



# The ultimate startup guide to entering the US

A practical, founder-first guide to US market entry

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This guide is intended for informational purposes only and should not be construed as business advice, legal advice, or any other form of advice on financial services, financial instruments, financial products or digital assets. Readers should seek professional guidance before acting on the contents in this guide.



For ambitious entrepreneurs, the US isn't just another market; it's a global exchange where ideas, capital, and talent come together to scale, test, and evolve. For global founders, it creates a unique opportunity to plug into a diverse network of partners, investors, and customers looking to champion innovation and help you discover the next big idea.

At Aspire, we support founders looking to take their vision, talent, and experience to the next level, so we've developed a comprehensive guide for global founders entering the US, putting resources, tips, and personal perspectives in one place. This guide will help you take your first steps in one of the world's busiest and most vibrant hubs of entrepreneurial activity.

## The not-exclusively-American dream

Foreign-born founders have shaped the US startup landscape from the very beginning. Many of the country's most iconic companies were built by entrepreneurs who brought global perspectives, multicultural insight, and a unique competitive advantage to the table.

Think of Google co-founder Sergey Brin or WhatsApp's Jan Koum — leaders who created products for worldwide customers from day one by drawing on lived experience across markets.

### Did you know?

**\$1 billion**

More than half of startups valued at USD \$1 billion or more were founded by immigrants

[SF Chronicle](#)

**45%**

45% of Bay Area tech startups are founded by people from other countries

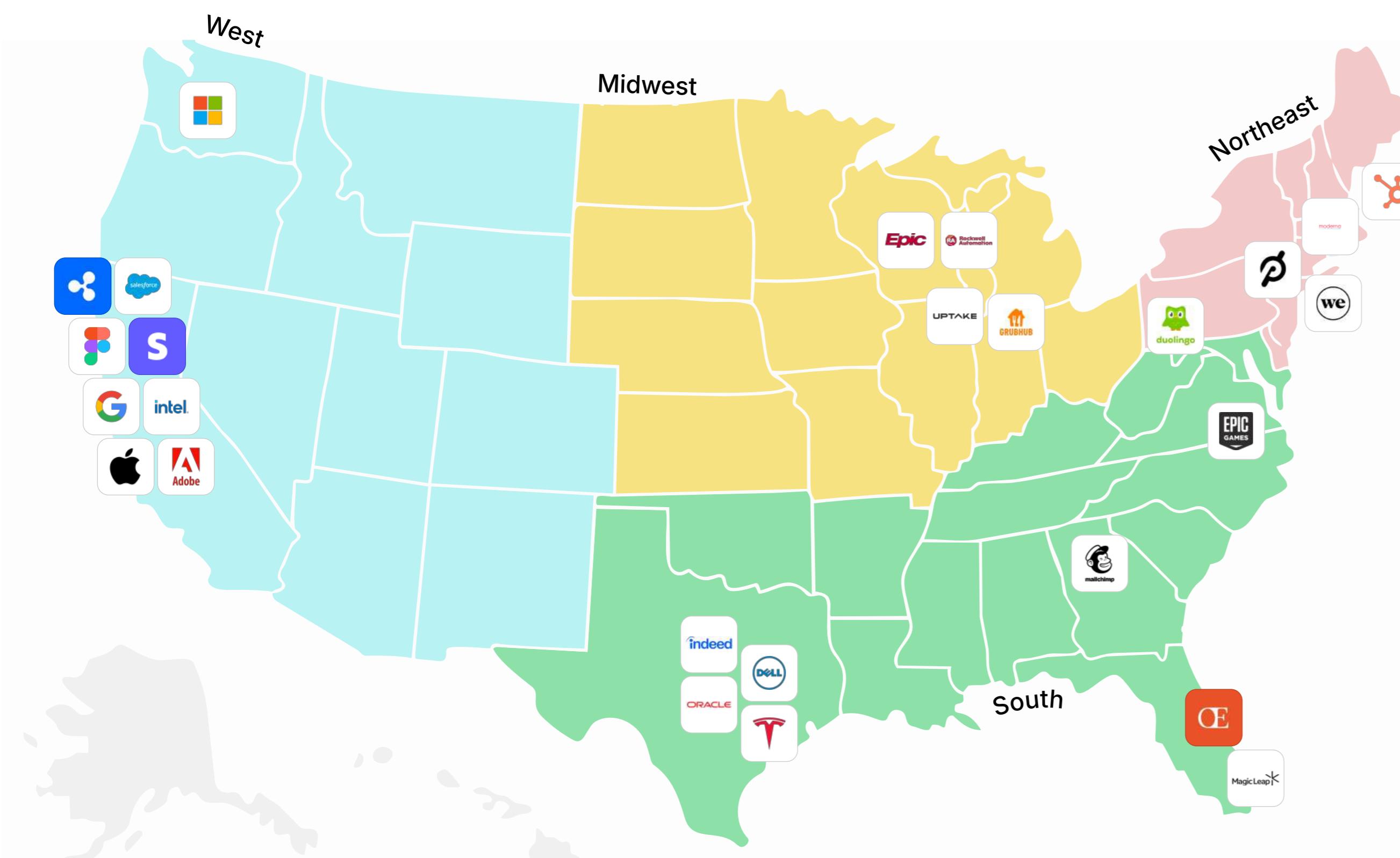
[The Spokes-man Review](#)

**64%**

64% of US unicorns were founded or co-founded by immigrants or their children

[NFAP](#)

When you're entering the US, geography matters. Not just because of its sheer size, but because every region has its own ecosystem, culture, infrastructure, and cost structure. These differences can shape everything from your hiring strategy to your fundraising timeline.



### West

#### Where ambitious products find scale.

From Los Angeles to San Francisco to Seattle, the West is home to some of the most resilient hubs of technology and entrepreneurship. Think unmatched density of capital, technical talent, and first-adopter customers.

##### Noteworthy companies

Apple, Google, Salesforce, Adobe, Intel, Microsoft, Ripple, Stripe

##### Known for

Frontier tech, venture capital, platform companies

### Northeast

#### Where capital meets complex decisions

If your business thrives on proximity to financial institutions, research organizations, regulatory bodies, or enterprise buyers making high-stakes, compliance-heavy decisions, the Northeast might be for you. Expect direct communication and short, fast transactional meetings.

##### Noteworthy companies

WeWork, Figma, Peloton, Moderna, HubSpot, Duolingo

##### Known for

Applied tech, finance, health, institutional companies

### Midwest

#### Where industry meets real-world scale.

If your company must be integrated into real-world supply chains, factories, hospitals, or physical workflows, you should consider the Midwest. Here, practicality often outweighs vision, prioritizing relationship-building and due diligence.

