

Understanding visa rules can help in hiring international students

February 07, 2016

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Special to Crain's Detroit Business

Steve Tobocman, head of **Global Detroit**, said many employers misunderstand how the visa process works.

"What we find is a lack of awareness on the rules and processes by which an employer can pursue talent," said Tobocman.

Most international students come to the U.S. on an F1 visa.

International students using an F1 visa can stay in the U.S. for up to 12 months after graduation if they are using the Optional Practical Training program, which allows students to work in the U.S. by engaging in practical training during or after their program ends, as long as a university verifies that the student is working in the chosen field of study.

International students majoring in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields can stay in the U.S. longer if they are using the OPT program. In 2008, President George W. Bush's administration created the STEM OPT extension, which allows international students majoring in STEM fields to stay in the U.S. an additional 17 months after graduation if employers use an electronic verification system.

Under new rules proposed in October, the **Department of Homeland Security** would extend the 17-month extension to 24 months. Altogether, business owners would have the opportunity to bring STEM talent into their company for three years at no extra cost to the employer.

Tobocman said the rules allow an opportunity for an employer to work with international students and see if they're interested in sponsoring an H1B1 visa. This visa provides three years of work authorization and can be extended another three to six years.

Bringing in international talent pays "enormous dividends over time," Tobocman said.

"It can really give companies a competitive edge."