



TALENT

WHY IT MATTERS TO STARTUPS?

Startups need to hire the best and brightest talent to compete, but the talent pool in the U.S. isn't currently equipped to fill all of the talent gaps, especially in ecosystems outside of traditional tech hubs. The U.S. technology sector needs a larger, more representative, and better-trained workforce, and the startup ecosystem on the whole would benefit from more resources for STEM education and training and better support for equity in STEM education programs. Other barriers, like the lack of affordable childcare, student loan debt, and insufficient benefits, also keep people from joining the startup ecosystem. On top of talent shortages, existing legal and policy frameworks—including limitations on independent contractors and the use of overly restrictive non-compete agreements—can make it difficult for startups to hire the talent they need as they grow.

Startups are also at a disadvantage when it comes to navigating the process of hiring high-skilled, foreign-born workers—which is lengthy and complex and imposes significant financial burdens on already tight startup budgets. The entire tech ecosystem benefits when companies can access high-skilled immigration opportunities—many of these employees may go on to found or contribute to new, innovative companies, and the presence of immigrant workers raises wages and creates jobs for native-born Americans.

WHAT POLICYMAKERS CAN DO?

To address the current talent gaps that startups face, policymakers should take steps toward building a larger and more representative high-skilled workforce. This includes ensuring startups have access to the flexibility they need in making hiring decisions, banning non-compete agreements, and boosting funding for and access to STEM education. Policymakers should also minimize other barriers to entrepreneurship, such as improving access to and affordability of child care and exploring loan forgiveness for startup founders and employees.

Policymakers should also defend and expand existing immigration programs and implement new programs to enable foreign-born entrepreneurs to come to the U.S. Policymakers should work to implement a startup visa with a pathway to citizenship, as well as providing green cards to foreign graduates of U.S. higher education institutions, especially in STEM fields, to enable the U.S. to remain at the forefront of innovation

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The startup ecosystem needs flexibility and access to the best talent to succeed.
- The U.S. needs to attract and retain skilled talent from around the world to compete globally, including by making the immigration system accessible to startups and creating pathways for foreign-born startup founders.
- Policy should help make STEM education and pathways to entrepreneurship accessible to everyone.



Startup Spotlight



Retail Aware

(Omaha, Neb.)

Keith Fix, Founder & CEO

Retail Aware helps brands, retailers, and their partners measure in-store product displays and shopper behavior data in real time.

“We have incredible talent that comes from all over the world to be educated at U.S. Universities and then we just kick them out. As a startup, resources and time are limited, making it challenging to allocate hours to the complex sponsorship process. It's a dilemma many face—dedicating finite resources to solving this issue while also risking other aspects of the business.”