

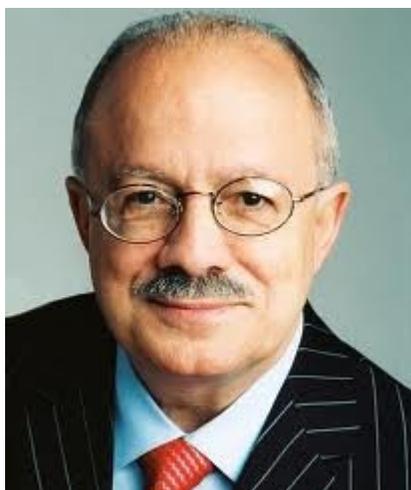
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## It's a good day to celebrate citizenship

BY EDUARDO PADRÓN

[mdc.edu](http://mdc.edu)



PADRÓN

Well over a year ago, a group of community employers blazed a new trail for civic engagement with their employees. Miami Dade College, the Intercontinental, and The Betsy–South Beach became founding employer partners of the Bethlehem Project. This unprecedented partnership was designed to help green card-holding employees — legal residents — become citizens at very low cost and without leaving the worksite.

As we celebrate Independence Day, the Bethlehem Project has grown to 20 businesses here in Miami, and more than 75 businesses nationwide.

What started as an experiment in Miami has become a national movement. From Los Angeles to New York, employers in healthcare, education, and hospitality are reaching out to their workers with green cards to help them become citizens.

They're doing so because these employers recognize the immediate benefits of citizenship for their workforce. For workers, the opportunity means the chance to realize their American Dream, open new doors and set even deeper roots in our community.

For businesses, it's a chance to boost productivity, foster loyalty, and provide a critical benefit to their employees — without any impact on the bottom line. And for the larger community, it's the opportunity to build new partnerships across industry sectors and encourage a stronger local economy.

A recently naturalized citizen stands to earn 8 percent to 11 percent more over his or her lifetime. When you multiply that by the 520,000 immigrants currently eligible to become citizens in the Miami area, the ripple effect is enormous.

Business leaders in Miami understand that a stronger local economy benefits their bottom line, and they also understand that helping one employee attain citizenship benefits the entire company.

That's why our partners are undertaking extra efforts to make citizenship even more accessible to their employees. Organizations and businesses such as University of Miami Hospital, the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center and Bascom Palmer Eye Institute are joining the movement and doing more than just providing free citizenship assistance at the worksite; these leading healthcare providers also give employees paid time off to complete their citizenship applications.

Other businesses are taking it a step further.

The Trump Hotel, for example, allows employees to trade in vacation days in exchange for money to pay for a portion of the citizenship application fee of \$680. And Baptist Health Services offers an in-house credit union for interest free loans for employees pursuing citizenship as part of the Bethlehem Project. All across South Florida, businesses are coming up with innovative ways to help their employees become citizens through the Bethlehem Project.

And employees are choosing to become Americans.

Through information sessions, 23,000 immigrants in Miami have learned the process and benefits of becoming citizens. By offering citizenship assistance, we've helped many of these immigrant employees complete the process. By continuing to innovate and partner with local service providers, such as the International Rescue Committee Miami, we'll reach thousands more in the coming year.

One year into the project, here at Miami Dade College we're initiating another round of workshops and expanding to additional campuses to ensure we reach more and more employees with this invaluable opportunity.

Miami is home to 520,000 entrepreneurial green-card holders who are waiting to start their American story as citizens. They manage our hotels, tend to our sick and teach our students. As their employers, we're doing everything in our power to help them fulfill their promise — and help our Greater Miami reach even greater heights.

Eduardo J. Padrón is president of Miami Dade College.