

Massachusetts's Global Entrepreneur in Residence Program

By: Sarah Leser, Legislative Analyst II
November 7, 2023 | 2023-R-0272

Issue

Briefly explain Massachusetts's Global Entrepreneur in Residence (GEIR) program and how it aids participants in obtaining an H-1B visa.

Summary

Massachusetts's GEIR program allows Massachusetts universities to provide part-time work opportunities for start-up entrepreneurs with advanced degrees who want to grow their companies but cannot because (1) available H-1B visa slots are limited or (2) their start-up is not sufficiently advanced in financing or governance to independently qualify for an H-1B visa. Participating universities may employ and sponsor any qualifying candidate (not just their own graduates) for a cap-exempt H-1B visa, since higher education institutions are not limited by the annual H-1B quota. The GEIR aims to both retain Massachusetts graduates and attract recent graduates from other states to grow start-up ventures and new high-skilled jobs.

Unless otherwise noted, the information about the GEIR program and H-1B visa application process below is drawn from the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Boston's Venture Development Center's (VDC) [website](#).

Challenges Obtaining an H-1B Visa

To qualify for an [H-1B visa](#), a nonimmigrant worker must have a bachelor's degree or higher and be employed in a specialty occupation by a U.S.-based employer who will file the visa petition. The number of H-1B visas issued each fiscal year is capped at 65,000, but an additional 20,000 are

available for individuals with a master's degree or higher. According to the UMass Boston VDC, two to three times as many individuals register for this visa each year. A lottery system selects who may apply. The application process occurs once per year, usually in early spring. This visa is generally [valid for three years](#) and can be extended for up to six years.

Higher education and nonprofit or governmental research institutions are not subject to the H-1B cap, and employees at a cap-exempt institution may apply for an H-1B visa anytime throughout the year. While employed under a cap-exempt H-1B visa by a cap-exempt organization, an employee may continue to establish their company to meet H-1B visa qualification requirements independently.

University of Massachusetts GEIR Program

Establishment and Overview

The Massachusetts Legislature's [2014 Jobs Bill](#) directed [Mass Tech Collaborative](#), a public agency that supports business formation and growth in Massachusetts's technology sector, to establish a three-year GEIR pilot program, in collaboration with two Massachusetts public universities (UMass Boston and UMass Lowell), to provide part-time work opportunities for start-up entrepreneurs.

In the years since the pilot program's conclusion, UMass Boston continues to host its GEIR program through the school's [Venture Development Center \(VDC\)](#), which helps recently-graduated entrepreneurs establish their businesses in Boston. VDC selects start-up entrepreneurial teams that work on assignments furthering the university's interests and helps organize and establish new business ventures. Through the GEIR program, the university can petition to employ a start-up founder for as few as eight hours per week under an H-1B visa, and the founder, while employed by the university, may continue to establish their company to meet H-1B visa qualification requirements independently. While participating in the GEIR program, entrepreneurs share their knowledge with university students and faculty through activities such as giving lectures, training interns, or sponsoring capstone course projects.

Post-Program Assistance and Success

The GEIR program also helps entrepreneurs plan for long-term residency and the success of their business. Entrepreneurs typically spend 9 to 18 months in the program before "graduating" and independently obtaining their own H-1B visa, a O-1 extraordinary talent visa, or an EB-1 or EB-2 green card. [According to VDC](#), since the program began in 2014, 395 entrepreneurs have applied to the program, and 20% were accepted. Additionally, 110 initial (H-1B) and subsequent (H-1B, O-1, EB-1, and EB-2) visas have been approved, for a success rate of 100%. Furthermore, 65% of program graduates are still active in the U.S., and their companies have 1,690 employees and have raised \$1,017,657,000 in funding.

Additional Resources

[According to VDC](#), UMass was the first school to host a GEIR program in the country. However, schools in other states (e.g., [Illinois](#) and [Michigan](#)) have established similar GEIR programs; and in Massachusetts at least one private higher education institution ([Babson College](#)) also hosts a GEIR program.

Additional information about H-1B demand in New England, including the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, and New Haven-Milford metropolitan areas, is available from the [Pew Research Center](#).

SL:kl