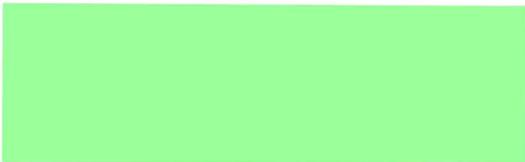




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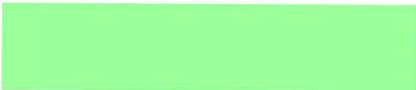


DATE: **AUG 01 2014**

OFFICE: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

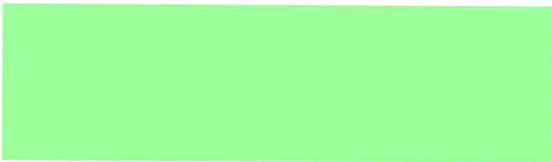
FILE: 

IN RE: Petitioner:  
Beneficiary:



PETITION: Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker Pursuant to Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:



INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) in your case.

This is a non-precedent decision. The AAO does not announce new constructions of law nor establish agency policy through non-precedent decisions. If you believe the AAO incorrectly applied current law or policy to your case or if you seek to present new facts for consideration, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen, respectively. Any motion must be filed on a Notice of Appeal or Motion (Form I-290B) within 33 days of the date of this decision. **Please review the Form I-290B instructions at <http://www.uscis.gov/forms> for the latest information on fee, filing location, and other requirements. See also 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. Do not file a motion directly with the AAO.**

Thank you,



Ron Rosenberg  
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

**DISCUSSION:** The service center director denied the nonimmigrant visa petition. The matter is now on appeal before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO). The appeal will be dismissed. The petition will be denied.

The petitioner submitted a Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker (Form I-129) to the Vermont Service Center on April 2, 2013. On the Form I-129 visa petition, the petitioner describes itself as an information technology consulting business with three employees, established in 1994. In order to employ the beneficiary in what it designates as a "Software Developer" position, the petitioner seeks to classify him as a nonimmigrant worker in a specialty occupation pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b).

The director denied the petition, finding that the petitioner failed to demonstrate the existence of an employer-employee relationship between the petitioner and the beneficiary.

The record of proceeding before us contains the following: (1) the Form I-129 and supporting documentation; (2) the director's request for evidence (RFE); (3) the petitioner's response to the RFE; (4) the notice of decision; (5) the Notice of Appeal or Motion (Form I-290B) and supporting materials. We reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing our decision.

Upon review of the entire record of proceeding, we find that the petitioner has failed to overcome the director's grounds for denying this petition. Accordingly, the appeal will be dismissed, and the petition will be denied.

As a preliminary matter, we will address additional, independent grounds, not fully identified by the director's decision, which also preclude approval of this petition.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, beyond the decision of the director, the evidence in the record of proceeding does not establish that: (1) the proffered position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation; and, (2) the petitioner has specialty occupation work available for the beneficiary for the requested employment period. For these additional reasons, the petition may not be approved.

## I. FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The petitioner indicated on the Form I-129 that it wishes to employ the beneficiary as a software developer from October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2016, on a full-time basis, and with a weekly salary of \$2,000. In addition, the petitioner indicated on the petition that the beneficiary will work at the petitioner's location at [REDACTED] North Carolina. The petitioner stated on the Form I-129 that the petitioner will not work off site.

The petitioner also submitted a certified Labor Condition Application (LCA) in support of the instant petition. The petitioner indicated on the LCA that the beneficiary will work at the petitioner's location. The LCA also states the occupational category is designated as "Software Developers, Systems Software," SOC (ONET/OES) Code 15-1131, at a Level IV wage level, and that the period of intended

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<sup>1</sup> We conduct appellate review on a *de novo* basis (*See Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004)), and it was in the course of this review that we identified these additional grounds for denial.

employment is from September 19, 2013 to September 19, 2016.

In the petitioner's support letter, the petitioner stated that it was founded in 1994 as a "software development, IT and Regulatory Consulting, and Café Business." The petitioner also stated that the beneficiary will perform the following duties in the proffered position:

1. Modify existing software to correct errors, allow it to adapt to new hardware, or to improve its performance.
2. Develop and direct software system testing and validation procedures, programming, and documentation.
3. Confer with systems analysts, engineers, programmers and others to design system and to obtain information on project limitations and capabilities, performance requirements and interfaces.
4. Analyze user needs and software requirements to determine feasibility of design within time and cost constraints.
5. Design, develop and modify software systems, using scientific analysis and mathematical models to predict and measure outcome and consequences of design.
6. Store, retrieve, and manipulate data for analysis of system capabilities and requirements.
7. Consult with customers about software system design and maintenance.
8. Supervise the work of programmers, technologists and technicians and other engineering and scientific personnel.
9. Coordinate software system installation and monitor equipment functioning to ensure specifications are met.
10. Obtain and evaluate information on factors such as reporting formats required, costs, and security needs to determine hardware configuration.