##### Noteworthy companies

Grubhub, Rockwell Automation, Epic Systems, Uptake

##### Known for

Industrial tech, applied systems, real-world solutions

### South

#### Where the next industrial shift happens

If your startup benefits from ecosystems where software, hardware, and infrastructure are built side by side, the South might be just for you. Think lower costs, talent density, strong technical schools, and business incentives.

##### Noteworthy companies

Tesla, Oracle, Dell, Mailchimp, Magic Leap

##### Known for

Infrastructure, logistics, energy, cost advantages



## What fast means in the US

A cold intro to a VC can turn into a decision in as little as two weeks.

Bay Area teams often run daily sprints: idea, build, test, decide — all within 24–48 hours.

In competitive markets, candidates can move from first interview to final offer in five business days.

Teams work in parallel: product ships version 3, sales sells version 2, and finance closes revenue from version 1.

## A few key cultural differences to know

Excitement doesn't always mean commitment. Many professionals in the US use positive exploratory language early in discussions, but their attitudes can evolve with time and information.

Negotiation is expected, not confrontational. Counter-offers and structured back-and-forth are seen as professional ways of doing business.

No-nonsense direct language might seem blunt, but it's often expected and appreciated.

Small talk is often a part of many business transactions, and signals personal interest and building trust. It often softens direct conversations and allows smooth, aligned transitions to the business at hand.

Networking can be more transactional than relational. While initial connections can form around shared business value, people in the US often treat networking connections as business opportunities.

Respecting time as currency. In the US, time is treated as a tradable asset, and often asking for 15 minutes can be more welcome than requesting an open-ended meeting.

From incorporation to customer validation and early investor outreach, your first days in the US (and the weeks prior) can certainly shape your momentum. To help you stay focused and cut through the noise, we've put together a handy checklist to help you prioritize the things that will actually move your company forward.

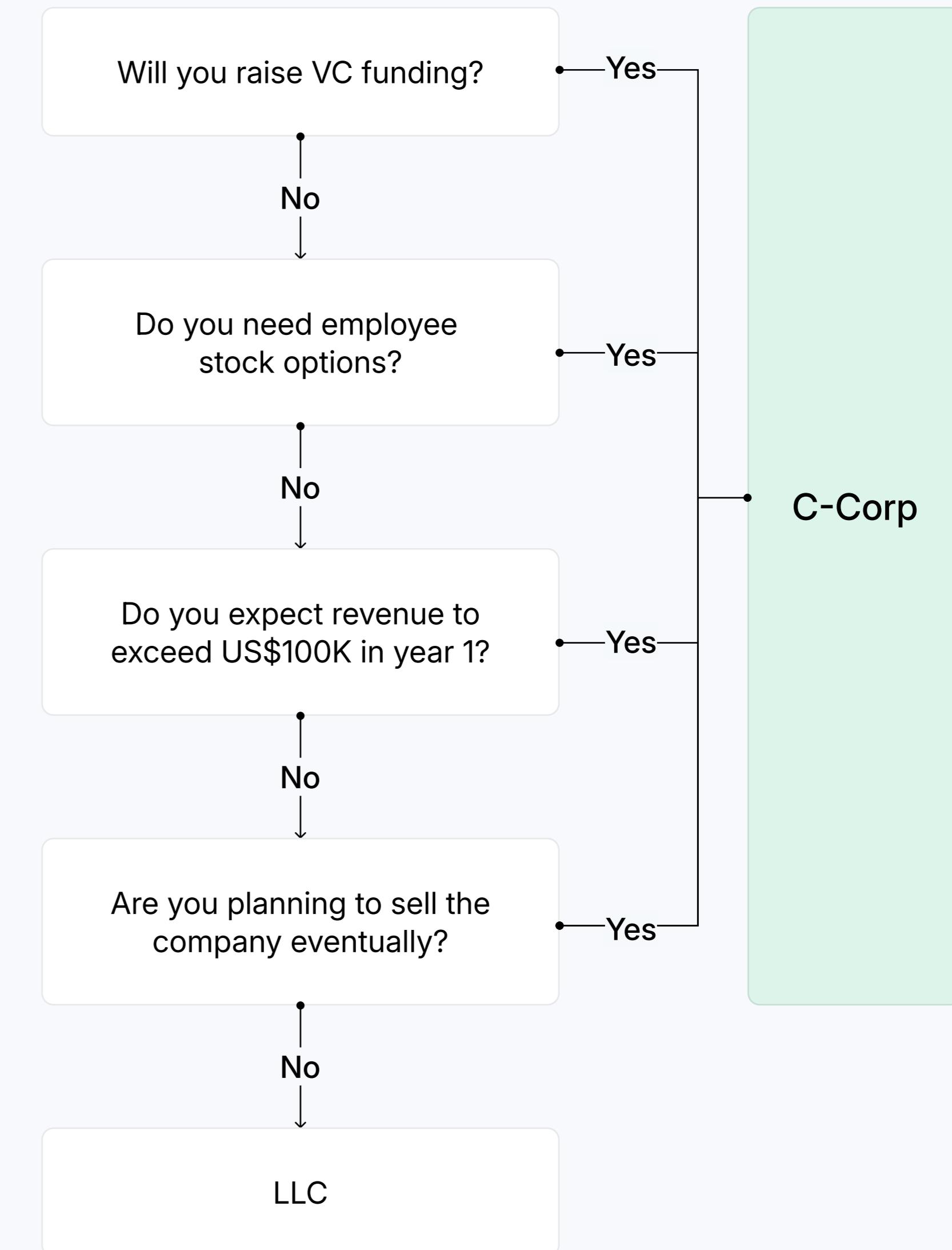
Before you take the leap	Day -90~0	Building foundations	Day 1-30	Setting up operations	Day 31-60	Preparing to scale	Day 61-90
<b>Business Prep</b>				<b>Infrastructure &amp; internal process</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Competitive analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Map first US customer segment <input type="checkbox"/> Register domain names and social media handles		<input type="checkbox"/> Clarify your US-specific positioning <input type="checkbox"/> Join local startup communities <input type="checkbox"/> Review US trademarks		<input type="checkbox"/> Set up internal communication stack and office suite <input type="checkbox"/> Start bookkeeping workflows + simple monthly reporting <input type="checkbox"/> Create a basic onboarding process <input type="checkbox"/> Hire contractors for US-based support		<input type="checkbox"/> Test product with early users <input type="checkbox"/> Collect user feedback and iterate <input type="checkbox"/> Formalize customer feedback loops <input type="checkbox"/> Establish US-specific KPIs and metrics dashboard <input type="checkbox"/> Establish spend policy and approval process	
<b>Immigration</b>		<b>Incorporation</b>		<b>Market and product</b>		<b>Operation and systems</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Engage a US immigration attorney <input type="checkbox"/> Determine visa pathway and gather all required documentation		<input type="checkbox"/> Choose your US company structure <input type="checkbox"/> Secure a US business address <input type="checkbox"/> Select the state of incorporation and register <input type="checkbox"/> File Articles of incorporation <input type="checkbox"/> Appoint a registered agent <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain an EIN		<input type="checkbox"/> Launch a US-ready landing page <input type="checkbox"/> Conduct additional customer interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Test US-specific messaging and positioning <input type="checkbox"/> Define US pricing <input type="checkbox"/> Secure pilot customers		<input type="checkbox"/> Build simple SOPs for weekly tasks (customer support, reporting, marketing) <input type="checkbox"/> Create KPI + metrics dashboard (revenue, leads, churn, CAC, runway) <input type="checkbox"/> Formalize a monthly financial review cadence <input type="checkbox"/> Set up a cash flow forecast for the next 6 months <input type="checkbox"/> Map key risks and create a lightweight contingency plan <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare processes for future hiring	
<b>Finance and Tax</b>				<b>Fundraising prep</b>		<b>Fundraising</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Understand basic tax implications (federal vs. state)		<input type="checkbox"/> Open a business account <input type="checkbox"/> Apply for ITIN (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> Set up a lightweight accounting system		<input type="checkbox"/> Develop a pitch deck for US investors <input type="checkbox"/> Begin soft investor conversations <input type="checkbox"/> Research accelerators		<input type="checkbox"/> Build investor pipeline <input type="checkbox"/> Engage target investors or angels <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare financial projections <input type="checkbox"/> Apply to accelerators	
<b>⚠ Ignore for now</b>							
<input type="checkbox"/> Full product development <input type="checkbox"/> Anything that requires extensive physical presence		<input type="checkbox"/> Hiring full-time employees <input type="checkbox"/> Office leases <input type="checkbox"/> Expensive marketing campaigns		<input type="checkbox"/> Scaling team <input type="checkbox"/> Full HR processes <input type="checkbox"/> Expensive enterprise software		<input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive expansion <input type="checkbox"/> Hypergrowth hiring <input type="checkbox"/> Build your sales	

