What policymakers can do:

To address the current talent gap that startups face, policymakers should take steps towards building a larger and representative high-skilled workforce through improved STEM education. Policymakers should consider proposals to increase funding for STEM education generally, including boosting funding for university-based STEM programs through government grant-supported research. And Congress should prioritize efforts to bolster diversity and inclusion of underrepresented groups—including at the National Science Foundation and at educational institutions—and craft strategies to increase diversity in tech at the federal level. And policymakers at all levels of government should work with stakeholders in order to remove barriers to participation in STEM careers, including through grants to boost participation of underrepresented individuals in STEM programs.

Policymakers should also defend and expand existing immigration programs and implement new programs to enable foreign-born entrepreneurs to come to the U.S. Recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program still lack a permanent solution to legally remain in the U.S. without having to continually renew their statuses, and policymakers must prioritize a legislative solution for this critical talent pool. Efforts should be made to bolster the H-1B visa program and make it more easily accessible to startup founders. Policymakers should work to implement a startup visa with a pathway to citizenship, to enable the U.S. to remain at the forefront of innovation.

Why it matters to startups:

Startups need to hire the best and brightest talent to compete, but the U.S. talent pool isn’t currently equipped to fill all of the talent gaps. The U.S. technology sector needs a more diverse and better trained workforce. Studies routinely show that a diverse workforce leads to more profitability for a business. And the startup ecosystem on the whole would benefit from increased resources for STEM education, an emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship education, and better support for equity in STEM education programs and amongst educators.

Additionally, the process for hiring a high-skilled, foreign-born worker is uncertain and complex, with long wait times for visas and additional 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. Adopting a startup visa would further boost economic and innovation gains, especially as new immigrant-owned startups generated an estimated three to four million jobs.

Key takeaways:

- The startup ecosystem needs access to the best and brightest talent to succeed.
- The U.S. needs to continue attracting and retaining skilled talent from around the world to compete globally, including by implementing a startup visa.
- Policymakers must prioritize STEM education to cultivate future startup founders and innovative thinkers and build on initiatives to bolster diversity in tech.

Startup Spotlight

Unshackled Ventures
(San Francisco, CA)
Manan Mehta, Founding Partner

Unshackled Ventures is a venture capital fund that supports immigrant entrepreneurs.

“Full stop, we need a startup visa. This is an issue with bipartisan support. Yet, it gets caught up in the grinding gears of comprehensive immigration reform. I think it’s time to recognize that we are educating, employing, and using U.S. taxpayer dollars for immigrant students and others that immigrate here but are constrained by the current system...If we want to keep the competitive advantage we need, then we need a startup visa.”