The petitioner also stated that the position of software developer requires "[a]t a minimum a Bachelor's degree in a Computer Science related field." The petitioner further stated that "University-level course work and work experience related to this field are essential to adequately perform the work required by the position."

The petitioner submitted a copy of pages from the petitioner's website. The information on the petitioner's website states that the petitioner is a Compliance consultant, "[p]roviding superior customized service in the Pharmaceutical, Biotechnology, Medical Devices, and Manufacturing industries." The petitioner also submitted the beneficiary's resume and copies of his school records and diplomas.

The director found the initial evidence insufficient to establish eligibility for the benefit sought, and issued an RFE on April 15, 2013. The petitioner was asked to submit probative evidence to establish, in part, that a valid employer-employee relationship will exist between the petitioner and the beneficiary. The director outlined some of the types of specific evidence that could be submitted.

In response to the RFE, counsel for the petitioner explained the following regarding where the beneficiary will be working:

Please find enclosed a contract for three years for [the petitioner] with Specialty Systems, Inc and which will be the focus of the beneficiary's work during this time frame. In addition, we have included previous contracts and the most recent contracts as well for [the petitioner] with other vendors. In addition, we have amended the H1B Petition form I-129 to reflect that the beneficiary will be placed at more than one location possibly during his employment with [the petitioner]....

Counsel's request to amend the petition in response to the RFE is not properly before the us. The regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(E) state in pertinent part:

The petitioner shall file an amended or new petition, with fee, with the Service Center where the original petition was filed to reflect any material changes in the terms and conditions of employment or training or the alien's eligibility as specified in the original approved petition.

Furthermore, the new I-129 cannot be considered as it post-dates the filing of the petition. The petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing the nonimmigrant visa petition. 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(1). A visa petition may not be approved at a future date after the petitioner or beneficiary becomes eligible under a new set of facts. *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. 248 (Reg. Comm'r 1978).

In addition, the petitioner stated in the initial Form I-129 that the beneficiary will not work off-site and now in response to the RFE, counsel for the petitioner contends that the beneficiary may work off-site. Again, the petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing the nonimmigrant visa petition. 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(1). A visa petition may not be approved at a future date after the petitioner or beneficiary becomes eligible under a new set of facts. *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. 248 (Reg. Comm'r 1978).

In response to the RFE, the petitioner provided, among other things, the following documents:

- A copy of the Articles of Incorporation of the petitioner from the North Carolina Department of State.
- A copy of the City of Raleigh Business license that lists the business as, [REDACTED]
- A copy of a document entitled, "Contractor Agreement," entered into on June 15, 2013 between the petitioner and [REDACTED]. The agreement states that the petitioner will render consulting services from November 1, 2013 "to such date that this Agreement is terminated in accordance with Section three (3) below."
- A copy of a document entitled, "Services Agreement," between [REDACTED] and the petitioner.

- A copy of the petitioner's lease agreement. The lease agreement stated that "[the petitioner] shall use the Rental Space only for the operation of a Café. . . ."
- A copy of the petitioner's tax returns for 2011 and 2012.

The director reviewed the documentation and found it insufficient to establish eligibility for the benefit sought. The director denied the petition on July 8, 2013. The petitioner submitted an appeal of the denial of the H-1B petition.

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner claimed, "[t]he Petitioner supplied three different contracts with three different vendors showing exactly the kind of work and projects the beneficiary will be working on" during his employment with the petitioner. Counsel also claimed on appeal that the beneficiary will be working on an internal project for the petitioner. Counsel asserted that the beneficiary's work location is a business called [REDACTED] which "is in the heart of downtown Raleigh and that there is office space in the back."

## II. LAW AND ANALYSIS

### A. Lack of Standing to File the Petition as a United States Employer

We will first determine whether the petitioner has established that it meets the regulatory definition of a United States employer as that term is defined at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). We will review the record of proceeding to determine whether the petitioner has established that it will have "an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee." *Id.*

Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act defines an H-1B nonimmigrant in pertinent part as an alien:

subject to section 212(j)(2), who is coming temporarily to the United States to perform services . . . in a specialty occupation described in section 214(i)(1) . . . , who meets the requirements for the occupation specified in section 214(i)(2) . . . , and with respect to whom the Secretary of Labor determines and certifies to the [Secretary of Homeland Security] that the intending employer has filed with the Secretary [of Labor] an application under section 212(n)(1) . . . .

The term "United States employer" is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) as follows:

*United States employer* means a person, firm, corporation, contractor, or other association, or organization in the United States which:

- (1) Engages a person to work within the United States;

- (2) *Has an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee; and*
- (3) Has an Internal Revenue Service Tax identification number.

