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New Evaluation of Entrepreneur Startup Program Chronicles Real Impact in Michigan’s Economic Future

From 2019 pilot to present-day, impact evaluation recommends expansion and call for participants

Global Detroit released a new impact evaluation of its [Global Entrepreneur-in-Residence](#) (Global EIR) program to place foreign-born startup founders at universities to teach and mentor while launching and growing their startup companies. Growing from an initial 2019 pilot launched in partnership with the University of Michigan and funded by the William Davidson Foundation, the program has expanded to five new university partners and attracted funding from the State of Michigan and Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, making Global Detroit’s Global EIR program one of the most significant in the nation.

The evaluation documents that Global Detroit has supported twelve immigrant founders from eleven companies who have created 174 jobs and attracted \$28.1 million in venture capital investment since entering the program. These diverse founders hail from five continents and were placed at five Michigan universities and are playing a critical role in Michigan’s innovation economy in electric vehicles, outdoor recreation, and logistics, as well as business using artificial intelligence and solving Michigan-focused challenges such as providing fresh produce in Detroit’s food deserts and providing early and more accurate detection of micro-organisms in Michigan fresh water lakes, rivers and streams.

Chening Duker, the founder of [Goodpluck](#) (pluck.eco) and Veggie Express, was one of the first founders supported by the Global EIR program in 2019. Duker graduated from the University of Michigan in computer science as an international student from the U.K. with roots growing up in Ghana and Cameroon. He spent three years working at Ann Arbor’s Duo Security as a software engineer before applying to the Global EIR program.

“Global EIR gave me the opportunity to pursue my American Dream. I am passionate about food access and equity—issues critical to Detroit, our farms, residents and neighborhoods—and I wanted to prove that technology could help affordably and efficiently connect Detroit residents with all the sustainable, affordable food being grown around them,” Duker notes.

Goodpluck provides over 100 customers in Detroit the opportunity to get fresh, Detroit-grown produce delivered directly to their doorsteps bypassing the added expense, waste and energy loss of a grocery store. Duker’s second endeavor, Veggie Express—launched after he successfully exited the Global EIR program on a longer-term visa—is a collaboration of Goodpluck, local Black-owned farms, food distributors and an solar powered electric vehicle startup to create a sustainable, cost-effective model for the farmers to distribute produce while improving fresh food access in Detroit.

“Simply put, Global EIR provides international and immigrant startup founders with the opportunity to launch their businesses here in Detroit and across the state of Michigan,” notes Global Detroit Managing Director Alaina Jackson. *“If we are serious about being a leader in the innovation economy, Michigan needs to take advantage of every opportunity it can. Global EIR is opening doors to diverse startup founders of color and women that have been historically marginalized and excluded from startup programs,”* Dr. Jackson continues, noting that four of the last five founders accepted in the Global EIR program are Latinx or Middle-Eastern, with 40% of them being women.

Global EIR programs provide a crucial pathway for foreign-born entrepreneurs to launch their companies not only in Michigan, but throughout the United States, offering them a unique blend of academic and practical support. By placing immigrant founders in part-time university jobs, these programs allow entrepreneurs to work on their startups while benefiting from uncapped H-1B visa employment.

Launched at the University of Massachusetts Boston in 2014, Global EIR programs have expanded to nearly a dozen U.S. universities, with over 100 founders participating. Global Detroit’s program, launched in 2019, is the second largest in the nation. Since 2021, Global Detroit has led a Global EIR National Peer Network, which has seen the number of participating states and universities operating Global EIR programs expand from four operating programs in 2021 to over 13 in three short years.

The State of Michigan appropriated nearly \$1 million to the Global EIR program as part of the Michigan Global Talent Initiative in its Fiscal Year 2023 budget with a second appropriation in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget. Since Michigan first made its appropriation, four other states have followed: California (\$2 million state appropriation), New Jersey (\$400,000 state appropriation), New York (\$4 million state appropriation); and Washington (\$300,000 state appropriation).

With support from the William Davidson Foundation, Global Detroit first launched the program at the University of Michigan, but with support from the National League of Cities and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation was able to add programs at Wayne State University, the College for Creative Studies, and Lawrence Tech. State funding has enabled Michigan Tech and Grand Valley State University to also offer Global EIR programs in partnership with Global Detroit.

“As we provide transformative opportunities for international entrepreneurs to thrive, we not only enrich our communities but also position Michigan as a global leader in innovation and entrepreneurship,” noted **Michigan Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist II** who authored a forward for the report. *“I commend the efforts of Global Detroit and the Michigan Global Talent Coalition for their dedication to building a more prosperous and inclusive Michigan. This impact report allows us to pause to support and celebrate the contributions of international entrepreneurs to our state’s growth and prosperity.”*

New Global EIR participants are encouraged to apply to the program. Those interested can learn more and fill out an application by visiting <https://globaldetroitmi.org/geir/>.

About Global Detroit

[Global Detroit](#) is a regional community and economic development organization. With a focus on immigrants and global talent, we develop and implement inclusive strategies to drive the growth, revitalization and broadly shared prosperity of Detroit and Southeast Michigan.

About the Michigan Global Talent Coalition

The [Michigan Global Talent Coalition](#) is a collection of 20+ statewide and local chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, industry associations and key supporters who believe that the intentional inclusion of immigrant talent in Michigan's economic development and workforce development plans, policies, and programs will expand the state's economic growth, shared prosperity and competitiveness. The Coalition has advocated for the Michigan Global Talent Initiative, a five-year investment to ensure comprehensive immigrant inclusion in the State's Sixty by 30 workforce development goals.

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