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Author: Mr. Gidon Gautel
Moon Village Association (MVA), United Kingdom

Mr. Kyran Grattan
Space Generation Advisory Council (SGAC), Luxembourg
Ms. Sara Sabry
Deep Space Initiative, United States
Mrs. Isi Casas del Valle Pacheco
Space Generation Advisory Council (SGAC), Chile

FUELING DOMESTIC SPACE WITH GLOBAL TALENT: EXPLORING A US SPACE VISA

Abstract

International, intercultural and interdisciplinary teams are critical for successful entrepreneurship, innovation, and the solving of multi-decadal problems. As the number of global space actors is increasing, the need and ability to attract and retain talent is of the utmost importance to maintaining a vibrant and competitive domestic space industry, including for the United States of America (US). The inability of non-US persons to engage fully in the US' space industry is typically a topic of note due to the consequent barriers to talent acquisition, administrative burden, and reduced opportunities. As investment in the global space industry has accelerated, industry commentators have noted increasing difficulties that US space companies face in accessing the necessary skills to fuel growth, particularly for startups and small to medium size enterprises. Most recently, several commentators have proposed measures to increase the number of foreign workers in the US space industry, to address a tight labor market and space-specific skills shortages, including the introduction of a "space visa" to provide foreign talent with a direct path to space industry participation.

This study critically analyzes the need for, feasibility, and potential implementation of these propositions. Firstly, the study characterizes the skills shortages in the US commercial space industry. With a brief overview of measures available to address space industry skills gaps, the study then reviews the efficacy of immigration for filling high technology skills gaps. Finally, the study considers the feasibility of implementation of a space visa, as well as workable legal and regulatory pathways, sourced from literature and expert interviews. While focusing on the US, this paper provides generalizable lessons for other nations seeking to provide their domestic space industry with sufficient skilled labor forces, ensuring continued innovation and entrepreneurial dynamism, while balancing national security interests.