8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (emphasis added); *see also* 56 Fed. Reg. 61111, 61121 (Dec. 2, 1991). In the instant case, the record is not persuasive in establishing that the petitioner will have an employer-employee relationship with the beneficiary.

Although "United States employer" is defined in the regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), it is noted that the terms "employee" and "employer-employee relationship" are not defined for purposes of the H-1B visa classification. Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act indicates that an alien coming to the United States to perform services in a specialty occupation will have an "intending employer" who will file an LCA with the Secretary of Labor pursuant to section 212(n)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(1). The intending employer is described as offering full-time or part-time "employment" to the H-1B "employee." Subsections 212(n)(1)(A)(i) and 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(1)(A)(i), (2)(C)(vii). Further, the regulations indicate that "United States employers" must file a Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker (Form I-129) in order to classify aliens as H-1B temporary "employees." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(1), (2)(i)(A). Finally, the definition of "United States employer" indicates in its second prong that the petitioner must have an "employer-employee relationship" with the "employees under this part," i.e., the H-1B beneficiary, and that this relationship be evidenced by the employer's ability to "hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining the term "United States employer").

Neither the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) nor USCIS defined the terms "employee" or "employer-employee relationship" by regulation for purposes of the H-1B visa classification, even though the regulation describes H-1B beneficiaries as being "employees" who must have an "employer-employee relationship" with a "United States employer." *Id.* Therefore, for purposes of the H-1B visa classification, these terms are undefined.

The United States Supreme Court has determined that where federal law fails to clearly define the term "employee," courts should conclude that the term was "intended to describe the conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine." *Nationwide Mutual Ins. Co. v. Darden*, 503 U.S. 318, 322-323 (1992) (hereinafter "*Darden*") (quoting *Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid*, 490 U.S. 730 (1989)). The Supreme Court stated:

"In determining whether a hired party is an employee under the general common law of agency, we consider the hiring party's right to control the manner and means by which the product is accomplished. Among the other factors relevant to this inquiry are the skill required; the source of the instrumentalities and tools; the location of the work; the duration of the relationship between the parties; whether the hiring party has the right to assign additional projects to the hired party; the extent of the hired party's discretion over when and how long to work; the method of payment; the hired party's role in hiring and paying assistants; whether the work is part of the regular business of the hiring party; whether the hiring party is in business; the provision of employee

benefits; and the tax treatment of the hired party."

*Darden*, 503 U.S. at 323-324 (quoting *Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid*, 490 U.S. at 751-752); see also *Clackamas Gastroenterology Associates, P.C. v. Wells*, 538 U.S. 440, 445 (2003) (hereinafter "*Clackamas*"). As the common-law test contains "no shorthand formula or magic phrase that can be applied to find the answer, . . . all of the incidents of the relationship must be assessed and weighed with no one factor being decisive." *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 324 (quoting *NLRB v. United Ins. Co. of America*, 390 U.S. 254, 258 (1968)).

In this matter, the Act does not exhibit a legislative intent to extend the definition of "employer" in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, "employment" in section 212(n)(1)(A)(i) of the Act, or "employee" in section 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act beyond the traditional common law definitions. See generally 136 Cong. Rec. S17106 (daily ed. Oct. 26, 1990); 136 Cong. Rec. H12358 (daily ed. Oct. 27, 1990). On the contrary, in the context of the H-1B visa classification, the regulations define the term "United States employer" to be even more restrictive than the common law agency definition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> While the *Darden* court considered only the definition of "employee" under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 ("ERISA"), 29 U.S.C. § 1002(6), and did not address the definition of "employer," courts have generally refused to extend the common law agency definition to ERISA's use of employer because "the definition of 'employer' in ERISA, unlike the definition of 'employee,' clearly indicates legislative intent to extend the definition beyond the traditional common law definition." See, e.g., *Bowers v. Andrew Weir Shipping, Ltd.*, 810 F. Supp. 522 (S.D.N.Y. 1992), *aff'd*, 27 F.3d 800 (2nd Cir.), *cert. denied*, 513 U.S. 1000 (1994).

However, in this matter, the Act does not exhibit a legislative intent to extend the definition of "employer" in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, "employment" in section 212(n)(1)(A)(i) of the Act, or "employee" in section 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act beyond the traditional common law definitions. Instead, in the context of the H-1B visa classification, the term "United States employer" was defined in the regulations to be even more restrictive than the common law agency definition. A federal agency's interpretation of a statute whose administration is entrusted to it is to be accepted unless Congress has spoken directly on the issue. See *Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 844-845 (1984).

