ALCHEMIST ACCELERATOR

Advice for International Founders / Founders Moving to SF Bay Area

Welcome!

The Bay Area is an unrivaled place for tech resources. But it can be daunting when you first move here. Please know that you are not the first -- many founders have come from abroad for Alchemist (~⅓ of Alchemist founders are international).

Connecting w/ International Alchemist Founders

It is best to find others who have been in similar situations and reach out. We encourage you to connect with Alchemist alumni -- especially those from your region -- to ask for advice. You are able to find the contact info for alumni in the Alchemist Vault and Slack. We also encourage you to join the #international-founders community channel on Slack and ask questions there.

Visa Letters

Check out Visa Letter Templates and select a sample letter that works for your needs, create a copy, edit it, and send to support@alchemistaccelerator.com and for review.

To learn more about the visa process, check out this recording: [All Things O-1 for Foreign Founders](#).

Also, see [Alchemist Accelerator | U.S. Visa Guide](#), by Dreem.

Legal Guidance

We have a list of [legal providers here on our Perks Airtable.](#)

Housing Directories

- [DirectorySF](#) - Find housemates, sublets, and coliving communities in the SF tech scene. Recommended by [Taylor](#) (Class 36).
- [Landing](#) - Fully furnished housing, on the pricey side
- [Common](#) - Private rooms in coliving places, moderately priced
- [Blueground](#) - Fully furnished housing
- [ApartmentList](#) - A great website to search for apartments within a budget and using travel times as a parameter
- [Craigslist.org](#) - Good source for finding rentals in the Bay Area.
- [AirBnB](#) - Might want to find a temporary place to stay here first, and then a longer term place via Craigslist.
- [HomeSuite](#)
- [Live Lovely](#)

Hacker Houses

- [Top Coliving Spaces in San Francisco](#) list
- [Foundry](#) - Co-living house for founders in SF. Contact [foundry.today@gmail.com](#)
- [Cloud Fortress](#) - Hacker house nearby SF Werqwise office. [Taylor](#) (Class 36) lives there, so does [Jun/Sean](#) (Class 38)
- [Startup Basecamp Co-Living Hotel](#) – Co-living + co-working space for short-term stays
- [Silicon House](#) – Contact Andrea at [alitto@siliconhouse.us](#), mention Founders Space
- [StartupHouse](#) – Co-living for entrepreneurs in Palo Alto
- You can post to the Alchemist community on Slack (#sanfrancisco) if anyone is looking for people to house with or have places to rent

Neighborhoods in SF Bay Area

- **Hayes Valley:** Known as "Cerebral Valley," Hayes Valley is popular among AI / tech entrepreneurs.
- **SoMa (South of Market):** "Downtown" SF. Super close to major tech companies / Alchemist's co-working space. Note: downtown has challenges with homelessness, especially in the Tenderloin neighborhood.
- **Potrero Hill:** Community feel with sunny weather and a growing tech presence. Rents are generally lower than in downtown.
- **Dogpatch**: An up-and-coming neighborhood, mix of modern condos and historic lofts. It's gaining popularity among entrepreneurs. Close to water, too.
- **Mission District**: Known for its vibrant and diverse cultural scene, the Mission is particularly popular among younger entrepreneurs. It has good public transit options and a lively nightlife.
- **Mountain View:** Home to Google and other major tech companies. More suburban lifestyle with easy access to tech hubs. Can take CalTrain to SF.
- **Palo Alto**: A hub for tech and innovation: close to Stanford University and Sand Hill Road (home to many iconic VCs). One of the more expensive areas in the Bay. Can take CalTrain to SF.
- **Berkeley**: Known for its academic / research environment, Berkeley is a great choice for founders interested in the intersection of tech / academia. More laid-back atmosphere compared to SF. Can take BART to SF.
- **Oakland**: More affordable alternative to San Francisco with a thriving arts scene and vibrant culture. It's becoming increasingly popular among tech entrepreneurs looking for a more diverse community than the SF tech scene. Can take BART to SF.
- **Marin County:** Suburban lifestyle with easy access to nature and outdoor activities. Mill Valley and Sausalito are popular towns. Good choice for families / those seeking a quieter environment, while still being within commuting distance to SF (need to drive to get into SF).
- Learn more:
    - San Francisco Neighborhood Guide: Where to Live in 2025 (Redfin)
    - A Guide to the Neighborhoods of San Francisco : r/sanfrancisco (Reddit)
    - SF Communities for New Founders - Look no further
    - Best San Francisco Neighborhoods for Tech Entrepreneurs

Transportation in Bay Area

You can pay for public transit using a Clipper Card. There are SFMTA "Muni" bus routes throughout the city. Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) trains can take you to/from SF to San Jose, Stanford, Oakland, Berkeley, etc.. Google Maps is helpful for trip planning and for knowing how to get places.

Having a car can be a huge help if you are traveling around the Bay Area (i.e. not just staying in San Francisco). While there is public transportation, the Bay Area is very spread out and it will take twice as long at least to travel if you are going outside of San Francisco for meetings without a car. If you are residing outside of San Francisco, it's virtually a must.

You can use zipcar or City CarShare to rent cars - but it becomes expensive if you use it a lot. For the cash-conscious, you can buy a used car and resell it if / when you leave. If you do this judiciously, you can sell it for the cost you bought it at. Past founders have done this.

