

MARKET COMMENTARY | OCTOBER 2026

82% of Founders Maintain US Expansion Plans Despite Immigration Uncertainty, Beyond Border Survey Finds

Founders are pressing ahead with US expansion despite immigration uncertainty, according to new research from Beyond Border. Its Founder Mobility Pulse survey found that **82% have not changed their plans to expand to the US**, while an analysis of **1,140 immigration inquiries from Asia** offers insights into the region's role in US market entry.

For founders across Asia looking to establish a presence in the United States, immigration uncertainty is adding another layer of complexity to international expansion. As the Trump administration steps up scrutiny of employment-based immigration, recent moves affecting green-card sponsorship at major technology companies, alongside investigations into visa programs at leading universities, have raised questions about how international businesses and skilled professionals can access the American market.

Yet new research from Singapore-founded immigration platform Beyond Border suggests that commercial opportunities continue to outweigh immigration concerns for founders considering US expansion. Its August 2026 Founder Mobility Pulse found that 82% of respondents had not changed their expansion plans despite immigration uncertainty, while 85% identified access to US customers as their primary motivation for entering the market.

KEY FIGURES

At a glance

82%

of founders surveyed have not changed their US expansion plans despite immigration uncertainty

85%

cite access to US customers as their primary motivation, compared with 8% for fundraising

64%

expect the founder to relocate alone or with a small launch team

72%

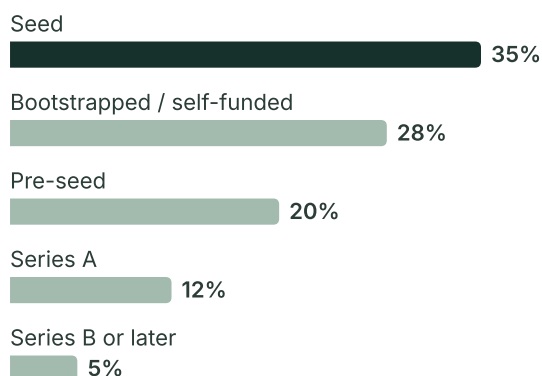
plan to retain engineering and product functions in Asia

Beyond Border Founder Mobility Pulse, August 2026
(n=307 worldwide; >200 Asia-based).

Nearly two-thirds expected to personally establish a US presence, either alone or with a small team.

Together with US immigration statistics and regional talent data, the findings offer insights into how founders are approaching US market entry, the role Asia continues to play in their expansion plans, and the potential implications for businesses and technology talent across the region.

Funding stage of surveyed companies



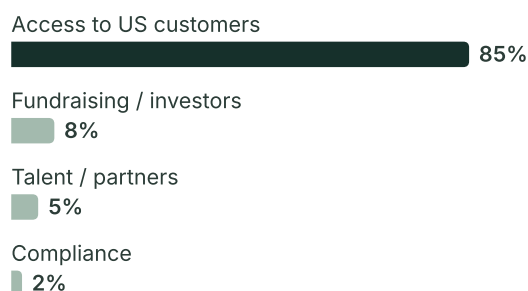
Source: Beyond Border Founder Mobility Pulse, August 2026 (n=307 worldwide). Percentages rounded.

FINDING 1

Access to US customers outweighs fundraising as a motivation for expansion

Access to American customers is the primary motivation for US expansion among founders surveyed. Some 85% identified customer access as their main reason for entering the market, compared with just 8% who cited fundraising or investor networks.

Primary motivation for US expansion

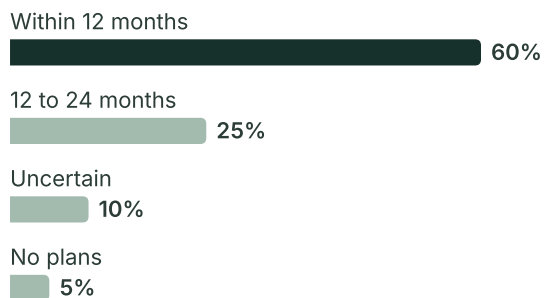


Source: Beyond Border Founder Mobility Pulse, August 2026 (n=307 worldwide). Percentages rounded.

While fundraising remains important to startups, establishing a presence in the US may offer opportunities to build customer relationships and grow revenue in one of the world's largest markets.

These ambitions are also relatively near-term. Some 60% of respondents intend to expand to the US within the next 12 months, with a further 25% targeting the following year. Taken together, 85% expect to enter the US market within two years.

Planned timeline for US expansion



Source: Beyond Border Founder Mobility Pulse, August 2026 (n=307 worldwide). Percentages rounded.

