October 23, 2025

David O. Sacks
Chair of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST)
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Sacks:

We build, invest in, and support startups across the innovation ecosystem who depend on the best, high-skilled talent to build and grow the world's most innovative companies. We appreciate the Administration's desire to maintain the integrity of the H-1B program, curtail unintended use, and encourage companies to fully leverage existing domestic talent. But as the U.S. competes for leadership in critical areas, from artificial intelligence to space exploration, we implore you to factor in the vital role that high-skilled foreign-born talent plays in building U.S. startups.

The U.S. has positioned itself as a destination for innovators and founders—55 percent of America's unicorn startups have at least one immigrant founder and, according to an analysis by the National Foundation for American Policy, 65 percent of AI companies in the U.S. are founded or co-founded by immigrants[1]. Pro-startup, pro-innovation immigration policy doesn't just benefit founders, it also drives economic growth, creates new jobs, and ensures the next wave of innovative companies are built in the U.S. versus elsewhere. Research shows that a one percentage point increase in the share of foreign STEM labor boosts wage growth among domestic college educated workers by up to 8 percentage points[2].

The current talent pool for high tech industries is not nearly robust enough to meet demand. While the U.S. certainly needs to continue investing in domestic talent, those investments will take time to pan out, particularly as they relate to improving STEM education and skills beginning in K-12 schools. In the meantime other countries are actively recruiting U.S.-educated, high-skilled talent. The U.K. has their "high potential visa" program, and other regions, like the European Union and Canada, are attracting other foreign-born workers through more navigable immigration systems. Most recently China rolled out its K-visa program to attract foreign tech talent to the country and does not require employer sponsorship or a job offer[3]. U.S. based companies, including startups, are in stiff competition with these incentives and one another for already limited talent.

[1] *55% of America's Billion-Dollar Startups Have an Immigrant Founder*, Foster Global (April 18, 2019), https://www.fosterglobal.com/blog/55-of-americas-billion-dollar-startups-have-an-immigrant-founder/; Stuart Anderson, *AI and Immigrants, NFAP Policy Brief*, National Foundation for American Policy, June 2023), https://nfap.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AI-AND-IMMIGRANTS.NFAP-Policy-Brief.2023.pdf.
[2] Peri, Giovanni, Kevin Shih, and Chad Sparber, *STEM Workers, H-1B Visas, and Productivity in US Cities,* Journal of Labor Economics 33, no. S1 (July 2015): S225–S255. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/679061.
[3] Eduardo Baptista, *China's New K Visa Beckons Foreign Tech Talent as US Hikes H-1B Fee*, Reuters (September 29, 2025) https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/sustainable-finance-reporting/chinas-new-k-visa-beckons-foreign-tech-talent-us-hikes-h-1b-fee-2025-09-29/.

The current H-1B program already fails to meet the startup ecosystem's need for high-skilled talent. Its once or twice yearly lottery selection is ill suited for a startup's tight funding runways. Their rate of scale necessitates the ability to bring key talent onto their team within weeks not months. Unlike large companies which can apply for the lottery en masse, startups are usually looking to bring just one or two key hires into the country. All together this has made even the current H-1B program a visa pathway that is too unreliable, time consuming, and costly for startups to leverage. Adding a $100,000 fee may put it out of the question all together. Startups also benefit from the H-1B visa's downstream effects, as the pool of high-skilled talent brought into the country by larger companies often go on to start or work for startups. The fee may limit this source of talent for startups. The Administration has the opportunity to help startups make better use of the H-1B program if it deems technology startup employees "in the national interest" and exempt from the new $100,000 fee. In recognition of the vital role that innovators play in our national interest and security, we urge the Administration to work within this framework to exempt startups from this prohibitive fee.

This Administration should better align immigration programs to attract high-skilled foreign talent. Pro-startup immigration reforms could include strengthening the International Entrepreneur Parole (IEP) program, tailoring the O-1A visa, and ultimately a startup visa pathway. As of 2024, the IEP program has only seen an average of 19 applications per year[4]. In theory this program could be better utilized if the Administration shortened processing times, increased visibility, and easier access for founders to obtain status in the U.S. Extraordinary ability visas like the O-1A are already used by some founders, but the Administration could enhance this existing pathway by including startup-specific criteria, such as acceptance into competitive U.S. incubators/accelerators. Ultimately, the best way to ensure the U.S. attracts the best talent to foster innovation is the creation of a startup visa, aimed at founders that already have a stake in a U.S. company or demonstrate the ability to be a significant job creator. The visa would only be renewable if certain commercial benchmarks were met and would provide more stability than pathways like the IEP program. These provisions could allow more founders to launch and grow companies in the U.S. and slow the drain of startup talent to other countries.

We urge the Administration to better align innovation aims with immigration by carving out provisions for startups in the H-1B program changes and pursuing new policies that boost the domestic and foreign talent pipelines. These policies help founders build their businesses and grow their teams in the U.S., and protect against a tech talent brain drain. We thank you for your recognition of the importance of the U.S. innovation ecosystem and encourage you to take swift action to ensure innovators can access the talent we need to launch and grow companies and make the U.S. the global leader of innovation.

Sincerely,

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[4] *Changes to the International Entrepreneur Program: What You Need to Know,* Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC, (October 15, 2024), https://www.bipc.com/changes-to-the-international-entrepreneur-program-what-you-need-to-know.

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