The regulatory definition of "United States employer" requires H-1B employers to have a tax identification number, to employ persons in the United States, and to have an "employer-employee relationship" with the H-1B "employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Accordingly, the term "United States employer" not only requires H-1B employers and employees to have an "employer-employee relationship" as understood by common-law agency doctrine, it imposes additional requirements of having a tax identification number and to employ persons in the United States. The lack of an express expansion of the definition regarding the terms "employee," "employed," "employment" or "employer-employee relationship" indicates that the regulations do not intend to extend the definition beyond "the traditional common law definition." Therefore, in the absence of an intent to impose broader definitions by either Congress or USCIS, the "conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine," and the *Darden* construction test, apply to the terms "employee," "employer-employee relationship," "employed," and "employment" as used in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, section 212(n) of the Act, and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h). That being said, there are instances in the Act where Congress may have intended a broader application of the term "employer" than what is encompassed in the conventional master-servant relationship. See, e.g., section 214(c)(2)(F) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c)(2)(F) (referring to "unaffiliated employers" supervising and controlling L-1B intracompany transferees having specialized knowledge); section 274A of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1324a (referring to the employment of

Specifically, the regulatory definition of "United States employer" requires H-1B employers to have a tax identification number, to engage a person to work within the United States, and to have an "employer-employee relationship" with the H-1B "employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Accordingly, the term "United States employer" not only requires H-1B employers and employees to have an "employer-employee relationship" as understood by common-law agency doctrine, it imposes additional requirements of having a tax identification number and to employ persons in the United States. The lack of an express expansion of the definition regarding the terms "employee" or "employer-employee relationship" combined with the agency's otherwise generally circular definition of United States employer in 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) indicates that the regulations do not intend to extend the definition beyond "the traditional common law definition" or, more importantly, that construing these terms in this manner would thwart congressional design or lead to absurd results. *Cf. Darden*, 503 U.S. at 318-319.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, in the absence of an express congressional intent to impose broader definitions, both the "conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine" and the *Darden* construction test apply to the terms "employee" and "employer-employee relationship" as used in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, section 212(n) of the Act, and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h).<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, in considering whether or not one will be an "employee" in an "employer-employee relationship" with a "United States employer" for purposes of H-1B nonimmigrant petitions, USCIS must focus on the common-law touchstone of "control." *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450; *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining a "United States employer" as one who "has an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise *control* the work of any such employee . . . ." (emphasis added)).

The factors indicating that a worker is or will be an "employee" of an "employer" are clearly delineated in both the *Darden* and *Clackamas* decisions. *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 323-324; *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 445; *see also Restatement (Second) of Agency* § 220(2) (1958). Such indicia of control include when, where, and how a worker performs the job; the continuity of the worker's relationship with the employer; the tax treatment of the worker; the provision of employee benefits; and whether the work performed by the worker is part of the employer's regular business. *See Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 445; *see also New Compliance Manual*, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, § 2-III(A)(1) (adopting a materially identical test and indicating that said test was based on the *Darden* decision); *see also Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384, 388 (5th Cir. 2000) (determining that hospitals, as the recipients of beneficiaries'

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unauthorized aliens).

<sup>3</sup> To the extent the regulations are ambiguous with regard to the terms "employee" or "employer-employee relationship," the agency's interpretation of these terms should be found to be controlling unless "plainly erroneous or inconsistent with the regulation." *Auer v. Robbins*, 519 U.S. 452, 461 (1997) (citing *Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council*, 490 U.S. 332, 359, 109 S.Ct. 1835, 1850, 104 L.Ed.2d 351 (1989) (quoting *Bowles v. Seminole Rock & Sand Co.*, 325 U.S. 410, 414, 65 S.Ct. 1215, 1217, 89 L.Ed. 1700 (1945))).

<sup>4</sup> That said, there are instances in the Act where Congress may have intended a broader application of the term "employer" than what is encompassed in the conventional master-servant relationship. *See, e.g.*, section 214(c)(2)(F) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c)(2)(F) (referring to "unaffiliated employers" supervising and controlling L-1B intracompany transferees having specialized knowledge); section 274A of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1324a (referring to the employment of unauthorized aliens).

services, are the "true employers" of H-1B nurses under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h), even though a medical contract service agency is the actual petitioner, because the hospitals ultimately hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of the beneficiaries).

It is important to note, however, that the factors listed in *Darden* and *Clackamas* are not exhaustive and must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Other aspects of the relationship between the parties relevant to control may affect the determination of whether an employer-employee relationship exists. Furthermore, not all or even a majority of the listed criteria need be met; however, the fact finder must weigh and compare a combination of the factors in analyzing the facts of each individual case. The determination must be based on all of the circumstances in the relationship between the parties, regardless of whether the parties refer to it as an employee or as an independent contractor relationship. See *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 448-449; *New Compliance Manual* at § 2-III(A)(1).

Furthermore, when examining the factors relevant to determining control, USCIS must assess and weigh each actual factor itself as it exists or will exist and not the claimed employer's right to influence or change that factor, unless specifically provided for by the common-law test. See *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 323-324. For example, while the assignment of additional projects is dependent on who has the *right to* assign them, it is the *actual* source of the instrumentalities and tools that must be examined, and not who has the *right to* provide the tools required to complete an assigned project. See *id.* at 323.