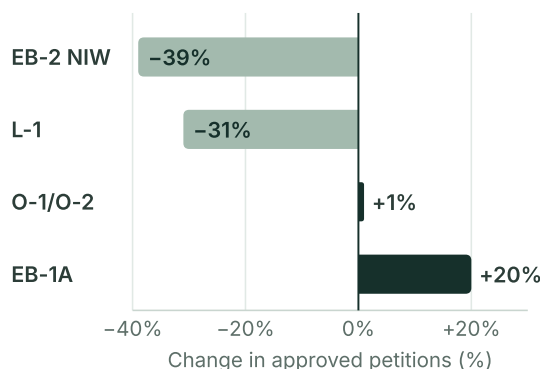
FINDING 2

Immigration uncertainty is not deterring founders' US expansion plans

Immigration uncertainty does not appear to be significantly altering expansion intentions among the founders surveyed. Beyond Border's August 2026 Founder Mobility Pulse, which surveyed 307 respondents worldwide, including more than 200 based in Asia, found that 82% had not changed their US expansion plans. A further 11% were either bringing forward their expansion timelines or exploring alternative visa pathways.

Separately, Beyond Border analyzed 1,140 immigration inquiries from Asia-based individuals between August 2025 and September 2026 to understand which US immigration pathways were attracting interest. Approximately 45% of inquiries (510) concerned the O-1 visa, intended for individuals with extraordinary ability or achievement.

Selected US immigration pathways show diverging approval trends



L-1 and O-1/O-2: FY2022 to FY2024 | EB-2 NIW and EB-1A: FY2023 to FY2025

Source: USCIS I-129 and I-140. Changes in approval volumes. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

US government data paints a mixed picture of immigration pathways. Approvals for certain routes used by companies to transfer employees or bring skilled professionals to the US have declined in recent years, while other pathways, including those for individuals with extraordinary abilities, have remained relatively stable or seen an increase. Between FY2022 and FY2024, approved L-1 petitions declined by 31%, while O-1/O-2 approvals increased slightly by 1%. Over a separate period, FY2023 to FY2025, EB-1A approvals increased by 20%, while EB-2 NIW approvals declined by 39%.

Taken together, the findings suggest that immigration uncertainty has not necessarily diminished founders' appetite for US expansion. While some respondents are exploring alternative visa pathways, the broader picture is one of continued interest in the US market despite a changing immigration environment.

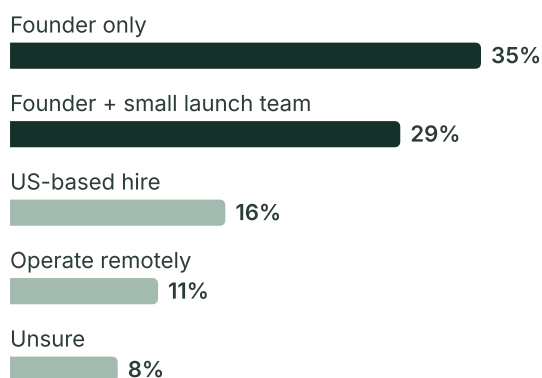
FINDING 3

Nearly two-thirds of surveyed founders expect to lead US market entry themselves

Beyond Border's survey suggests that founders may be taking the lead in establishing their companies' US presence. Some 35% of respondents anticipated the founder going alone, while another 29% expected the founder to be accompanied by a small launch team. A further 16% planned to establish a presence through a US-based hire without the founder relocating.

Who would most likely relocate to the US?

64% expect the founder to relocate alone or with a small team



Source: Beyond Border Founder Mobility Pulse, August 2026 | n=307 worldwide; >200 Asia-based. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

For early-stage companies, a founder-led presence may offer a practical way to establish customer relationships and develop partnerships without immediately building a substantial local team. However, it also places greater responsibility on founders who may still be managing operations across Asia.

Still, it points to a strategic question: who genuinely needs to be in the US to establish the business, and when does a founder-led foothold need to evolve into a broader local operation?

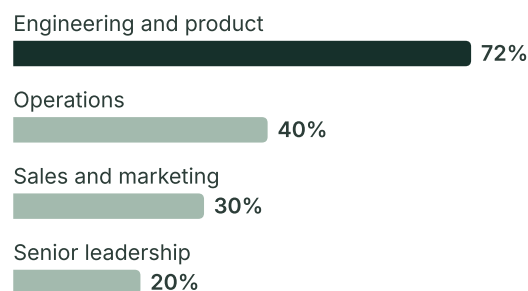
FINDING 4

As companies expand into the US, Asia remains an important base for engineering and product development

While 72% of surveyed founders intend to retain engineering and product functions in Asia, other functions they expect to keep in the region include operations (40%), sales and marketing (30%) and senior leadership (20%).

