

Welcoming Stories



Immigrant Fellowship Program: Bridging the Gap Between Employers and Immigrant Talent

Kejsi Ruka

Communications Intern

The Welcoming Center's Immigrant Fellowship Program connects employers with immigrant talent through a 12-week paid fellowship while providing participants with the opportunity to gain work experience in their field of expertise. Highly experienced immigrants often come to this country with high hopes to apply their work skills and knowledge, only to encounter endless barriers to employment. To help address this problem, TWC launched the Immigrant Fellowship Program. Originally launched in 2017 in partnership with the City of Philadelphia, this program has since led to partnerships with several organizations and companies, one of them being Stimulus.

Stimulus is a relationship intelligence SaaS platform company. In the past year, Stimulus has taken on three fellows from The Welcoming Center, offering one fellow a full-time permanent position. Tiffanie Stanard, the CEO and founder of Stimulus, commented on the many benefits of taking on fellows who come from a diverse set of backgrounds.

"Starting in the fellowship before bringing them on full time as an employee is a great way to get to know a potential employee to see how they fit into your team's way of doing things," said Stanard.

For the Fellow, along with a pay rate of at least \$15 per hour, valuable benefits include gaining work experience, building practical skills, networking with other professionals, and cultivating references for future job opportunities.

Carla Monoy was originally a fellow at Stimulus and now works there as a Data Analyst. Monoy moved to the U.S. in 2017 from the Philippines. Her background is in ecology and plant research. The fellowship at Stimulus was Monoy's second fellowship through The Welcoming Center, her first was with the Philadelphia Water Department. Monoy did not originally envision herself working in data analysis, but once she did an evaluation of her transferable skills, she realized that it was a viable career path.

"I think the difficulty initially was just it was more like a mental barrier of not thinking that I could apply for a data analyst job," said Monoy.

Alejandra Lopez is currently a fellow at Stimulus working as a Digital Visual Designer after being a participant in The Welcoming Center's International Professionals Program (IPP). Lopez moved to the U.S. from Colombia 7 years ago. Both Monoy and Lopez recognize the value of the fellowship in different ways.

"When you're applying for something, you tend to really want to sell yourself and say, 'I really want to work for this organization...I want to do all these things.'" commented Monoy.

"But truly you don't know what it's like inside and you only find that out once you're inside. At least with this fellowship, there was that clear endpoint initially where we could say, 'Okay, this is a three-month thing, and we can reevaluate this in three months.' That kind of end point helped me [think] I can do this for three months at least, try something out and see if I really want it."

For Lopez, this fellowship meant experiencing a professional work environment in the U.S. for the very first time. “There are a number of benefits for me, like being able to demonstrate my skills and what I know. To start working with a company...I feel like now I’m getting to know American culture, like working in a professional way,” said Lopez.

Working with a company like Stimulus helped the fellows gain confidence in their abilities, while also providing them the opportunity to take on new projects or contribute their own ideas.

Through the Immigrant Fellowship Program, Stimulus has witnessed the value of taking on fellows that will provide reliable talent for the company. At the same time, the fellows gain professional work experience they can add to their resumes, overcoming one of the biggest obstacles to immigrant integration into the workforce.

“I’ve had the opportunity to work with three great women, it happened to be women that came to our team, and one ended up staying and becoming full time,” said Stanard. **“As I’m thinking of different employees that we need to hire and grow our team, The Welcoming Center is definitely one of the first organizations I think of.”**

The Welcoming Center hopes to continue building partnerships between employers and immigrant talent. If you are interested in learning more about the Immigrant Fellowship Program or would like to learn ways for your company to become better connected to immigrant talent, please visit our website at this link: <https://welcomingcenter.org/workforcedevelopment/employers>.



Photo Credit to Tiffanie Stanard.

Micro-lending Supports Immigrant Entrepreneurs to Grow Their Small Businesses, Create Jobs, and Build Generational Wealth for their Families

Alma Romero opened her restaurant, Alma del Mar, in the heart of the Italian Market during the summer of 2020. She experienced extensive delays due to the pandemic. In early 2022, she received a micro-loan through Greenline Access Capital, a lending partner of The Welcoming Center. This micro-loan provided much needed relief and the opportunity to receive structured support to continue to grow and expand her business.

Immigrant entrepreneurs encounter many barriers to accessing capital. These include the lack of credit and/or credit history and linguistic barriers to communicate with lenders. With many immigrant business owners, obtaining the funds to launch and/or grow a business is not typically sourced through an official lender but from friends and family. That had been Alma’s case until she received her first formal micro-loan from Greenline Access Capital.

The Welcoming Center played a critical role in connecting Alma with a lending organization that could provide culturally relevant and appropriate solutions to support her business. Greenline Access Capital’s staff is fully bilingual and has vast experience in character-based lending. An additional benefit of Alma del Mar’s first micro-loan is that Alma’s loan repayments will build her credit history and make her a stronger candidate for future larger loans to continue to grow her business, create jobs, and build generational wealth.