Lastly, the "mere existence of a document styled 'employment agreement'" shall not lead inexorably to the conclusion that the worker is an employee. *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450. "Rather, . . . the answer to whether [an individual] is an employee depends on 'all of the incidents of the relationship . . . with no one factor being decisive.'" *Id.* at 451 (quoting *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 324).

Applying the *Darden* and *Clackamas* tests to this matter, the petitioner has not established that it will be a "United States employer" having an "employer-employee relationship" with the beneficiary as an H-1B temporary "employee."

As a preliminary issue, we find that the petitioner provided conflicting information as to the job location and work assignment regarding the proffered position. For example, in the Form I-129, the petitioner stated that the beneficiary will not work off-site. However, in response to the RFE, counsel for the petitioner submitted contracts with vendors and indicated that the beneficiary will work on the assignments pursuant to those contracts, which may be off site. On appeal, counsel explained that the beneficiary will also work on an in-house project for the petitioner. Counsel submitted a business plan and explanation of the in-house project. It is not clear why the beneficiary's work location, assignment and duties changed from the initial filing. No explanation for the inconsistencies was provided. It is incumbent upon the petitioner to resolve any inconsistencies in the record by independent objective evidence. Any attempt to explain or reconcile such inconsistencies will not suffice unless the petitioner submits competent objective evidence pointing to where the truth lies. *Matter of Ho*, 19 I&N Dec. 582, 591-92 (BIA 1988). The petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing the nonimmigrant visa petition. 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(1). A visa petition may not be approved at a future date after the petitioner or beneficiary becomes eligible under a new set of facts. *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. 248 (Reg. Comm'r 1978).

The petitioner claims that it will have an employer-employee relationship with the beneficiary and that the beneficiary will work for an end client, [REDACTED] and will work on an in-house project, and may work with other vendors. As noted above, the petitioner has provided different information regarding where the beneficiary will work during the requested employment with the petitioner. Even assuming the beneficiary will work for [REDACTED] the petitioner did not submit any documents which detailed the nature and scope of the beneficiary's employment at the end client. [REDACTED]

Upon review of the contractor agreement between the petitioner and [REDACTED] it does not provide a detailed explanation of the type of work to be provided by the petitioner. In addition, the contract is entered into June 15, 2013, thus was not in effect when the petition was filed. Moreover, the petitioner did not submit a work order that specifically states that the beneficiary will work with [REDACTED]. Furthermore, under Section 1., "Description of Services," it states that "said consulting services shall include, but not necessarily be limited to program analysis, program coding, and integration, either directly or indirectly with [REDACTED] from here on as CLIENT and CLIENT's users." The petitioner did not provide any information on [REDACTED] and thus, it is not clear if the petitioner will provide consulting services to [REDACTED]. Again, it is incumbent upon the petitioner to resolve any inconsistencies in the record by independent objective evidence. Any attempt to explain or reconcile such inconsistencies will not suffice unless the petitioner submits competent objective evidence pointing to where the truth lies. *Matter of Ho*, 19 I&N Dec. 582, 591-92 (BIA 1988).

The petitioner submitted a second contract to indicate they have additional work for the beneficiary should he need it. However, upon review of the service agreement between the petitioner and [REDACTED] Inc., it states that [REDACTED] is entering into this Agreement with Service Provider with the understanding that [REDACTED] will conduct the Services under this Agreement on behalf of the Service Provider." Thus, it does not appear that the beneficiary could work on this project as the services agreement specifically states that the work must be completed by [REDACTED].

The petitioner also submitted a third agreement as evidence that it has additional work for the beneficiary should he need it, between [REDACTED] and a contractor identified as [REDACTED] (dba as the petitioner). Upon review of this one-page agreement, it states that "the terms and conditions of this Agreement are attached hereto as Exhibit A and are incorporated herein by this reference and made a part hereof." However, the petitioner did not submit Exhibit A, thus, the agreement is not complete. Moreover, the record does not include sufficient probative evidence establishing that this individual is authorized to do business as the petitioner. In addition, the petitioner did not submit any documentation such as a work order specifically indicating the beneficiary's role with this vendor. Finally, the agreement was effective on April 30, 2012 but does not include an end date so it is not clear if the agreement still exists. Going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Comm'r 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm'r 1972)).