From fundraising to taxes, your company structure determines many things when it comes to your expansion to the US. Here are some things you might want to consider to get it right from the start.

\* Disclaimer *This section is for general guidance only. For tailored advice, consult a qualified legal professional.*

## Choosing the right legal entity

(Placeholder) Consult a legal professional to help with this step



# C-Corp vs LLC: Key differences explained

	C-Corp	LLC
Investor-friendly?	Preferred by venture capitalists and angel investors. Most US startups that raise funding are C-Corps.	Investors typically avoid LLCs due to pass-through taxes and complex ownership classes.
Taxation	<p>The corporation pays US corporate tax. Shareholders only pay tax on dividends (if any). No personal US tax return needed for foreign owners unless they draw salary/dividends.</p> <p>Franchise tax depending on the state or jurisdiction chosen.</p>	Profits pass through to the owner's personal taxes. Foreign owners must file US tax returns and might owe tax on undistributed LLC profits.
Legal Structure	Needs a board of directors, officers, bylaws, stock issuance, etc.	Less formal requirements and more flexibility. Can be managed by members or managers and governed by an operating agreement.
Ease of ownership	Easy transfer of shares. Stock can be issued in classes (common/preferred) and transferred and sold.	Ownership is in membership units. Transferring interests or adding new investors may require revising the operating agreement.
Better for	Default for startups aiming to scale or raise capital. Also necessary if you plan an IPO or stock option pool.	More suitable for businesses that have no plans to seek venture capital.

## Is Delaware right for you?

If you're planning to raise institutional capital, need employee stock options, want standardized governance and are planning an eventual exit/IPO, you might want to consider a Delaware C-Corporation.

- Delaware is the only state to have a separate business court system
- It has over 100 years of corporate case law and an established legal framework
- It offers a high degree of predictability in the event of legal action

While Delaware is a common state for incorporating, you could consider alternative states that might offer other key advantages to you or your business. Note that you don't need to be in the US to incorporate.

## Considerations when registering in Delaware

Here are some basic requirements to keep in mind before registering a C-Corporation in Delaware.

### 1. Prepare a capitalization table that determines:

- a. The authorized shares of the company
- b. Who the shareholders are
- c. How many shares will be issued to each shareholder
- d. The percentage of ownership for each shareholder
- e. Stock class (optional)
- f. Value per share (optional)

In the early stages of a startup, common stock is typically authorized and issued. However, if you have multiple classes of shares, this should be reflected in the capitalization table as well.

### 2. Check the [Delaware registry](#) to confirm your corporation name is available

### 3. Confirm names and addresses of directors

### 4. Appoint a registered agent

- File an application for registration
- Register the company

### 5. Get a business address

## Obtaining an EIN (Employer Identification Number)

1. Prepare Form SS-4: Download the one-page IRS Form SS-4 and fill in your company details.

**Tip** Use your US mailing address.

2. Submit to IRS: Without a US SSN, you have two methods:

#### a. Fax

Send the signed SS-4 to the IRS fax number for EIN requests (for Delaware corporations, the fax is 855-641-6935). This is the fastest option for non-SSN applicants. The IRS will fax back or mail your EIN confirmation. Expected timeline: ~4 weeks

#### b. Mail

Mail the SS-4 to the IRS. Expected timeline ~ 6–8 weeks or more. Use this only if fax isn't possible.

3. Alternatives (if you're using a service provider): If you formed your company through a service provider, they often handle the EIN for you.

a. These might file SS-4 on your behalf. You'll simply receive your EIN via email or dashboard ~3–5 weeks after incorporation.

b. Some registered agent services will also assist with EIN filing as an add-on.

4. Receive EIN Confirmation: The IRS will issue your EIN as a formal letter (CP 575). The EIN is a 9-digit number (format: XX-XXXXXXX).

**Tip** Save the EIN letter. You'll need this number for almost everything — from opening bank accounts to paying Delaware franchise tax.



## A quick note on taxes

### State Income/Franchise Taxes

If your company has real operations in any US state (office, employees, or significant revenue from that state), you may be required to register in that state and pay taxes there.

For instance, if you hire an employee in California or start renting an office in New York, your Delaware company must also register in that state. You may then be subject to that state's corporate taxes or fees in addition to Delaware's franchise tax.

Taxes in the US can be complex, and it's worth understanding them early in your journey. Keep in mind that every state has its own unique requirements, and often entail a combination of physical and economic presence.

