

The Founder Visa (again)

Nearly 5 years ago, Paul Graham first proposed the founder visa. There has been a lot of discussion since, but nothing has happened.

Maybe he was too ambitious in asking for 10,000 startup visas per year. So here is a proposal for the US government: please let Y Combinator help allocate up to 100 visas to founders per year. We'll continue to take applications for funding from around the world, and work with whatever process you'd like—we just need to be able to get the founders visas quickly (None of the current paths works well enough for this, but a slight reworking of the O1 visa around criteria and timing could be sufficient.). If the test works with us, you could expand it to other investment firms. We're happy to be the beta tester, and we're confident we'll prove that it's a good idea.

100 visas a year is nothing. But 50 new startups a year could be a huge deal. Many will fail, of course, but one could be the next Google, Facebook, Airbnb, or Dropbox. Though this is almost an immeasurably small number of visas, it could have a measurably large effect on the number of jobs created in the United States.

Startups are what the US is the best in the world at. We figure out new businesses faster than anyone else. It would be disastrous if that stopped being the case.

If founders from elsewhere want to pay taxes and create jobs in the US, we should let them. Other countries are already encouraging this. If you believe that intelligence and determination are evenly distributed, less than 5% of the best founders are born in the US. But it'd be great if many of them started their companies here.

This is just a start. We are also in need of broad-based immigration reform, and I believe more immigrants will help our country. But I also understand that the founder visa got tangled up with full-scale immigration reform, which may take a long time. This is an easy way to have an immediate effect, and it's good to move the ball down the field with small, incremental experiments.

Let us show you what we can do with 100 visas. This will be measurable, and in 5 years, we can tell you exactly how many jobs get created.