Finally, on appeal, counsel for the petitioner stated that the beneficiary will also be working on an in-house project. It is not clear how the beneficiary could be working with [REDACTED] while also working on the in-house project for the petitioner. The petitioner does not include specific

duties, an allocation of his time, or other substantive information regarding the beneficiary's actual proposed work for either [REDACTED] or the claimed in-house project. In addition, the director specifically requested that the petitioner provide evidence of any in-house project if the beneficiary would work on such a project; however, the petitioner failed to even reference an in-house project in its response to the director's RFE. The regulations indicate that the petitioner shall submit additional evidence as the director, in his or her discretion, may deem necessary in the adjudication of the petition. See 8 C.F.R. §§ 103.2(b)(8); 214.2(h)(9)(i). The purpose of the request for evidence is to elicit further information that clarifies whether eligibility for the benefit sought has been established, as of the time the petition is filed. See 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(1), (8), and (12). The failure to submit requested evidence that precludes a material line of inquiry shall be grounds for denying the petition. 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(14). As the nature of the beneficiary's specific work is material to an eligibility determination in this matter, the failure of the petitioner to provide this requested, material evidence is an additional ground for denying the petition.

Furthermore, although the requested evidence was eventually submitted, it was only submitted for the first time on appeal. Where, as here, a petitioner has been put on notice of a deficiency in the evidence and has been given an opportunity to respond to that deficiency, we will not accept evidence offered for the first time on appeal. See *Matter of Soriano*, 19 I&N Dec. 764 (BIA 1988); see also *Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. 533 (BIA 1988). If the petitioner had wanted the submitted evidence to be considered, it should have submitted the documents in response to the director's request for evidence. *Id.* Under the circumstances, we need not and do not consider the sufficiency of this evidence submitted on appeal.

Although, the petitioner contends that it has the right to control the beneficiary's work and monitors and assigns his work on a regular basis, and submitted evidence such as the service agreements discussed above, the petitioner did not submit any document which detailed the nature and scope of the beneficiary's employment from the end clients. The agreements, even if effective and still ongoing when the petition was filed, which the petitioner has not established, do not include consistent information regarding the actual client or end-client. The record is simply deficient in this regard. There is insufficient probative evidence demonstrating where and to whom the beneficiary will provide his services. Thus, it is not possible to discern from the incomplete record that the petitioner will exercise control over the beneficiary's work. That is without all the agreements establishing the beneficiary's work, it is not possible to ascertain what limitations or restrictions have been put in place regarding the beneficiary's work. Therefore the key element in this matter, which is who exercises control over the beneficiary, has not been substantiated.

While social security contributions, worker's compensation contributions, unemployment insurance contributions, federal and state income tax withholdings, and other benefits are still relevant factors in determining who will control an alien beneficiary, other incidents of the relationship, e.g., who will oversee and direct the work of the beneficiary, who will provide the instrumentalities and tools, where will the work be located, and who has the right or ability to affect the projects to which the alien beneficiary is assigned, must also be assessed and weighed in order to make a determination as to who will be the beneficiary's employer. Without full disclosure of all of the relevant factors, we are unable to find that the requisite employer-employee relationship will likely exist between the petitioner and the beneficiary.

In addition, the evidence is not clear if the beneficiary will in fact be working as a Software Developer as the petitioner attested on the Form I-129 and LCA. The petitioner's lease agreement states, "the Lessee shall use the Rental Space only for the operation of a Café..." Thus, it is not clear how the petitioner is a consulting company and the beneficiary will work as a software developer at the petitioner's location that can only be used as a Café. Further, the petitioner claimed that it has three employees, but does not clarify how its three employees run a café and provide consulting services to vendors. The petitioner has not provided sufficient credible evidence establishing the nature of its business, and that it provides consulting services as attested on the Form I-129. Doubt cast on any aspect of the petitioner's proof may, of course, lead to a reevaluation of the reliability and sufficiency of the remaining evidence offered in support of the visa petition. *Matter of Ho*, 19 I&N Dec. 582, 591 (BIA 1988). We also note that an inaccurate statement anywhere on the Form I-129 or in the evidence submitted in connection with the petition mandates its denial. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(10)(ii); *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(1).

Upon review of the deficiencies in the record, we find that the petitioner has not submitted sufficient probative evidence to establish that it qualifies as a United States employer, as defined by 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Merely claiming in its letters that the petitioner exercises complete control over the beneficiary, without sufficient, credible corroborating evidence to support the claim, does not establish eligibility in this matter. Again, going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. at 165. The evidence of record does not establish that the petitioner would act as the beneficiary's employer for H-1B purposes, in that it will hire, pay, fire, or otherwise control the work of the beneficiary.

Based on the tests outlined above, the petitioner has not established that it will be a "United States employer" having an "employer-employee relationship" with the beneficiary as an H-1B temporary "employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii).

B. Failure to Establish that Proffered Position Qualifies as a Specialty Occupation

Beyond the decision of the director, we find that the petitioner also failed to establish that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation in accordance with the applicable statutory and regulatory provisions.

