better equipped to attract future economic development opportunities, especially by foreign-owned businesses, by being perceived as a multicultural community that welcomes all people.

Recommendations

The Quad Cities does not currently offer a centralized support organization to assist immigrants coming into our area or a specific plan to address the workforce shortage we are going to face in 5 short years. Our team believes it is imperative to address the issues now, and to do so we would like to make the following recommendations:

- Create a task force to gather data regarding immigration
 - This will assist in funding and grants for our area
 - This will assist in developing the educational aspect of our program
 - This will help determine the services immigrants require of the program
- Develop “We Live Here” program with assistance from the following:
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - Religious groups
 - Cultural organizations
 - Immigrant and refugee support groups
- Establish measurable goals for the program – for example:
 - 5% increase in immigrant population locating to the Quad Cities
 - 3% increase in foreign-owned businesses developing in the Quad Cities

Appendix 1 – Authors

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Appendix 2 – References

¹ Carson, Chris. “Immigration and the Economy” at <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=7338>

² Stevenson, Keira. “Counterpoint: Economic Opportunity and Immigration.” *Points of View: US Borders*; 2007, p. 3

³ <http://www.bistateonline.org/cgi-script/upload/upload/Population%252edb/1950-2000-ill-iow-pop.pdf>

⁴ Blueprint2010 Workforce Survey, 2/2008 by the Illinois Quad City Chamber of Commerce

⁵ Richard C. Longworth, *Caught in the Middle* (New York, New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2008)

⁶ http://hias.org/Hearts_Minds

⁷ http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=31000US19340&-context=adp&-ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_&-tree_id=3307&-_lang=en&-_caller=geoselect&-format=

⁸ MegaHunter 2008 – Eastern Iowa/Western Illinois Regional Directory

⁹ http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/NPTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_NP01&-geo_id=31000US19340&-gc_url=&-ds_name=&-_lang=en

¹⁰ http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin_4406.html

¹¹ Federation for American Immigration Reform. “Metro Area Factsheet: Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, Iowa MSA.”
http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=research_research162b_sup