Which functions would remain in Asia as you expand to the US?

72% plan to retain engineering and product functions in Asia



Source: Beyond Border Founder Mobility Pulse, August 2026 | n=307 worldwide; >200 Asia-based. Multiple responses permitted; percentages do not total 100%.

The results suggest that companies may be pursuing a model in which founders establish a presence closer to US customers while retaining engineering, product development and other operational capabilities in Asia.

Rather than relocating entire teams, founders may be prioritizing which functions require a physical presence in the American market.

For Asian economies, this points to the potential for continued participation in the growth of internationally expanding businesses, even when those companies establish a presence in the US.

FINDING 5

Returning technology talent could create opportunities for Asian economies

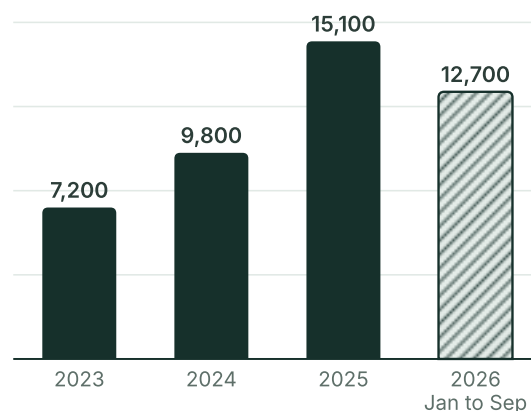
As the US tightens immigration policies, signs of returning technology talent in India are raising questions about whether other Asian economies could also benefit from internationally experienced professionals reconsidering where to build their careers.

According to recruitment firm Xpheno, an estimated 12,700 white-collar technology professionals returned from the US to India in the first nine months of 2026, compared with 15,100 in the whole of 2025, 9,800 in 2024 and 7,200 in 2023.

The implications could extend beyond India. The US National Science Board reports that India and China accounted for 29% and 12%, respectively, of foreign-born workers in US science and engineering occupations in 2024. That highlights the scale of Asian-origin talent in the American workforce, although it does not indicate how many might consider leaving.

Estimated technology professionals returning from the US to India, 2023 to 2026

(Estimated number of US-based technology professionals returning to India, by year)



Source: Xpheno estimates; 2026 covers January to September only.

Singapore, with its established technology and innovation ecosystem, could be among the Asian economies seeking to attract internationally experienced professionals.

For Asian economies, the opportunity will depend on whether employers and innovation ecosystems can offer internationally competitive compensation, career progression and opportunities in emerging fields such as AI and deep technology. Tighter US immigration policies alone will not be enough to bring talent back.

OUTLOOK

US expansion remains attractive, but the decisions are becoming more complex

Beyond Border's findings suggest that immigration uncertainty has not fundamentally changed the commercial appeal of the US market for the founders surveyed. Access to customers remains the primary motivation for expansion, with many founders expecting to establish an American presence themselves while retaining key business functions in Asia.

However, expanding internationally is becoming a more complex exercise in deciding where people and resources are best deployed. Founders must balance the benefits of being close to US customers with immigration requirements, operating costs and the capabilities they can continue to build in their home markets.

For Asian economies, these changing patterns of expansion and talent mobility could create opportunities to retain skilled professionals, support internationally growing businesses and attract experienced talent. Realizing those benefits will depend not only on developments in US immigration policy, but also on the opportunities available within the region.

SOURCES

About the data

Founder Mobility Pulse

Beyond Border survey of 307 respondents worldwide, including more than 200 based in Asia, August 2026.

Immigration inquiries

1,140 inquiries from Asia-based individuals, August 2025 to September 2026.

Approval trends

USCIS I-129 and I-140 approvals, FY2022 to FY2025.

Returning talent

Xpheno estimates, 2023 to September 2026.

US workforce

US National Science Board, 2024.

About Beyond Border

Built by founders for founders and highly skilled professionals, Beyond Border is a trusted, Singapore-founded, tech-enabled U.S. immigration platform. Launched in 2024, the company helps clients pursue U.S. visas and employment-based green cards, with a focus on O-1 visas and EB-1A and EB-2 NIW green-card pathways. Beyond Border supports clients from eligibility assessment through petition preparation, connecting them with vetted specialist immigration attorneys. Beyond Border has supported thousands of founders including from companies backed by Y Combinator, Techstars, Antler and 500 Global, as well as cross-border technology companies including SuperOps and Biorce. Beyond Border has nine offices in the United States, United Kingdom, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and Nigeria. For more information, visit www.beyondborderglobal.com