For an H-1B petition to be granted, the petitioner must provide sufficient evidence to establish that it will employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation position. To meet its burden of proof in this regard, the petitioner must establish that the employment it is offering to the beneficiary meets the applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

Section 214(i)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1), defines the term "specialty occupation" as an occupation that requires:

- (A) theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and
- (B) attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its

equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) states, in pertinent part, the following:

*Specialty occupation* means an occupation which [(1)] requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in fields of human endeavor including, but not limited to, architecture, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, business specialties, accounting, law, theology, and the arts, and which [(2)] requires the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), to qualify as a specialty occupation, a proposed position must also meet one of the following criteria:

- (1) A baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position;
- (2) The degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or, in the alternative, an employer may show that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree;
- (3) The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position; or
- (4) The nature of the specific duties [is] so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree.

As a threshold issue, it is noted that 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must logically be read together with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). In other words, this regulatory language must be construed in harmony with the thrust of the related provisions and with the statute as a whole. *See K Mart Corp. v. Cartier, Inc.*, 486 U.S. 281, 291 (1988) (holding that construction of language which takes into account the design of the statute as a whole is preferred); *see also COIT Independence Joint Venture v. Federal Sav. and Loan Ins. Corp.*, 489 U.S. 561 (1989); *Matter of W-F-*, 21 I&N Dec. 503 (BIA 1996). As such, the criteria stated in 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) should logically be read as being necessary but not necessarily sufficient to meet the statutory and regulatory definition of specialty occupation. To otherwise interpret this section as stating the necessary *and* sufficient conditions for meeting the definition of specialty occupation would result in particular positions meeting a condition under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) but not the statutory or regulatory definition. *See Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 387. To avoid this result, 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must therefore be read as providing supplemental criteria that must be met in accordance with, and not as alternatives to, the statutory and regulatory definitions of specialty occupation.

As such and consonant with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), USCIS consistently interprets the term "degree" in the criteria at 8 C.F.R.

§ 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to mean not just any baccalaureate or higher degree, but one in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proffered position. See *Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d 139, 147 (1st Cir. 2007) (describing "a degree requirement in a specific specialty" as "one that relates directly to the duties and responsibilities of a particular position"). Applying this standard, USCIS regularly approves H-1B petitions for qualified aliens who are to be employed as engineers, computer scientists, certified public accountants, college professors, and other such occupations. These professions, for which petitioners have regularly been able to establish a minimum entry requirement in the United States of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the particular position, fairly represent the types of specialty occupations that Congress contemplated when it created the H-1B visa category.

To determine whether a particular job qualifies as a specialty occupation, USCIS does not simply rely on a position's title. The specific duties of the proffered position, combined with the nature of the petitioning entity's business operations, are factors to be considered. USCIS must examine the ultimate employment of the alien, and determine whether the position qualifies as a specialty occupation. See generally *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384. The critical element is not the title of the position nor an employer's self-imposed standards, but whether the position actually requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty as the minimum for entry into the occupation, as required by the Act.

As recognized by the court in *Defensor, supra*, where the work is to be performed for entities other than the petitioner, evidence of the client's job requirements is critical. See *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d at 387-388. That is, it is necessary for the end-client to provide sufficient information regarding the proposed job duties to be performed at its location in order to properly ascertain the minimum educational requirements necessary to perform those duties. *Id.* The court held that the former INS had reasonably interpreted the statute and regulations as requiring the petitioner to produce evidence that a proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation on the basis of the requirements imposed by the entities using the beneficiary's services. *Id.* at 384. Such evidence must be sufficiently detailed to demonstrate the type and educational level of highly specialized knowledge in a specific discipline that is necessary to perform that particular work.

In the instant case, the record of proceeding is devoid of sufficient information from the claimed end-clients regarding the specific job duties to be performed by the beneficiary. In addition, even if considering the petitioner's in-house project, the petitioner did not provide details of the job duties the beneficiary will perform on the project. The petitioner has not identified the beneficiary's actual role and assignment with specificity, and the corresponding duties, for any of its clients, ultimate end-clients, or its in-house project. The record includes a general description of the occupation of a software developer but does not include detail regarding the beneficiary's day-to-day duties. Such a generalized description may be adequate when defining the range of duties that may be performed within an occupation, but cannot be relied upon by a petitioner when discussing the duties attached to specific employment. In establishing a position as a specialty occupation, a petitioner must describe the specific duties and responsibilities to be performed by a beneficiary in relation to its particular business interests. The petitioner has failed to do so here.

The petitioner's failure to establish the substantive nature of the work to be performed by the beneficiary, therefore, precludes a finding that the proffered position satisfies any criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), because it is the substantive nature of that work that determines (1) the normal minimum educational requirement for the particular position, which is the focus of criterion 1; (2) industry positions which are parallel to the proffered position and thus appropriate for review for a common degree requirement, under the first alternate prong of criterion 2; (3) the level of complexity or uniqueness of the proffered position, which is the focus of the second alternate prong of criterion 2; (4) the factual justification for a petitioner normally requiring a degree or its equivalent, when that is an issue under criterion 3; and (5) the degree of specialization and complexity of the specific duties, which is the focus of criterion 4.

