

Entrepreneurs in Residence

U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Initiative Summary
May 2013

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Working with private sector experts to better serve the entrepreneurial community

Why EIR

In 2011, the White House and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced a series of new initiatives to grow the U.S. economy and create American jobs. As part of these efforts, USCIS sought to ensure that it was realizing the full potential of our current immigration system to attract and retain immigrants founding startup enterprises that promote innovation and create jobs in America. Immigrant entrepreneurs are some of our nation's most successful job creators but the existing immigration framework, and USCIS policies and practices, did not serve their industry well or reflect the business realities they faced. Solving this important challenge required expertise, fresh ideas, focus, and time. The Entrepreneurs in Residence (EIR) model provided all of this: it brought together professionals with diverse talents from inside and outside government to work together as a team on outcome-oriented solutions within a short and focused time frame.

How it worked

USCIS announced the EIR initiative at a meeting of the President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness in October 2011 and formally launched the initiative at a national stakeholder summit in Silicon Valley in February 2012. The initiative was spearheaded by USCIS, working in close coordination with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. USCIS was only the second Federal agency to embrace this tool for government innovation.

To build its EIR team, USCIS recruited both startup experts from the private sector, using DHS's Loaned Executive Program, and internal immigration experts from across the agency. Working within the framework of current immigration law, the team set out with the overarching goal of optimizing existing visa categories used by entrepreneurs to provide pathways that are clear, consistent, and aligned with business realities. After a brief orientation and an initial visit to USCIS's California Service Center, one of the four service centers that receive applications and petitions from entrepreneurs, the team developed a detailed project plan, incorporating feedback from external stakeholders and USCIS immigration officers, with several sub-goals and projects that could be completed in 90 days.

The USCIS EIR effort began as a 90-day sprint focused solely on nonimmigrant visa categories. To build on the initial successes achieved, the team volunteered to continue its work and recruited new internal experts to expand the focus of the project to relevant immigrant visa categories. Over the course of a year, the EIR team convened on a regular basis at USCIS headquarters in Washington, D.C., service centers in California, Vermont, Texas, and Nebraska, and at stakeholder engagements around the country.

What it did

The EIR team worked collaboratively to develop the most effective solutions for USCIS. For each of its three main goals, the team produced a range of signature deliverables, detailed below.

1. Produced clear public materials to help entrepreneurs understand which visa categories are most appropriate for their particular circumstance.

Launched *Entrepreneur Pathways*. In November 2012, the EIR team launched *Entrepreneur Pathways*, a custom-designed resource for immigrant entrepreneurs that provides

Average unique visitors a day	300
Total unique visitors since launch	30,000

them with the tools and information to determine which visa category is most appropriate for their particular circumstance. *Entrepreneur Pathways* makes

information about relevant visa categories readily available to help entrepreneurs better understand the variety of immigration pathways, and the requirements for each potential pathway, that could enable them to start or grow a business in the United States.

Improved outreach to student entrepreneurs. Though USCIS does not have primary jurisdiction over student visas, the team focused on identifying better ways to reach student entrepreneurs and disseminating information about the immigration pathways that may allow these students to stay in the United States to start a business after completing their education. This included cross-linking USCIS resources with Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE's) *Study in the States* website, sharing information with ICE and DHS on top university and private incubator programs, and identifying and collaborating with universities as a preferred venue for community engagements.

2. Equipped USCIS's workforce with tools to better adjudicate cases in today's complex and rapidly evolving business environment.

Developed and delivered *Startup 101 training*. The team developed a comprehensive training course for USCIS on the startup landscape. Piloted with a small group of immigration officers in June 2012, the team subsequently delivered the training to nearly all

Total number of officers trained	425
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employment-based immigration officers at the four USCIS service centers. The training curriculum, rated highly by a majority of immigration officers, covers such topics as

the history and anatomy of a startup enterprise, business fundamentals, stages of a startup, and funding and sources of capital. Principles addressed in the Startup 101 training have been integrated into USCIS's BASIC training course, which the agency delivers to all adjudicating officers, and will be incorporated into online training modules that are accessible to any USCIS employee.

