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City Invites Groups to Help Immigrants Start Businesses

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Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg [announced a competition](#) Thursday aimed at helping immigrant entrepreneurs finance their businesses and overcome language barriers and other obstacles hindering their growth.

The program comes as part of the city's wide-ranging push to assist immigrant start-ups, which fail at a higher rate than businesses begun by native-born Americans. Roughly half of the city's self-employed workers are immigrants.

The competition invites community groups to develop business plans for projects that would help immigrants gain access to credit and business networks. The five best plans will each receive \$25,000 to create a pilot project, and the winner will get up to \$100,000 to develop it further, according to the mayor's office. The project is a partnership between the city's Economic Development Corporation and Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation.

"Immigrant entrepreneurs and the businesses they launch have long been drivers of innovation and enterprise in New York City and across America," [Mr. Bloomberg](#) said in a statement.

[The mayor has embraced national immigration reform](#) as a signature issue, forming a [broad coalition of mayors and business leaders](#) to lobby Washington to make it easier for immigrants, especially those who are educated and highly skilled, to gain legal status. Although Mr. Bloomberg has testified before Congress and pushed the issue at every turn, he and his inner circle acknowledge that the effort has made little headway.

The start of the modest entrepreneurial program may not signal a scaling back of his ambitions for reform, but it represents the mayor's embrace of a small-scale approach that aims to help immigrants on the corner-store level.

"We may not be able to change federal policy in one fell swoop," John Feinblatt, the mayor's chief policy adviser, said in an interview. "But what we can do within the five boroughs is support and encourage the entrepreneurial spirit of immigrants."

Mr. Bloomberg was scheduled to discuss the proposal Thursday afternoon in an address at an immigration reform conference sponsored by the Center for Migration Studies and the [Levin Institute](#) at the State University of New York.

Jonathan Bowles, director of the [Center for an Urban Future](#), a nonpartisan research group in New York that has [studied immigrant entrepreneurs](#), applauded the mayor's announcement as "a real step forward for the city's economic policy."

"Until recently, immigrant entrepreneurs weren't really integrated into the local economy," he said. "With this announcement, they're making a huge step to do so."

The city also announced plans to open a third [incubator kitchen](#), in central Brooklyn, to help

entrepreneurial cooks start businesses, said Seth W. Pinsky, president of the city's Economic Development Corporation. The other two commercial kitchens are La Marqueta in East Harlem and the Entrepreneur's Space in Long Island City, Queens.

While the kitchens are not explicitly geared toward immigrants, roughly 70 percent of workers in the food-manufacturing business are foreign-born, according to the mayor's office.

The mayor's office also announced that the Economic Development Corporation would join with the city's Department of Small Business Services to offer free courses to help small businesses. The department has provided such classes in English, but the new ones will be taught in Chinese, Korean, Spanish and Russian.