While Delaware itself has no income tax on corporations operating outside Delaware, be mindful of where your business actually operates. State tax rules can vary widely, so it's worth consulting a qualified tax advisor to understand your obligations early.

### Understanding 83(b) elections

The 83(b) election is a one-page filing with the IRS that affects how your stock grants are taxed. It must be filed within 30 days of the date you receive your shares.

If your startup shares vest over time, filing an 83(b) election tells the IRS that you want to be taxed on the shares upfront, based on their current (typically low) value, rather than being taxed as they vest later at a potentially higher value.

This can mean much lower taxes for founders. You lock in a low value now and avoid higher tax bills down the road. For most startup C-Corp founders with vesting stock, filing the 83(b) is essential.

**Note** *This should not be construed as legal or tax advice. Consult a professional for tax or legal guidance.*

# Banking and managing your finances

Finding the right banking solution is a key element in your journey to operating successfully in the US. Your money needs to move quickly and affordably. We take a look at financial setups that won't slow you down or eat into your margins.

## Preparing your documents

### Company documents

- Certificate of Incorporation**  
Proof your company exists

- EIN confirmation**  
The IRS letter or email assigning your EIN

- Corporate governance docs**  
Bylaws or Operating Agreement, and a Banking Resolution (if required)

- Proof of US business address**  
Lease, utility bill, or agent address confirmation

### Personal documents

- Valid passport for each company owner who will be on the account**

- Secondary ID**  
Driver's license, if available, or other ID – not always required but good to have

- Proof of address**  
Your personal proof of address in your home country may be needed by some banks for KYC verification

- Business proof**  
Some banks ask for evidence that your business is real: a simple website, customer invoices, or a short business plan can suffice

**⚠** If your documents aren't in English, you'll want certified translations. Make sure the spelling and order of names and addresses match across all documents. For example, some Asian naming conventions list family names first, while US systems expect the reverse. Inconsistencies can trigger compliance checks or delay your setup.

## Submitting your application

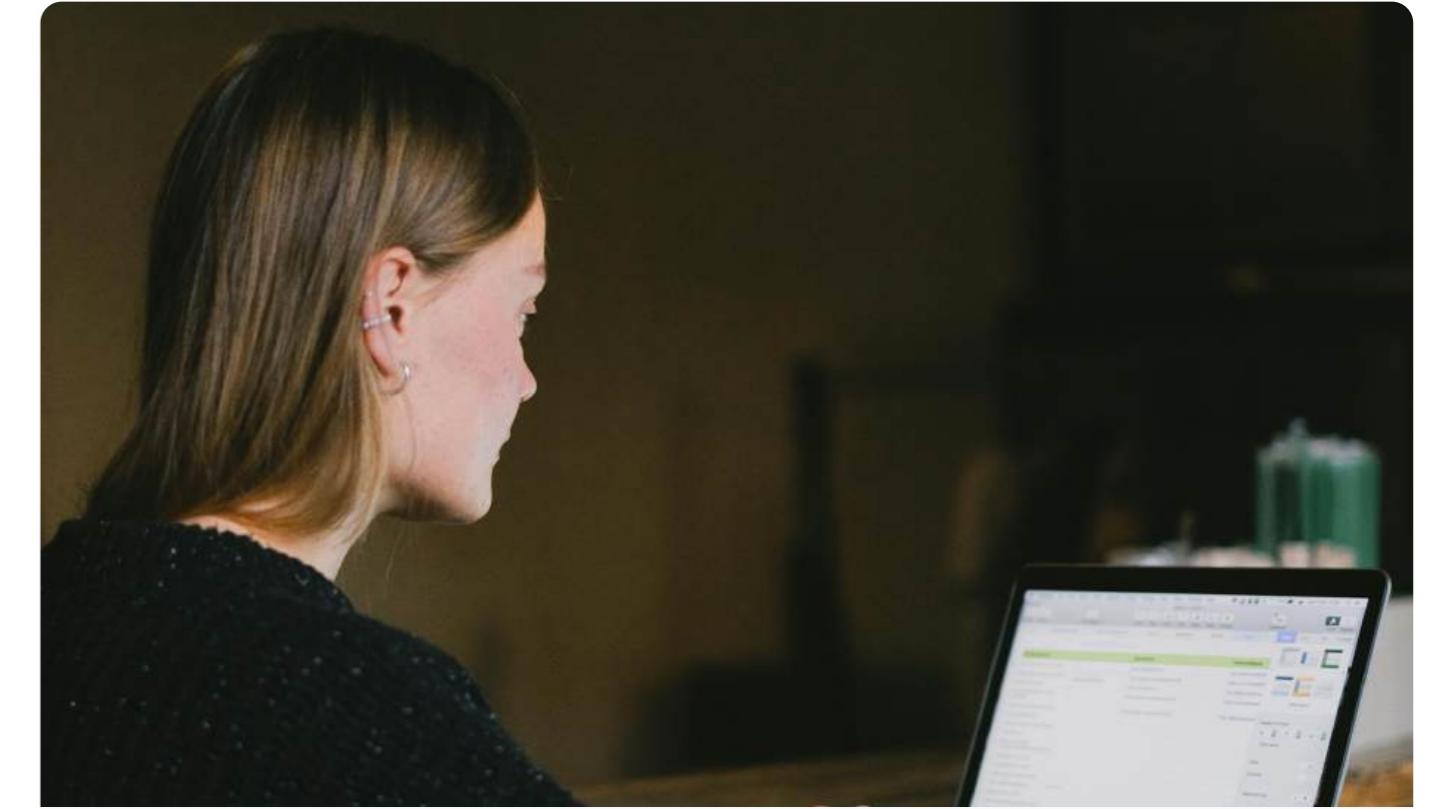
Typically, you fill out an online form and upload documents. Be prepared to provide additional info on your business model (a short description) and expected account activity (they might ask how much you plan to deposit or transfer monthly). If you're planning to visit a branch while in the US, make an appointment with a banker ahead of time

Some traditional banks may have a minimum deposit requirement. Also, the bank might send a verification code by mail or email. Ensure that the address you've provided is accessible. After opening, set up online banking and order a debit card if applicable.

# The importance of multi-currency cash flows

When managing cross-border cash, it's useful to understand how currency conversion and transfer methods work so you can choose the setup that best supports your operations. Modern fintech platforms offer more flexibility than traditional banks, such as the ability to hold multiple currencies, convert only when needed, or automate certain tasks, helping reduce friction as you scale across markets.

Here are a few practical considerations to keep in mind when operating in multiple currencies.



## Watch out for hidden fees

International wire transfers from traditional banks often have poor exchange rates on top of fees, and you might lose ~5% just in conversion and correspondent fees.

