

Georgia Immigrant Business Owners Needs Assessment

Statewide Comprehensive Survey and Brick-and-Mortar Focus Groups Results

First Report Brief – February 2026

There are over 124,000 immigrant-owned businesses in Georgia. **These businesses are essential to the state's economy, driving entrepreneurship, creating jobs, meeting needs and enriching the state's cultural landscape.** Yet there has been no intentional effort to understand how to strengthen this growing segment of businesses to increase their statewide economic impact.

This project addressed this gap in knowledge delivering a statewide needs assessment of immigrant-owned businesses with a mixed-methods approach, including a comprehensive survey, engagement with local business-serving organizations, a series of focus groups and interviews for in-depth understanding of brick-and-mortar business owners and economic development offices focused on two critically important and historically international corridors: the Buford Highway and Clarkston, and a review of promising policies that have been successful at retaining the global character of these areas.

Taken together, the survey and focus group findings show that **immigrant business owners are highly resourceful and deeply embedded in their communities, yet face structural barriers tied to language, gender, formality, location, and policy context.** The focus groups make clear that many challenges identified in the survey, such as delayed registration, funding barriers, or rent instability, are not simply technical issues, but reflections of lived constraints, uneven power dynamics, and systems that are difficult to navigate without trusted guidance and support.

These findings and the recommendations provided are critical for local and state governments, economic development agencies, nonprofit and financial sectors to develop informed solutions that underpin positive impact for all in the state.

*This assessment was conducted **between February and December 2025.** Data collection took place **from May through September 2025,** engaging a total of **454 business owners from across the state in the survey,** and **24 brick-and-mortar business owners from the Buford Highway corridor and Clarkston in three focus groups.***

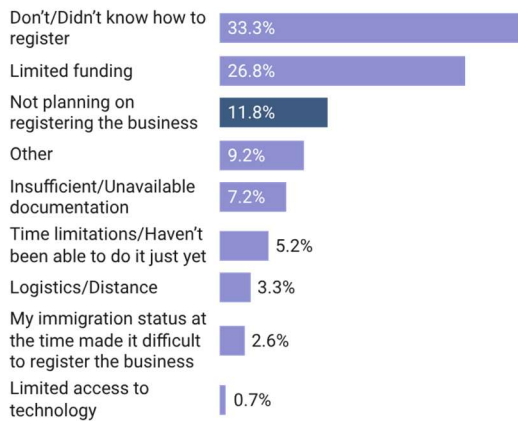
This collaborative effort was coordinated by the **Latino Community Fund Georgia** (LCF Georgia), bringing together trusted local partners including **Refugee Women's Network** (RWN), **We Love Buford Highway** (WLBH), the **Latin American Association** (LAA), and **Prospera.** Data collection and analysis were led by **Neighborhood Nexus.**

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Summary of Findings

- 1. Informality is transitional rather than preferred.** Delays in Secretary of State registration, and challenges with financial and formal systems are usually unintentional, reflecting complex processes, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with U.S. systems.

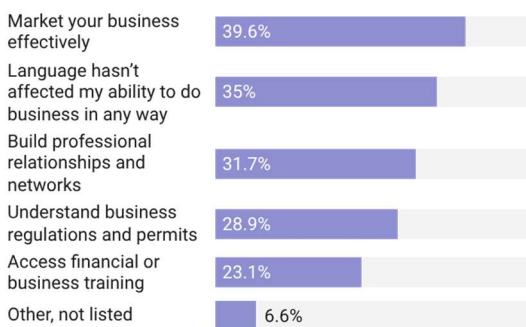
Reason why businesses are not registered or were not registered earlier



- 2. Language barriers limit marketing, professional relationships, regulatory compliance, and access to resources.**

Owners rely on bilingual family members or peers for critical interpretation, highlighting the need for culturally and linguistically accessible support.

Impact of language barriers



- 3. Owning a business has a deep emotional value.** For immigrants, entrepreneurship and ownership are closely tied to personal identity, independence, and

belonging in a new country, especially for women.

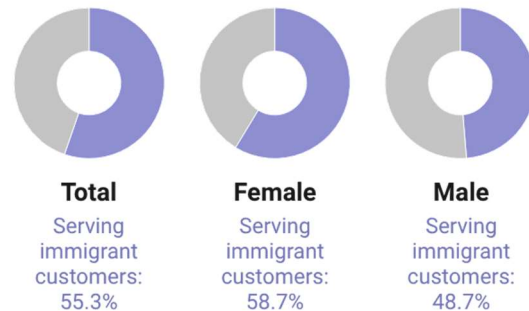
“ I wanted to be me, and that's why I went into business

- Focus Group participant

- 4. Immigrant-owned businesses operate in community-facing sectors, acting as economic and social anchors.** Frequently serving immigrant customers, creating and providing jobs, training, and mentorship that strengthen social cohesion and workforce development.

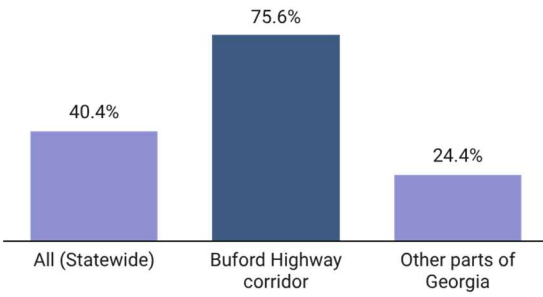
- 5. Women-led businesses are more likely to operate informally, focus on local or immigrant-focused markets.** They often balance caregiving responsibilities with work, which can result in smaller scale, informal operations, and lower profitability.

Business owners who reported the majority of their customers were immigrants



- 6. The Buford Highway corridor is both a hub for immigrant entrepreneurship and a zone of heightened vulnerability.** Businesses in this area face high rent burdens, limited space, competition from large chains, and infrastructure constraints (parking, transportation, sewage).

Business owners who reported rent as an increasing burden



7. Immigrant-receiving areas like Clarkston experience high population turnover, cultural and linguistic diversity. These conditions make workforce retention, long-term planning, and collective advocacy more challenging for business owners.

“ If you know English, you can get by. ”
 - Focus Group participant

8. Moving from home-based operations to commercial spaces is costly and complex. Shared or transitional spaces (e.g., community kitchens) help but often limit flexibility and growth potential.

9. Information overload from emails and online resources lead to missed opportunities. Trusted peer networks, word-of-mouth, and referrals are more influential than formal channels for navigating regulations, funding, and growth.

10. Streamlined COVID-era programs were cited as effective models for funding support. Immigrant business owners have high interest in funding opportunities, but perceptions of ineligibility or process complexity create barriers and lead to low application rates.

Main barriers to access the funding business owners need



11. Retaining employees is a growing challenge as businesses scale. Turnover and rising costs limit growth, and employee incentive programs are often difficult to sustain without strong financial stability.

Top challenges to develop offer workforce development opportunities

- 1 Financial costs
- 2 Lack of information/resources
- 3 Time constraints

12. Demand for legal and brick-and-mortar management support. Immigrant business owners emphasized applied, hands-on support in leasing, permitting, inspections, financial management, and tenant-landlord relations are key for their businesses.