

Business and citizenship are winners in Miami

How many green-card holders live in South Florida? There are 520,000. Can you imagine our community with 520,000 new American citizens?

What if 520,000 more people could vote, run for public office, obtain a U.S. passport and sponsor their family members for reunification?

The National Immigration Forum's Bethlehem Project, which launched recently in Miami, offers an innovative program to local businesses to make this a reality for our community. The Bethlehem Project selected greater Miami as its official launch city because we have been a cutting edge, immigrant-friendly community that has tremendously benefited from all that immigrants offer society.

Citizenship and business are natural win-win partners. This free program offers inherent benefits to businesses including onsite services such as legal assistance for the citizenship process, English classes and civics instruction.

These services are automatically included in the business' employee-benefit package, without any budget implications.

The additional benefits for a business include celebrating the diversity in the company's workforce; helping with employee recruitment; building employees' loyalty and the retention of those workers; creating an inclusive work culture and boosting productivity; generating goodwill amid a growing foreign-born consumer demographic in a globally competitive market; and creating positive publicity opportunities.

Companies' employees are offered free and trustworthy legal services that support them as they seek to achieve the American dream.

As the National Immigration Forum launched the project, they announced their partnerships with the founding business partners: Miami Dade College, InterContinental Miami and The Betsy South Beach.

In offering these services, they have demonstrated that they want to do all they can to support employees who are eligible for citizenship because they want to see the community at its fullest potential.

Not only do we need this project now for our communities' currently eligible legal permanent residents, but with immigration reform on the horizon, we will need excellent immigration integration services for additional individuals who are awaiting the opportunity for a pathway to citizenship.

We can only make effective opportunities available with the help of our business leaders. In the immediate future, businesses will need to offer these services more than ever before.

Along with Miami Dade College, The InterContinental and The Betsy, I challenge local businesses to join us in imagining our community with these 520,000 new Americans fully engaged. We want business leaders to consider how this not only positively affects our community, but also their companies.

Join us in this effort by joining the Bethlehem Project, www.joinbethlehemproject.org. or call Abbey Chase, CEO of Chase Marketing, at 305-379-0800.

Manny Diaz, senior partner,

Lydecker Diaz, Miami