## Consider USD billing for global customers

Founders with global products often opt to bill in USD (or another stable currency) to simplify cash flow. Whether this makes sense depends on your customers' expectations, your pricing strategy, and how sensitive your target market is to currency changes.

## Set up a clear cash movement process

Establishing a reliable way to transfer funds between your US entity and your home base (or vice versa) ensures you can move money when needed without operational delays.

\* Disclaimer The above points are general operational considerations and not financial advice. Your tax, legal, or financial obligations may vary depending on your specific circumstances.

# Compliance red flags that can kill your momentum

Global founders can often underestimate how complex US compliance can be, and how quickly it can create real risk. These 5 mistakes are the ones that most often stall early progress, but they're all solvable with the right steps.

## Preparing your documents

Common mistakes	Why is this a problem?	What you should do instead
Mixing personal and business finances while waiting for a US business account	May trigger tax red flags, creates a messy audit trail, and destroys investor confidence during diligence	Use a compliant business wallet that accepts global founders or open a US account as early as possible, and keep all transactions separated from day one
Registering in a "tax-cheap" state instead of where you actually operate	May lead to double registration (State of Incorporation + State of Business Activity) and penalties for operating without qualification	Incorporate in Delaware (VC-friendly) or Wyoming (simple/low-cost), then register as a foreign entity in the state where your team, revenue, or operations occur
Misclassifying contractors as employees	May create exposure to fines, back payroll taxes, and state-level penalties (especially in states like CA, MA, or NY)	Use contractor agreements and run each role through federal and state classification tests. Use a Payroll/HRIS provider to ensure proper classification and tax withholding
Leaving bookkeeping, payroll taxes, and filings until year-end	May lead to missed quarterly payroll tax deadlines, inability to manage cash flow, and financial statements that are unusable for fundraising	Set up an accounting system and integrate it with your bank account in the first 30 days
Ignoring the annual foreign ownership tax form (5472)	May lead to a minimum penalty of USD \$25,000, even if your company had no income	Hire a CPA who specializes in foreign-owned corporations and confirm they will file Form 5472 + Form 1120 annually

\* Disclaimer *Before acting on this guidance, consult a legal professional for advice.*

Setting up your company is one milestone, but convincing US investors to back you can be an entirely different challenge. And the bar is high. Recent Angel Capital Association data shows that only about 3 out of 100 pre-seed applications received funding between 2022 and 2024.

To stand out, you need to understand what "US-ready" actually looks like and how investors assess whether a global founder is prepared to operate in the world's most competitive startup market.

## ✓ Signals that tell investors you're ready

Indicators	Criteria
A clean, compliant US structure	Your C-Corp is set up properly, founders' equity is issued, and basic governance (registered agent, EIN, operating agreements) is in place
Updated and tidy bookkeeping	All transactions are categorized, reconciled, and compliant with standard accounting practices — no gaps, no messy spreadsheets
Clear understanding of US customer pain points	You can articulate real US customer problems, backed by conversations, pilots, or waitlists, not assumptions from your home market.
A realistic go-to-market plan	Investors want to know what you will do with the fund. So you need to outline early channels, first 10 customers, GTM motion, and the US roles you plan to hire for.
Know your numbers	You can confidently explain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burn rate</li> <li>• Runway</li> <li>• CAC assumptions</li> <li>• Projected cash flow and revenue</li> </ul>

## ✗ Possible deal-breakers for investors

Indicators	Criteria
Pitch deck that lacks a US angle	Your deck doesn't address why the US, what problem you're solving specifically for US customers, or how you'll win your first 10 US users
Unclear ownership or cap table issues	Founder equity isn't issued, vesting isn't set, SAFE notes are undocumented, or early investors aren't properly recorded
No idea about your target market	You can't explain customer segments, local behaviors, pricing expectations, or competitive differences between the US and your home market
Messy reporting	Your bookkeeping isn't up-to-date, you rely on unsynced spreadsheets, or you can't produce a clean P&L or cash runway calculation when asked
Compliance red flags	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrong state registration</li> <li>• Missing annual filings (such as Form 5472)</li> <li>• Employee misclassification risk</li> <li>• No US business address/registered agent.</li> <li>• Significant past-due payroll taxes or state penalties</li> </ul>

	US Hire	Team relocation
Pros	Cultural fluency Faster access to customers and networks Client trust	Deeper product and company context Culture continuity Built-in loyalty and long-term retention
Cons	Requires US payroll and compliance Higher salaries in competitive markets Fast employee turnover	Visa challenges Distance from US customers Possible cultural gaps in communication

Consider hiring locally for: customer-facing, market entry, and relationship-building roles, such as partnerships or sales.



# Visas and immigration

Getting yourself (and key team members) legally working in the US can be just as important as incorporating your company. Visas can also affect fundraising timelines, such as needing to be present in the US for any due diligence or programs like Y-Combinator.

This might seem obvious, but keep in mind that you cannot start working on your US startup on a tourist visa or without proper work authorization. Failing to follow visa rules may jeopardize your status or future immigration prospects.

## Step-by-step guide to visa applications

### 1. H1-B visa

[www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/h-1b-specialty-occupations/h-1b-electronic-registration-process](http://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/h-1b-specialty-occupations/h-1b-electronic-registration-process)

### 2. O-1 visa

[www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/o-1-visa-individuals-with-extraordinary-ability-or-achievement](http://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/o-1-visa-individuals-with-extraordinary-ability-or-achievement)

