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Tech Firms Take More H-1Bs

By [PUI-WING TAM](#)

Silicon Valley companies have long relied on foreign skilled employees. During the recession, many big local technology firms appeared to hire a larger share of those workers compared with other top employers of professionals from overseas.

That is according to an analysis by the **National Foundation for American Policy**, a nonprofit nonpartisan policy research group in Arlington, Va. The group looked at government data on new H-1B visas that were awarded to the top 50 employers of such visa holders nationwide over the past four years. H-1B visas are the coveted visas that allow foreign skilled workers to be employed in the U.S.

According to the analysis, Silicon Valley companies such as [Intel Corp.](#) and [Google Inc.](#) received 14.7% of the new H-1Bs visas that were awarded to the top 50 H-1B employers for the year ended Sept. 30. That totaled about 2,110 approvals out of the total 14,315 such visas for the group.

Silicon Valley's share of such approvals was the highest it has been for several years. It was up from 6.1% in fiscal year 2008, 4.5% in fiscal year 2007 and 2.8% in fiscal year 2006, according to the analysis.

The findings don't necessarily show that Silicon Valley companies took advantage of the recession to hire H-1B visa holders. Instead, it suggests that local companies were simply more successful in getting their H-1B applications through, says Cynthia Lange, a partner at law firm Fragomen Del Rey Bernsen & Loewy, which specializes in immigration law. H-1B visas are capped at an annual 65,000 limit. In past years, that quota has been rapidly used up.

But more recently, demand for such visas has slowed as some industries have scaled back their H-1B visa applications in the weak economy.

That has opened opportunities for local tech companies like Intel. Lisa Malloy, a spokeswoman for the Santa Clara chip company, says it moved some of its foreign skilled workers from shorter-term L-1 visas to longer-term H-1B visas last year because more H-1Bs were available. Intel also reapplied for H-1Bs for some workers who missed out on the H-1B cap the prior year—and got more of those reapplications approved, she says.

Pat Chalmers, vice president of human resource operations at chip maker [Nvidia](#) Corp., which also increased its H-1B approvals last year, says some of its visa approvals bled over from the prior year when it was hampered by the H-1B cap. She says H-1Bs help the Santa Clara company "hire the best talent, no matter where they're from."

Stuart Anderson, executive director for the National Foundation for American Policy, says the analysis doesn't give a complete picture of H-1B approvals since the study doesn't encompass all companies that applied for the program. But among top employers, Silicon Valley's growing share of H-1B approvals shows "a consistent need to use the category," he says.

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