Immigrants launch about 60% of new businesses in Massachusetts each year, which play a critical role in revitalizing neighborhoods — by rehabilitating abandoned storefronts, drawing consumers into re-emerging retail areas, and developing diverse small business sectors that attract new residents.

Immigrant entrepreneurs often find that limited English gets in the way of sustaining and growing their businesses, yet traditional ESOL classes do not provide the business-specific language tools they require. Language barriers, lack of technology skills, and long work hours also bar some owners from using business assistance programs typically available only in English.

ENB created a new ESOL for Entrepreneurs program in 2015. The program is accessible for business people — the classes are outside regular work hours and in locations convenient to commercial districts.

ENB's customized curriculum covers:
- Customer service
- Writing a business plan
- Licensing
- Marketing, such as slogans and social media
- Banking and loan terminologies

The goal of ESOL for Entrepreneurs is to enable immigrant entrepreneurs to improve their own and employees' English skills in order to expand their markets, better access business assistance resources and help invigorate local economies.

For native Columbians Amparo Pereanez and Elkin Vanegas, opening their East Boston apparel boutique, Girletata, was their dream come true. But since catering to a Spanish-speaking clientele when they opened six years ago, much has changed.

"Before, the neighborhood was mostly Spanish speakers," says Amparo. "Today we have people coming in here who are Chinese, Moroccan and American. They all live on the blocks around this store."

Determined to attract more customers, Amparo recently completed the first ESOL for Entrepreneurs program in East Boston supported by ENB. "The classes gave me more confidence to speak to customers about more things money-related, particularly purchases and returns," she says.

Amparo and Elkin know that improving their English will help them stay relevant and attuned to customers’ needs, no matter where they’re from, so that they can continue to dress the neighborhood and grow their successful business.