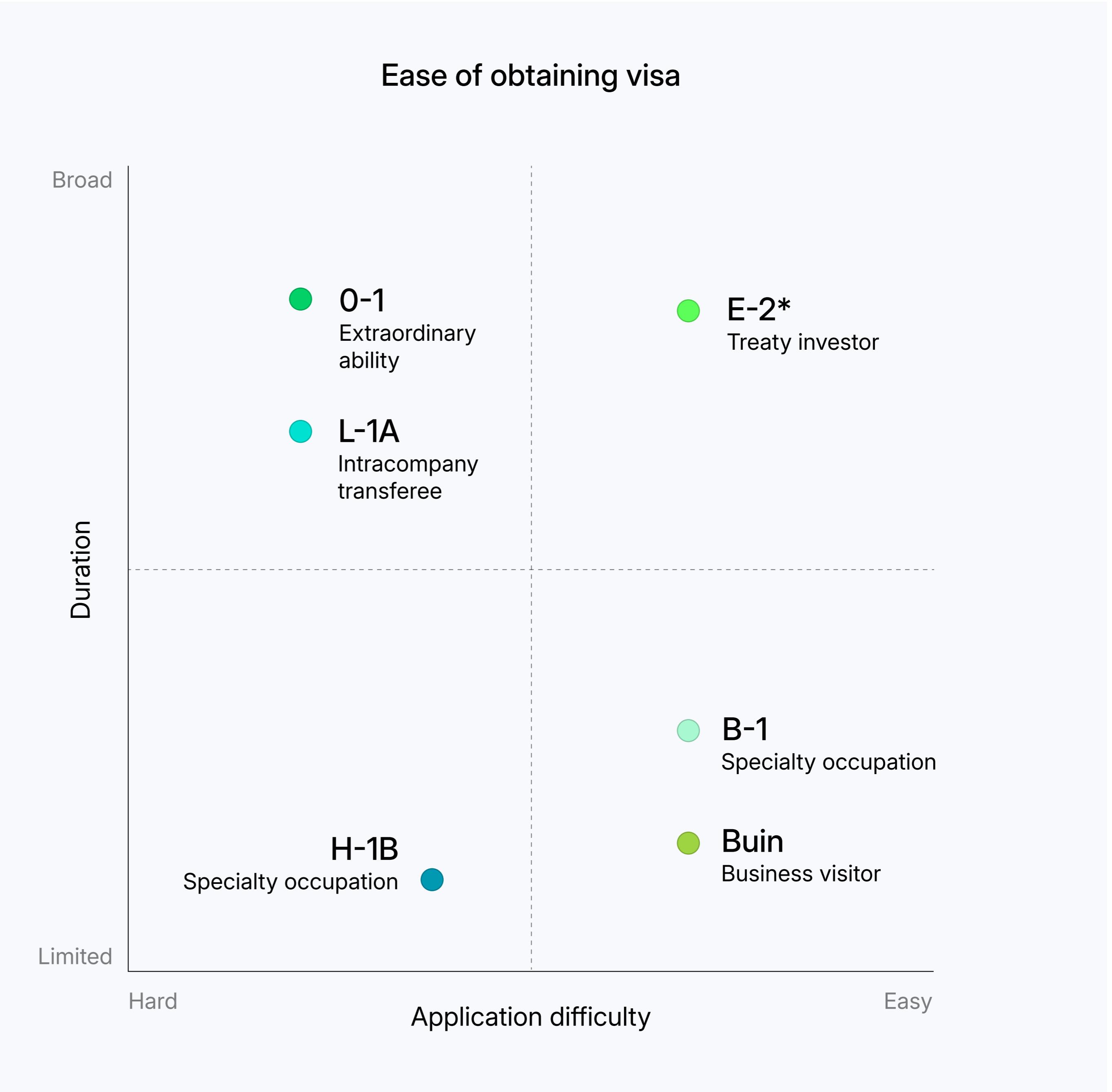
### 3. E-2 treaty investor visa

[www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/e-2-treaty-investors](http://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/e-2-treaty-investors)

### 4. L-1 intracompany transfer visa

[www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/l-1a-intracompany-transferee-executive-or-manager](http://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/l-1a-intracompany-transferee-executive-or-manager)

## Ease of obtaining visa



## O-1 "Extraordinary ability"

👤 Who it's for	Highly accomplished founders in tech/science/business.
✖️ Typical processing time	~2–4 months (15 days with Premium Processing available)

✓ Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Fast track, no annual cap</li><li>Founders can self-sponsor via their own startup</li></ul>
✖️ Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Very high bar; must prove you're among the top in your field (significant awards, media, etc)</li><li>Requires extensive documentation of achievements</li></ul>

## H1-B "Work Visa"

👤 Who it's for	Skilled workers with at least a Bachelor's degree.
✖️ Typical processing time	Varies: Lottery held in March annually; if selected, ~2–6 months for approval (15-day premium available after April)

✓ Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Well-known work visa that has been recently updated to allow founders to apply via their own company (you can be both employer and employee if structured right)</li></ul>
✖️ Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Annual lottery (~1 in 3 chance) unless your startup qualifies as cap-exempt</li><li>Employers may have to pay a one-time USD \$100,000 fee for new H-1B petitions</li><li>Must pay yourself a prevailing wage and stick to your specialized role.</li></ul>

## L-1 "Intracompany transfer"

👤 Who it's for	Founders/execs expanding an existing foreign company to the US.
✖️ Typical processing time	~1–3 months (15-day premium available)

✓ Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Allows you to open a US branch or subsidiary and transfer yourself (or key team) as an executive/manager.</li><li>Great if you have an operating company abroad and want to launch a US entity tied to it.</li></ul>
✖️ Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The foreign company must be well-established and continue operating.</li><li>New US office L-1 is initially one year; requires proving you set up US operations in that time.</li><li>Not ideal for very early-stage or solo founders without a foreign company track record.</li></ul>

## E-2 "Treaty Investor"

Who it's for	Citizens of certain countries who will invest and run a US business. (Check <a href="#">treaty country list</a> .)
Typical processing time	~1-3 months (varies by US consulate; no USCIS filing if applying abroad)
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Can be relatively quick if eligible.</li><li>Lets you stay in the US to direct your business as long as you maintain ~50% ownership.</li><li>Good for founders from treaty countries willing to invest substantial capital in their startup</li></ul>
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Not available to nationals of major economies like China, India, Brazil, and Russia (no treaty).</li><li>Must invest a substantial amount and must own <math>\geq 50\%</math> of the US company at all times (difficult after raising big investments).</li><li>No direct path to a green card (though renewals possible indefinitely).</li></ul>

