



**Back-up  
options for  
international  
students**



If you would like to stay in the U.S. to explore work opportunities and possibly build a career, there are some important considerations to take into account. Most international students have their minds set on pursuing a career within the U.S. However, many students struggle during their job search process due to inflexibility and lack of backup options.

There is no guarantee that international students will be able to stay in the United States for work. There are a couple of important reasons for that.

For starters, getting permission to work in the U.S. is not a simple process. Many factors are out of an international student's control. For example:

- **Highly competitive H-1B visa lottery**
- **H-1B visa application rejections**
- **And changes to immigration policy**

Given the inherent difficulty in obtaining an H-1B visa, the reasons for creating a backup plan should be clear. A backup plan solves a few different issues. Perhaps most importantly, a well-developed backup plan can provide a roadmap to follow should the need to take a different path arises.

The process of creating the backup plan can also help uncover ideas and opportunities that might otherwise remain hidden. Having more perspective makes it easier to stay fluid and flexible, which are two essential traits for any international student making important life decisions.

To create your backup plan, you should consider a range of options. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- **Consider alternative U.S. immigration options**
- **Consider international opportunities**
- **Continue exploring opportunities back home**
- **Pursue further education**

Now, let's take a deeper look at how and why these options might be worthwhile additions to your backup plan.





## 1. Consider Alternative U.S. Immigration Options

While the most common (and widely known) work visa in the U.S. is the H-1B, there are many other visa types offered by the USCIS that could solve some of the problems linked to the H-1B process.

Depending on your particular situation, education level, and goals for working in the United States, one or more of the following visa options may be interesting inclusions to a backup plan.

It is also possible to seek employment with institutions that are not required to go through the H-1B lottery process.

Here are some of the alternatives that many international students consider.

### **EB-1/2/3/4/5 – EMPLOYMENT-BASED VISA**

There are many EB visas to choose from and the requirements range in complexity. In general, EB visas are designed for skilled workers who are well educated (holding an advanced degree), have experience in their field, and can provide value to the U.S.

### **L-1A/1B – INTRACOMPANY TRANSFEREES VISA**

The L visas provide employees of international companies to 'transfer in' to the country. After working for at least a year in a foreign branch of a company, an application for an L visa can be

submitted. This is an excellent option for anyone looking at international companies as part of their backup plan strategy. Should the H-1B get rejected, it is possible to work for your chosen company in another country for a year, before circling back with the L visa.

### **O-1 – EXTRAORDINARY ABILITY OR ACHIEVEMENT VISA**

The O visa is designed to give applicants who have demonstrated extraordinary success in their field the chance to work in the U.S. for up to three years. "Extraordinary Ability and Achievement" must be quantified, and the visa is valid for work in the same field.

### **Q-1 – CULTURAL EXCHANGE VISA**

The Q visa provides short-term (15 months) cultural exchange-based employment permissions. Q visas allow holders to work for a short time in the U.S. Employment must be a part of a cultural exchange program organized by the employer.

### **EXPLORE CAP-EXEMPT POSITIONS**

Another opportunity that international students have is to apply for positions at higher-ed institutions and non-profit organizations. Organizations like these do not need to go through the lottery process when placing international students in particular roles. Depending on the position the student is applying for, it is possible to avoid the H-1B lottery altogether.



## 2. Consider International Opportunities

While it is always unfortunate when H-1B applications get rejected, it does happen. One thing that can help is to apply to companies that operate globally. When H-1B applications are made by international companies, it is often possible to request a position in another country.

Of course, to build a request like that into a backup plan, it would be necessary to research the company's global presence and any job opportunities at foreign locations.

This option is especially useful for an applicant who has already gone through the vetting process at the company in question. Transfers, references, and recommendations are easier to come by.

In addition to considering the international office or branch of your target employer and alternative visa types, you may also consider countries other than the U.S. Many countries provide much easier pathways to permanent and long-term working visas than the U.S.

One somewhat obvious alternative to the U.S. is Canada. Canada has a lot to offer, and many of the same large companies you will find in the U.S. operate in Canada.

Applicants with advanced degrees from the U.S. and other countries globally have the potential to apply (and get accepted) for a permanent residency in Canada through the Express Entry Program.

## 3. Continue Exploring Opportunities Back Home

Since there are no guarantees in the immigration visa and employment process, it is also important to consider what you can do if it becomes too difficult to stay and work in the U.S., or any other country.

Create a list of potential opportunities in your home country that you can fall back on, in case things don't go as planned. Factors that you may want to consider while putting your list together may include details like;

- **the global reach and recognition of the company,**
- **the possibility of developing a marketable skill set,**
- **the potential for growth and advancement within the company,**
- **and how the company may help your case in the future, should you wish to apply for a visa again.**

In many cases, international students can find positions at large, multinational companies in their own countries that can give them the competitive edge they need to land a good job in another country like the U.S.



## 4. Pursue higher education

Finally, there is one more option to include in a backup plan. In the event that employment (and the corresponding visa) cannot be secured, pursuing higher education can both add time to an international student's allowable time in the US, and create new opportunities at the same time.

As an example of how additional doors can open, there are 20K H-1B visas reserved for international students with advanced degrees.

Recipients of advanced degrees also have the chance to extend their OPT program by one year.