Trained specialized core of immigration officers. While nearly all employment-based immigration officers at USCIS's four service centers received the Startup 101 training course, a smaller subset of officers at each center

Total number of specialized officers	109
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received more detailed document-based training and case study workshops. These officers comprise a specialized core at each service center focused specifically on adjudicating and tracking entrepreneur and startup cases, helping USCIS enhance the consistency and quality of these adjudications.

Created startup resource library. To complement the Startup 101 training and ensure that immigration officers have continued access to a range of evolving tools to assist their adjudications, the team developed an internal USCIS website with all EIR-related resources. These resources include the Startup 101 training slides, a glossary of terms commonly used by startups and entrepreneurs, sample financial documents that startups may likely submit, and other materials developed or compiled over the course of the EIR effort. These products will be continually enhanced and updated.

3. Streamlined USCIS's policies and practices to better reflect the realities faced by foreign entrepreneurs and startup businesses.

Engaged with entrepreneurs nationwide. To inform its work, the EIR team prioritized gathering feedback and strategic thinking directly from entrepreneurs. In addition to the summit in Silicon Valley, the team held engagements with entrepreneurial communities in Atlanta, Boston, and Washington, DC. USCIS partnered with such academic institutions as Georgia Tech and MIT that have a vested interest in issues at the nexus of immigration and entrepreneurship. In 2013, USCIS will host additional engagements in startup hubs across the country, beginning with the University of Chicago. These engagements will help further USCIS's understanding of the immigration issues affecting entrepreneurs in local communities and evaluate the effectiveness of the entrepreneur resources that USCIS has developed.

Number of engagement participants in 2012	500
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Revised Request for Evidence (RFE) templates. To help officers better communicate with startup companies, the team explored alternative forms of evidence that the agency has not traditionally asked for and that an entrepreneur or startup may be more able to provide to meet the eligibility criteria for particular visa classifications. The team revised specific templates to make them more user-friendly and reflective of current business trends. For example, while RFEs typically asked for documents like stock certificates, articles of incorporation and bylaws, the RFEs may now include requests for documents such as stock purchase agreements, capitalization tables, and term sheets, which may be useful documents for the agency to review when determining eligibility for certain petitions filed by startups.

Number of RFE templates revised	5
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Reviewed H-1B policies. Based on internal and external feedback, the team evaluated the challenges and limitations faced by entrepreneurs in filing for and obtaining H-1B visas enabling them to work for their own or other startup companies. After undertaking an in-depth review of the policy parameters and operational considerations related to the interplay between the H-1B visa requirements and startup enterprises, the team proposed changes to current policy that remain under consideration by USCIS.

What it didn't do

While the EIR team accomplished a great deal in a short amount of time, the team identified issues that could not be addressed as quickly or easily. For example, though many existing visa classifications may be available to immigrant entrepreneurs who seek to start or grow businesses in the United States, each existing immigration pathway contains unique challenges for entrepreneurs. Though proposed changes to regulations and statutes were beyond the scope of USCIS's EIR effort, the team's work highlighted barriers that should be addressed to ensure the United States continues to attract and retain the world's most innovative entrepreneurs. Legislative reforms currently supported by the Obama Administration, such as creating a "startup visa" for job-creating entrepreneurs and "stapling" green cards to advanced Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) diplomas, would alleviate many identified obstacles.

Measuring its impact

The EIR initiative produced both tangible and intangible benefits for the agency during its term. In October 2012, the EIR team received USCIS's Pioneer Award, which recognizes inventiveness and creativity in developing a new and substantially improved way of carrying out a portion of the USCIS mission. Moving forward, USCIS will focus on measuring the long-term impact of this effort and the effectiveness of the team's work by:

- Using the American Customer Service Index (ACSI) to benchmark the usability of the *Entrepreneur Pathways* site against other government web resources and gather feedback to further refine the *Pathways* site.
- Surveying immigration officers at all four service centers to determine the value and impact of the Startup 101 training.
- Soliciting stakeholder feedback at upcoming public engagements to gauge community sentiments on the impact of this effort on adjudications.
- Gathering data on petitions and applications submitted by entrepreneurs across a range of visa categories to better understand the immigration paths that entrepreneurs choose to take.

Conclusion

By leveraging talent from the private sector and empowering government employees in an unprecedented way, the EIR initiative has proven to be an effective model to focus and address a critical challenge faced by government. In the coming months, USCIS intends to expand the EIR concept to a broader range of industries that it serves, including performing arts, health care, and information technology.