## Others (B-1, F-1, OPT, etc)

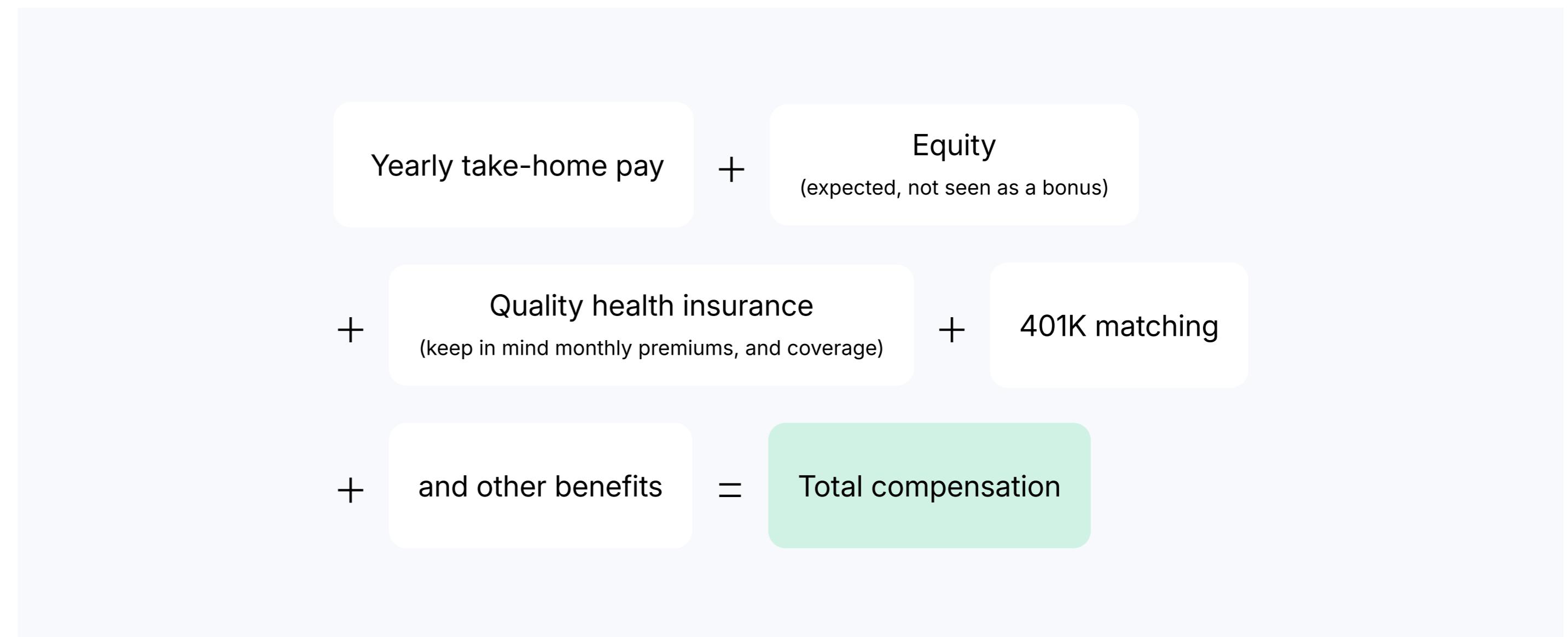
Who it's for	short-term business visits (not work); <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>F-1 OPT: work authorization for student founders, etc.</li><li>EB-5: investment green card route (requires USD \$800K+ investment and job creation).</li></ul>
Typical processing time	B-1/B-2: A few days to a few weeks for visa processing (or ESTA online for eligible countries)
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>B-1: handy for temporary trips (opening bank accounts, meeting investors) but no hands-on work.</li><li>F-1 OPT: lets student founders work on their startup for 12+ months if related to studies.</li><li>Good for founders from treaty countries willing to invest substantial capital in their startup</li></ul>
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>B-1: strictly no active management (don't violate status).</li><li>F-1: can't engage in startup full-time without OPT; even on OPT, work must relate to your field of study.</li><li>EB-5: very high investment and job creation requirements, and the program rules are in flux (a new startup visa program has been proposed to replace it).</li></ul>

## The salary equation

While salary makes up most of the employee cost in many markets, in the US, it's only one part of total compensation. You'll need to factor in additional elements such as:

- Employer payroll taxes
- Health insurance contributions
- Retirement (401K) matching
- Insurance

Total compensation could then be broken down into:



This is all seen through the lens of the increasing importance of pay transparency, taking into account the cost of living and market differences (San Francisco and New York are a lot more expensive than Atlanta or Denver).

### ★ Key takeaway

**Compensation signals how serious you are, your funding health, and your ambition to grow and be competitive.**

Early metrics can show investors you're gaining real momentum in the US. Here are a few things you might want to measure and use to validate your efforts in a new market.

	Metrics	What it is	Why it matters
Market Is there real demand in the US?	Website traffic & conversion	Number of US visitors + % converting into sign-ups, demos, or inquiries	Shows message – market resonance and whether US audiences care
	Waitlist sign-ups	Number of people who voluntarily register interest before launch	Indicates demand intensity and whether your US landing page is compelling
	Customer interviews completed	Number of structured interviews with US customers	Proof you understand local behaviour and can articulate real US pain points
	Number of pilot users / early adopters	First cohort actively using your product	The strongest pre-revenue signal
Revenue Are US dollars flowing in?	Pilot/trial conversion rate	% of pilot users converting into paying customers	Validates product value + willingness to pay in the US market
	Retention rate	% of users who return over time (for example, monthly)	Indicates product stickiness and long-term value
	Average revenue per user (ARPU)	Revenue earned per US user	Validates pricing for US market
	Daily/Monthly Active Users (DAU/MAU) ratio	% of monthly users who return daily (ratio 10%+ is considered strong)	Shows whether your product delivers daily/weekly value to US users
Sustainability Can your business survive in the US?	Monthly Recurring Revenue (MRR) / Annual Recurring Revenue (ARR)	Recurring and predictable revenue from US customers	Investors look closely at this number to track revenue
	Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)	The average dollar amount spent (Sales & Marketing) to gain 1 new paying US customer	Validates your early CAC assumptions and marketing efficiency
	Burn rate	Net cash loss per month	Shows operating discipline — crucial for global founders and investors
	Cash runway	Number of months you can operate at the current burn	Investors want to see at least 9-18 months of runway at early stages



### Min Chen

Co-founder, Wisy Platforms

"My advice is specifically for founders who want to build a VC-backed startup in Silicon Valley: work for a later-stage VC-backed company first. Learn the game from the inside, build the right relationships, and meet a future co-founder who fits the 'successful founder' pattern VCs tend to favor."



### Paola Restrepo & Andres Vallejo

Co-founders, 360 Sierra

"As founders from Latin America entering the US, doors opened for us, not because of our product knowledge or market strategy, but because of the passion and commitment we brought to pushing an idea forward. Investors believed in that passion above everything else."



### Oscar Ramos

CEO, R-Daniel

"When you're in the US, you find yourself in the middle of an enormous market that can offer many opportunities, but it can also distract you from your main path. Use these opportunities wisely. Don't be lured by songs of sirens that can make you lose focus. "

## Immigration and compliance

Visa and immigration information

[www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/international-entrepreneur-rule](http://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/international-entrepreneur-rule)

How to file IRS Form 5472

[www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f5472.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f5472.pdf)

How to file incorporation documents in Delaware

[https://corp.delaware.gov](http://https://corp.delaware.gov)

How to apply for an EIN

[www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/get-an-employer-identification-number](http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/get-an-employer-identification-number)

How to apply for ITIN

[www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-w-7](http://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-w-7)

Worker classification guide

[www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc762](http://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc762)

## Fundraising resources

Y Combinator's SAFE template

[www.ycombinator.com/documents](http://www.ycombinator.com/documents)

Series A term sheet resources

[www.ycombinator.com/series\\_a\\_term\\_sheet](http://www.ycombinator.com/series_a_term_sheet)

