

Interview with Fast Track Initiative VP of US Investment Tai Harada



Tai Harada
VP of US Investment
[Fast Track Initiative](#)

Q1: What is your current work in Boston? And how did you start doing this work?

Fast Track Initiative is a Japanese venture firm with 16 years of history in Japan and opened an office in Boston last year. With a newly launched fund, we are starting investment in US. We are working on everything from developing investment strategies to sourcing and assessing individual deals. It is also essential for us to establish a network and presence in the US community, especially in the Boston area. As a VP of US Operations, I spearhead these activities but work closely with other members at Fast Tack Initiative. We act as one team and often discuss well inside the team.

We believe our added value to the community is the facilitation of external collaborations. We are a small VC player in the community but work with industrial partners to achieve a bigger impact. Along the same line, when we assess investments, we value what we can do for startups after investments.

I was previously with Arch Venture Partners. Nearly 100 assessments working with members of Chicago office helped me earn a venture capital skill sets. But the equally important thing I learned is a mindset. Venture capitalists work across firms and time. Thus long-term, trust-based relationship matters a lot. My earlier experience at McKinsey also helps me establish relationships with corporate partners and analyze businesses.

Q2: What is your impression of Boston as an ecosystem for startups?

The ecosystem of Boson is distinctive from that of Japan or any other country or city. People are experienced in what they do, and there are enough capital and resources. And so, the most innovative technologies gather from the world and are commercialized in Boston. As there are lots of exciting and leading sciences, people are sensitive to how each innovation is unique and differentiated. For foreign startups who approach the community, it is essential to understand how they are unique.

Q3: How was your experience being a judge at the February 11th pitch event?

It was a great experience being on a panel with great startups and judges. Making new connections was a fantastic part of participating in this event. I believe the event also gave startups an excellent opportunity to pitch and collect feedback from VCs.

Q4: What was your impression of the Japanese startups who pitched?

I enjoyed listening to them and learning what they do. I clearly saw all presenters prepared well for presentations, and they did great Q&As. The pitch was very short, and it is tough to communicate everything at that time, but all companies did an excellent job covering from technology to business. The general feedback I would make is there may have been a better use of the opportunity than simply asking for money. Ask for funding in a pitch event itself is natural, but companies doing all the operations in Japan asking for funding from global VCs is a huge jump. Because VCs have more capabilities and functions than money supply, asking for strategy advice or connections could be another way to use these opportunities.

Q5: Do you have any tips/advice for Japanese startups hoping to expand overseas in Boston?

If a startup considers any activities, BD, R&D, fundraising, I'd advise preparing for that sooner than later. Unless the company has a proper network in the region, collaboration wouldn't happen, and it takes time to build a strong network. As mentioned earlier, people are highly experienced in what they do in the region. Hiring people in Boston could be a solution but recruiting good talent itself needs network and time.

In addition, identifying own differentiation in the global context is critical to be competitive. Regardless of where the company operates its business, it is very important to know who does what in the same space and convince people how the company is unique.