Local Tech Startup Events

- Subscribe to StartupDigest for a weekly list of tech-related events in the Bay Area.
- Check out 📆 Generative AI Events [by cerebralvalley.ai] for Gen AI events
- SF Tech Events - GarysGuide | The #1 Resource for SF Tech
- San Francisco - Luma Events Calendar
- Join #social and #sanfrancisco on Alchemist Slack

Alchemist SF Office

- Come work out of our SF co-working space!
- The space is located on the 4th floor of Werqwise - on 149 New Montgomery
- Learn more about our office here - 📄 Werqwise Wiki
- Join #werqwise in Slack to stay in the loop. Join us for weekly lunches!
- Alchemist's favorite spots nearby Werqwise: Salesforce Park, Lao Table restaurant, Working Girls Cafe, Blue Bottle Coffee
- Nearby parking: SFMoMA parking garage

Mail

- We recommend you utilize a virtual mail service (ie. PO Box) in US
- UPS at 660 4th St has this service

International Entrepreneur Rule (IER)

The proposed rule would allow the USCIS to use its existing discretionary statutory parole authority for entrepreneurs of startup entities whose stay in the United States would provide a "significant public benefit through the substantial and demonstrated potential for rapid

business growth and job creation." Under the proposed rule, the USCIS may parole, on a case-by-case basis, eligible entrepreneurs of startup enterprises:

- Who have a significant ownership interest in the startup (at least 15 percent) and have an active and central role to its operations;
- Whose startup was formed in the United States within the past three years; and
- Whose startup has substantial and demonstrated potential for rapid business growth and job creation, as evidenced by:
  - Receiving significant investment of capital (at least $345,000) from certain qualified U.S. investors with established records of successful investments;
  - Receiving significant awards or grants (at least $100,000) from certain federal, state, or local government entities; or
  - Partially satisfying one or both of the above criteria in addition to other reliable and compelling evidence of the startup entity's substantial potential for rapid growth and job creation.

Under the proposed rule, entrepreneurs may be granted an initial stay of up to two years to oversee and grow their startup entities in the United States. A subsequent request for re-parole (for up to three additional years) would be considered if the entrepreneur and the startup entity continue to provide a significant public benefit as evidenced by substantial increases in capital investment, revenue, or job creation.

The U.S. Alliance for International Entrepreneurs (USAIE) has written a summary and initial analysis of the proposed rule:

📄 usaie-comments-on-proposed-immigrant-entrepreneur-rule-1.pdf

Incorporating in the State of Delaware

Steps to incorporate in the state of Delaware:
1. Pick your company name
2. File the operating agreement with Delaware.gov Division of Incorporations
   a. This can usually take about 4-6 weeks. Since COVID, Delaware.gov has been backlogged.
3. Appoint directors (optional)
4. Appoint a registered agent (sometimes required)
5. Establish a Shareholder Agreement
6. Setup your accounting
7. Issue stock
8. Hold your first board meeting

9. Once you have your certificate from the State of Delaware, apply for an EIN [Employer Identification Number] from the IRS
    a. The person applying must have a valid Taxpayer ID.
10. When you have your EIN, open your business bank account.

For full understanding refer to the Delaware.gov Division of Incorporations website.

The process of incorporating takes time and commitment. You will need help. Below are some resources we have gathered for you. Some are firms who can assist, while others are more automated options that alumni have recommended based on their own experiences.

We are fortunate to have a good relationship with WilmerHale, one of our preferred and very considerate Service Providers. WilmerHale can help many of our founders. There is a limit to how much help they can give (varies depending on need), so please be patient with your outreach.

If WilmerHale is at capacity, try one of the resources from this list:
- Norton Rose Fulbright
- Nixon Peabody
- Jones Day
- Skadden
- McDermott Will & Emery
- White Summers

SaaS solutions:
- Stripe Atlas: Start a Business with Our Startup Toolkit
- Gust.com
- Clerky.com
- Firstbase.io
- Angellist Stack

(We do not necessarily endorse all of the above suggestions. We are just passing them along from our alumni.)

Advice from Alumni: incorporating for $1500-$2000 USD is about right. Anything more than $3000 USD is too much.

Miscellaneous Crowdsourced Advice

Re: starting European subsidiary from Delaware C-Corp.
Taxation and other topics for a foreign subcontractor can be complex. I've used Mike Torosian at Baker Botts for these types of things in the past. michael.torosian@bakerbotts.com
(Credit: John Braze)

Re: O-1 Visa Process
I had a lawyer who helped (around $9K). The time depends if you are doing the expedited or not, and if you already have all the documentation. On the lawyer side took them around 2 months to fill the petition and reviews, but I already had everything set on my side (including the recommendation letters).

The process time by the government took 2 weeks as I paid the expedite fee (~$2.8K). I have a friend who did without the expedite and took her 3 months to hear back from them
(Credit: Luciana)

Re: Getting Past Passport Control Without a Business Visa
If you don't have a business visa, here are a few tips from Alums to make getting past passport control easier. Please note these are just random tips. We don't necessarily endorse these as an "Alchemist recommended" approach. But we wanted to share tips others have had success with:

1. Say that you have meetings in the US, not that you are doing work in the US. Your word choice is important: Say you are here to do business, not to work.

2. Book a flexible short term return ticket, and then extend it later.
   a. Book a roundtrip ticket with a return leg in a week or two and say you will be here week. Then extend the return leg ticket once you are here. It's far easier to say you are here for a few meetings and then extend the return leg on a flexible ticket then to explain that you are here for several months.
   b. You may also want to mention that you are engaged and just coming here for a few meetings and then going back.

3. Experiment with coming in through a different port of entry if you have repeatedly come into the same port.
   a. If you have come into San Francisco quite a bit, try coming into NYC or another port of entry so they don't get suspicious. Basically you are just doing other meetings.

4. Dress nicely
    a. Don't look like a coder / hacker – look like a biz person.

5. Answer questions succinctly – don't rattle on with lots of stuff.
(Credit: Jesper K (Denmark))