“And justice for all” is more than a tag line on Iowa State University Extension and Outreach educational materials. It is a statement illuminating the university’s commitment to serving all Iowans, including those who have been historically underserved – Iowa’s minority, immigrant, and refugee populations. ISU Extension and Outreach’s Community and Economic Development (CED) program is engaging diversity for a strong Iowa – encouraging business development, helping to create jobs, and expanding entrepreneurial activity to support economic growth and improve quality of life.

According to the State Data Center of Iowa (2014) about 3 percent of Iowa’s population is Black or African American. The center also notes that people of Latino origin are Iowa’s largest ethnic minority, accounting for more than 5 percent of the state’s total population in 2014 and expected to grow to almost 13 percent by 2040. As Iowa’s population becomes more diverse, CED is focusing on creating multiple opportunities for sustainable entrepreneurism.

• CED partnered with the Small Business Development Center and the Iowa Black Business Coalition to create the Untraditional Start-A-Thon, using culturally relevant learning opportunities to increase minority and female entrepreneurship. Participants completed their business model canvas and talked through creating an LLC or corporation for their respective businesses. In addition, an online learning community was established for participants to learn about creating a visual identity, marketing analytics, and more. As a result of the Start-A-Thon, 13 potential business owners trademarked their businesses with the state of Iowa and seven businesses started.

• Iowa’s growing entrepreneurial economy includes many of Iowa’s newest residents, enterprising Latino immigrants in small communities who are diverse in age, skills, and education. Economic developers, service providers, and educators are realizing that one set of guidelines and services’ may not meet the needs and concerns of these diverse entrepreneurs. That’s why CED targets entrepreneurship training to Latino business owners. Topics covered include business concepts, feasibility plans, products and services, market analysis, cash flow, sales projections, and profitability. Building skills in these entrepreneurs has a big payoff: In FY2014, CED assisted 28 Latino business owners throughout the state in starting or improving their own businesses, trained 21 Latino business leaders and entrepreneurs, and assisted with the creation of 19 jobs and the retention of 90 jobs for minority employees. The estimated value of the jobs created/retained is $3,388,000.

• CED partnered with Dallas County Public Health and the Iowa Department of Public Health to increase access to healthy, culturally appropriate foods in Latino family-owned grocery businesses in Perry. Depending on their goals, store owners received
personalized assistance with optimizing store layout, overcoming distribution challenges, and becoming certified to accept SNAP and WIC benefits. They also received training and education on business management, energy efficiency, produce storage, and marketing. The project laid the groundwork to boost sales for these Latino businesses as their local consumers make healthier choices.

• CED is part of the Iowa Retail Initiative, a collaboration to support Iowa’s independent retailers and revitalize rural downtowns. It unites existing campus services and provides a single point of contact for rural communities and retailers seeking help. Iowa State students in an interior design studio created retail designs for culturally diverse businesses in Marshalltown. The retailers, representing Main Street and a local mall, included two ethnic grocery stores, an upholstery store, a bike shop, and a liquor store. The retailers learned new ways to market their wares, while the interior design students got a taste of designing for a diverse group of businesses.

• Across Iowa, ISU Extension and Outreach CED and Human Sciences programs partner with community organizations, school staff, and local volunteers to implement “Juntos Para Una Mejor Educación (Together for a Better Education).” Latino parents learn how they can help their children be successful in school. Their middle-school-age youth explore different paths they may take for their future – a college or university, community college or trade school, a degree or certification and so on. Through Juntos, ISU Extension and Outreach is increasing Latino families’ knowledge and skills so they can help their youth thrive in high school and successfully participate in higher education to increase their opportunities for economic prosperity long-term.

• Over the past five years, more than 3,000 refugees have arrived in Iowa, hailing from Burma, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, and Somalia. Many refugees face serious challenges in acclimating to Iowa and the United States, including language barriers and finding employment, healthcare, housing, transportation, and childcare. To better serve this diverse group of new Iowans, in 2016 CED hired a refugee community plan coordinator. The focus is on using research to understand the refugee community, service providers, stakeholders, and priorities. The goal is to create a more efficient, organized network that will help new Iowans acclimate easily, leading to their prosperity and independence in their new home state.

ISU Extension and Outreach strives to connect the needs of all Iowans with university research and resources, providing education and building partnerships designed to solve today’s problems and prepare for the future. By engaging the state’s diversity, ISU Extension and Outreach’s CED program is building a strong Iowa –with revitalized communities and families that are more financially secure – and supporting justice for all.