



BY MAURY WRIGHT, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

## H1-B questions hit *EDN* readers' hot button

**A** couple of times this year, I've highlighted research that *EDN* has conducted on the market or on engineers. We have more such material coming your way with a global engineering-salary-and-career survey that we will present next month. In the meantime, we conducted a one-day career-oriented survey on our Web site on Sept 26, and this column presents a few results from that survey. In particular, the subject of H1-B visas drew a number of interesting responses.

I thought that we had carefully considered what we would ask about H1-B visas, though your response indicated that we had failed. We settled on two questions. First, we asked, "Do you believe the government should expand the number of H1-B visas?" Second, we asked respondents to choose among three responses that best summed up their feelings and experiences with H1-B visas. The choices were: "I am working on an H1-B visa, and it has been a fantastic opportunity"; "I believe that we are short on qualified engineers in the United States, and I support the idea of increasing the number of H1-B visas"; and "My career was harmed when I lost an opportunity to another engineer that was a part of the H1-B program."

First, I want to assure you that we had no ulterior motive with this survey. One reader suggested, "[The second question] is very biased. I believe that we are short on engineers, but expanding the H1-B is not the answer; convincing kids to enter engineering is. You guys must already have written

the result and are waiting for the survey to support it." In fact, *EDN* as a whole has no position on H1-B visas. As several of you suggested, we should have offered the option on the first question to answer in a way other than "yes" or "no." And we offered too few choices in the second question.

For better or for worse, here are the results we gathered. To the yes/no question, 48.9% of you answered that, yes, the government should expand the H1-B offerings, and 51.9% answered no. In response to the second question, the answers came in at 3.5% for those working on an H1-B visa and believing it to be a great opportunity, 58.3% for those who believe that we should increase the number of H1-B visas because the United States is lacking in qualified engineers, and 38.2% who believe their career suffered because of the H1-B program. Keep in mind, though, that many of you couldn't match your feelings to the answers we offered.

A number of readers indicated that they believe that the United States has an acute shortage of engineers,

whereas they call into question the ideals behind and the execution of the H1-B program. One respondent noted, "The H1-B program has many holes. It is like indentured servitude. Many of my colleagues in the past who were H1-B holders were underpaid compared to others in similar positions. They were forced to work long hours and weekends as they were threatened with losing their jobs. If they lost their job, they lost their place in the permanent-residency line." Another added, "H1-B can be a good resource; however, it appears to be abused by hiring non-US workers at a lower wage in some situations."

A number of respondents pointed out that we should solve an engineering shortage by encouraging more students to enter the engineering field and by using available talent. One noted, "I believe there is a shortage of qualified engineers, but most companies are not willing to hire laid-off workers. I think there is an unfair bias against these workers. From my wife's experience, the potential employers that do give an interview are actually stealing ideas from these experienced workers and then not giving them a chance."

On a positive note, most respondents like their job and want to encourage young engineers. One noted, "I believe there is strong need for informing young students, high-school age to early college, of all the different types of engineering jobs that are available. ... Engineering is about solving problems, and we need to educate people on how fun that can be!"

To view the results of our survey, go to [www.edn.com/071025ed2](http://www.edn.com/071025ed2). **EDN**

Contact me at [mgwright@edn.com](mailto:mgwright@edn.com).

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