Y Combinator's pitch deck template

[www.slidebean.com/templates/y-combinator-pitch-deck-template](http://www.slidebean.com/templates/y-combinator-pitch-deck-template)

Sequoia pitch deck template

[www.slideshare.net/slideshow/sequoia-capital-pitchdecktemplate/46231251](http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/sequoia-capital-pitchdecktemplate/46231251)

NVCA Model legal documents for fundraising

[www.nvca.org/model-legal-documents](http://www.nvca.org/model-legal-documents)

## Founders knowledge

Market research and insights

[www.cbinsights.com/research](http://www.cbinsights.com/research)

Y Combinator startup school

[www.startupschool.org](http://www.startupschool.org)

Carta's classroom for founders

[www.cartacom/learn](http://www.cartacom/learn)

SBA guide to start a business

[www.sba.gov/business-guide/10-steps-start-your-business](http://www.sba.gov/business-guide/10-steps-start-your-business)

## Startup community

Aspire's FoundersXchange

[www.aspireapp.com/aspire-for-startups](http://www.aspireapp.com/aspire-for-startups)

Pitch and run

[www.luma.com/pnr](http://www.luma.com/pnr)

Founders club

[www.foundersclubofficial.com](http://www.foundersclubofficial.com)

The startup grind

[www.startup.startupgrind.com](http://www.startup.startupgrind.com)

Homebrew club

[www.bento.me/homebrew](http://www.bento.me/homebrew)

Founders brew

[www.foundersbrew.org](http://www.foundersbrew.org)

The AI Collective

[www.aicollective.com](http://www.aicollective.com)



## Building abroad is hard. Doing it alone is harder.

FoundersXchange is a community of global founders who have done it, are doing it, and are supporting others who are on the same journey.

For more resources like this, created specifically for global founders, join FoundersXchange.

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If this guide helped you, share it with another founder.

# GLOSSARY

## Incorporation & Corporate Law

Term	Definition
Action of Incorporator	Document signed by the incorporator appointing the initial board and adopting bylaws.
Certificate of Incorporation	The founding document filed with the state creating the corporation and its share structure.
Board of Directors	The elected body responsible for corporate oversight and appointing officers.
Bylaws	Internal rules that govern how the corporation operates and how decisions are made.
C-Corporation	A corporation that is a separate taxable legal entity under the IRS tax code.
Corporate Resolution	Written record of decisions made by the board of directors.
Delaware General Corporation Law (DGCL)	Statutes that govern the formation and operation of corporations in Delaware.
Foreign Qualification	Registering a DE corporation to do business in another state.
Incorporator	The person/entity who signs and files the Certificate of Incorporation.
Registered Agent	Designated DE-based party to receive state and legal mail.

## Equity & Fundraising

Term	Definition
Authorized Shares	Maximum shares a corporation is legally permitted to issue.
Cap Table	Ledger recording ownership stakes, typically founders/employees/investors.
Cliff	Vesting rule under which no equity vests until a specified period (commonly 1 year).
Common Stock	Basic voting equity typically held by founders/employees.
Convertible Note	Short-term debt that converts into equity under negotiated terms.
Dilution	Reduction of ownership % when new equity is issued.
Issued (Outstanding) Shares	Number of shares that have been granted to shareholders.
Option Pool	Reserved unissued shares for future hires/advisors.
Preferred Stock	Equity class with special investor rights such as liquidation preference.
SAFE	Standard agreement for future equity developed by Y Combinator.
Stock Purchase Agreement (SPA)	Contract setting the terms of buying shares from the company.
Vesting	Earning ownership rights over time under IRS restricted property rules.

## Taxes & Compliance

Term	Definition
83(b) Election	Election to be taxed on stock at grant rather than at vesting.
Assumed Par Value Method	Franchise tax calculation based on assets rather than shares.
Corporate Double Taxation	C-corp profits taxed at corporate level and again when distributed to shareholders.
EIN	Federal tax ID number assigned to a business.
Franchise Tax	Annual fee for the privilege of being incorporated.
IP Assignment Agreement	Transfers intellectual property rights from individuals to the corporation.
Nexus	Degree of business activity that creates state tax obligations.
Par Value	Nominal minimum share price specified in incorporation documents.
Pass-Through Taxation	Business income passes to owners' personal tax returns (LLC/S-Corp, not C-Corp).
Registered Office	The official address maintained in the state of incorporation for legal notices.

## Banking & Payments

Term	Definition
ACH	Domestic US electronic bank transfer system
AML	Individuals who ultimately own/control a company (25%+ or control rule).
CP 575 / 147C	IRS EIN confirmation letters.
Foreign Exchange (FX)	Conversion of one currency to another.
IBAN	International bank number standard (not used domestically in US).
KYC	Identity verification required of financial institutions.
Merchant Account	Account type that enables card acceptance and settlement.
Multi-Currency Account	Banking account capable of holding multiple currencies without auto-conversion.
Payment Processor	Provider that manages card payments and merchant acquiring.
Routing Number	9-digit bank identifier used in US domestic payments.
Wire Transfer	Electronic funds transfer between institutions through SWIFT or Fedwire.

## Immigration & Visas

Term	Definition
Beneficiary	The foreign national receiving the immigration benefit.
Dual Intent	Ability to seek permanent residence while on a temporary visa.
E-2 Treaty Investor	Visa for nationals of treaty countries investing in a US business.
ESTA	Travel authorization system under the Visa Waiver Program.
H-1B	Specialty occupation visa subject to annual numerical cap/lottery.
L-1	Intracompany transfer visa for executives/managers/specialized knowledge employees.
O-1	Visa for individuals with extraordinary ability.
Petitioner	US company filing a visa petition for a beneficiary.
Premium Processing	Optional USCIS expedited processing.
Status vs Visa	Visa relates to entering the US; status determines legal presence once inside.
Visa Bulletin	Monthly wait-time update for immigrant visa categories.

## Hiring & Employment

Term	Definition
1099 Contractor	Self-employed service provider not treated as an employee.
At-Will Employment	Employment that can end at any time for any lawful reason.
Employer of Record (EOR)	Third party that employs workers on behalf of a company.
Offer Letter	Document outlining role, pay, and terms of employment.
Payroll Tax	Taxes withheld from employee wages by employer.
PEO	HR outsourcing model where benefits are administered by a provider.
PIIA	Agreement assigning employee inventions and confidentiality to the employer.
W-2 Employee	Employee whose wages/taxes are reported on Form W-2.
W-8BEN-E	Tax withholding certificate for foreign entities.
Workers' Compensation	Required wage + medical protection for employees injured on the job.



[www.aspireapp.com](http://www.aspireapp.com)