Accordingly, as the record does not include the requisite substantive nature of the work to be performed by the beneficiary, the petitioner has not established that it has satisfied any of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), and it cannot be found that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. For this additional reason, the appeal will be dismissed and the petition will be denied.

As discussed in this decision, the petitioner did not submit sufficient evidence regarding the proffered position to determine that it is a specialty occupation and, therefore, the issue of whether it will require a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, also cannot be determined. USCIS is required to follow long-standing legal standards and determine first, whether the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation, and second, whether an alien beneficiary was qualified for the position at the time the nonimmigrant visa petition was filed. *Cf. Matter of Michael Hertz Assoc.*, 19 I&N Dec. 558, 560 (Comm'r 1988) ("The facts of a beneficiary's background only come at issue after it is found that the position in which the petitioner intends to employ him falls within [a specialty occupation]"). Therefore, we need not and will not address the beneficiary's qualifications.

### C. Speculative Employment

Although not specifically addressed by the director, we also find beyond the decision, that the petitioner has not established that it has specialty occupation work available for the beneficiary for the requested employment period. In that regard, we have reviewed the information in the record regarding the petitioner's consulting business. Upon review of this information, we find that the record of proceeding lacks documentation regarding the petitioner's business activities and the actual work that the beneficiary will perform to sufficiently substantiate the claim that the petitioner has H-1B caliber work for the beneficiary for the period of employment requested in the petition. That is, the record does not include sufficient work product or other documentary evidence to confirm that the petitioner has ongoing projects or actual work that the beneficiary will perform to sufficiently substantiate the claim that the petitioner has H-1B caliber work for the beneficiary for the period of employment requested in the petition. The petitioner provided a contractor agreement with [REDACTED] and a services agreement with [REDACTED], but neither contract indicates that these entities will have specialty occupation work available for the beneficiary until September 30, 2016.

In addition, the petitioner did not provide any documentation to support the claim that the in-house project will last for three years such as a business plan with a detailed timeline, a budget, or general information on how long a new product development usually takes to complete. In addition, the

petitioner did not provide any evidence of the job duties to be performed by the beneficiary if the in-house project fails or is completed prior to September 30, 2016. The record does not include evidence of sufficient work product to confirm that the petitioner has ongoing projects to which the beneficiary will be assigned.

The agency made clear long ago that speculative employment is not permitted in the H-1B program. For example, a 1998 proposed rule documented this position as follows:

Historically, the Service has not granted H-1B classification on the basis of speculative, or undetermined, prospective employment. The H-1B classification is not intended as a vehicle for an alien to engage in a job search within the United States, or for employers to bring in temporary foreign workers to meet possible workforce needs arising from potential business expansions or the expectation of potential new customers or contracts. To determine whether an alien is properly classifiable as an H-1B nonimmigrant under the statute, the Service must first examine the duties of the position to be occupied to ascertain whether the duties of the position require the attainment of a specific bachelor's degree. See section 214(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the "Act"). The Service must then determine whether the alien has the appropriate degree for the occupation. In the case of speculative employment, the Service is unable to perform either part of this two-prong analysis and, therefore, is unable to adjudicate properly a request for H-1B classification. Moreover, there is no assurance that the alien will engage in a specialty occupation upon arrival in this country.

63 Fed. Reg. 30419, 30419 - 30420 (June 4, 1998). While a petitioner is certainly permitted to change its intent with regard to non-speculative employment, e.g., a change in duties or job location, it must nonetheless document such a material change in intent through an amended or new petition in accordance with 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(E). In this matter, even if the petitioner had established the position proffered here is a specialty occupation, which it has not, the petition must still be denied for this additional reason.

### III. CONCLUSION

An application or petition that fails to comply with the technical requirements of the law may be denied by us even if the service center does not identify all of the grounds for denial in the initial decision. See *Spencer Enterprises, Inc. v. United States*, 229 F. Supp. 2d 1025, 1043 (E.D. Cal. 2001), *aff'd*, 345 F.3d 683 (9th Cir. 2003); see also *Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004) (noting that the AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis).

Moreover, when we deny a petition on multiple alternative grounds, a plaintiff can succeed on a challenge only if it shows that we abused our discretion with respect to all of our enumerated grounds. See *Spencer Enterprises, Inc. v. United States*, 229 F. Supp. 2d at 1043, *aff'd*. 345 F.3d 683.

The petition will be denied and the appeal dismissed for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an independent and alternative basis for the decision. In visa petition proceedings, it is the petitioner's burden to establish eligibility for the immigration benefit sought. Section 291 of the Act,

8 U.S.C. § 1361; *Matter of Otiende*, 26 I&N Dec. 127, 128 (BIA 2013). Here, that burden has not been met.

**ORDER:** The appeal is dismissed. The petition is denied.