



U.S. Citizenship
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Services

[Home](#) > [Working in the United States](#) > Options for Noncitizen STEM Professionals to Work in the United States

Options for Noncitizen STEM Professionals to Work in the United States

The United States has long been a destination for top talent from all over the world. Our ability to attract global talent—especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)—has spurred path-breaking innovation, leading to the creation of jobs, new industries, and new opportunities for all Americans.

This online resource provides an overview of some of the temporary and permanent pathways for noncitizens to work in the United States in STEM fields. This guide also highlights some of the most important considerations for STEM professionals contemplating working in the United States. Subsequent sections outline these pathways in more detail.

More information on how to apply is available on uscis.gov for both [temporary](#) and [permanent](#) pathways as well as for [optional practical training](#) for students. In addition, a general guide to employment in the United States can be found in the [Working in the United States](#) section of uscis.gov. You may wish to consult with an attorney to evaluate the best classification for you.

Key Questions to Consider When Choosing a STEM Pathway

Do I have the education, experience, or skills needed to qualify?

Some pathways, such as the O-1 nonimmigrant visa classification and the EB-1A immigrant visa classification, are for those with “extraordinary ability.” These require that a person have widespread and sustained acclaim. Others, such as the H-1B, require at least a relevant bachelor’s degree or equivalent. And others, such as the L-1, require a pre-existing relationship with a company that does business both in the United States and abroad.

Do I need to have a job offer? Do I need a company to submit a petition for me?

Most pathways require you to already have a job offer, in which case an employer will submit a petition to USCIS on your behalf. However, some classifications do not require a job offer and permit you to directly submit an application or petition with USCIS (“self-petitioning”). For example, if you are seeking lawful permanent resident status (a Green Card) based on a classification as an individual with “extraordinary ability” (the EB-1A category), you do not need a job offer and do not need an employer to file the immigrant petition on your behalf (meaning, you may self-petition). Although a job offer is not required in this example, you must provide evidence establishing that you are coming to the United

States to continue work in your area of expertise.

Will I be working in the United States on a permanent basis as a lawful permanent resident, or will I be working on a temporary basis as a nonimmigrant?

Some opportunities provide a basis for individuals, including STEM professionals, to obtain permanent resident status in the United States. Permanent resident status allows you to live and work in the United States permanently, and typically provides you with a path to citizenship. These opportunities are known as “immigrant” pathways.

Others (for example, F-1 OPT, H-1B, L-1 and O-1), also known as “nonimmigrant” pathways, allow you to temporarily live and work in the United States. Many people who do work through one of these nonimmigrant pathways eventually transition to permanent resident pathways, and eventually [U.S. citizenship](#).

Are there any other criteria that are required for a specific pathway?

Some criteria that are not directly related to professional qualifications can affect visa eligibility. For instance, only citizens of Canada and Mexico qualify for TN visas. In addition, there can be some timing or other requirements particular to certain pathways. For example, some immigrant pathways require the employer to first obtain an approved labor certification from the U.S. Department of Labor. The labor certification verifies that there are insufficient able, available, qualified, and willing U.S. workers to fill the position and that such employment will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. citizens.

Summary of Pathways for STEM Employment in the United States

Nonimmigrant (Temporary) Pathways

For more details, see our [Nonimmigrant Pathways for STEM Employment in the United States](#) page.

	Required education, experience, or skills	Job offer required?	Duration of validity
F-1 OPT Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) and 24-Month STEM OPT Extension for F-1 Students	Student in F-1 status who has earned a Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Ph.D. in a STEM field from a U.S. college or university.	Job offer not required for initial 12-month OPT, but required for 24-month STEM OPT extension.	>Up to 12 months post-completion OPT + 24-month STEM OPT extension (36 months total).

	Required education, experience, or skills	Job offer required?	Duration of validity
H-1B Specialty occupation	<p>>Must hold a U.S. bachelor's or higher degree (or a foreign equivalent degree) required by the occupation, or an equivalent combination of education and experience.</p>	<p>Job offer must require the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge; and the attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.</p>	<p>3-year initial approval + one 3-year extension. Additional extensions may be available for individuals who are in the process of obtaining lawful permanent resident status.</p> <p>Due to an annual statutory cap, there is typically a random selection process to determine which petitions are eligible to be filed for an <i>initial</i> H-1B period (unless exempt from the cap). H-1B extension petitions are not subject to the cap.</p>
O-1 Extraordinary ability	<p>Sustained national or international acclaim in a specific field.</p>	<p>Job offer must demonstrate that you are coming to work in your area of extraordinary ability.</p>	<p>Up to 3-year initial approval + 1-year extensions, with no maximum duration of status and no annual numerical limit.</p>

	Required education, experience, or skills	Job offer required?	Duration of validity
<p>L-1A</p> <p>>Intracompany transfer of a manager or executive of a multinational firm</p>	<p>One continuous year of employment abroad for a parent, branch, affiliate, or subsidiary of the U.S. petitioning company. The employment abroad must have been in a specialized knowledge, managerial or executive capacity.</p>	<p>>Job offer must be in a managerial or executive capacity.</p>	<p>3-year initial approval + 2-year extensions up to a total of 7 years.</p>
<p>L-1B</p> <p>Intracompany transfer of a specialized knowledge worker of a multinational firm</p>	<p>One continuous year of employment abroad for a parent, branch, affiliate, or subsidiary of the U.S. petitioning company. Employment abroad must have been in a managerial, executive, or specialized knowledge capacity.</p>	<p>Job offer must be in a specialized knowledge capacity.</p>	<p>3-year initial approval + a 2-year extension for a total of 5 years.</p>
<p>TN</p> <p>NAFTA/USMCA Professional (limited to Mexican and Canadian nationals)</p>	<p>License and/or education/degree and/or experience to engage in a business activity as a NAFTA/USMCA professional.</p>	<p>Job offer must be for a position that requires a NAFTA professional.</p>	<p>3-year initial approval + unlimited 3-year extensions.</p>

Immigrant (Permanent) Pathways

Lawful permanent residents may work in the United States without restriction. Before you obtain permanent resident status, you may be able to apply for [employment authorization](#) when you file an application to [adjust your status](#) to lawful permanent resident.

For more details, see our [Immigrant Pathways for STEM Employment in the United States](#) page.

Pathway (i.e., employment-based immigrant visa classification)	Required education, experience, or skills	Job offer and/or labor certification required?
<p>EB-1A</p> <p>Employment-Based First Preference – Extraordinary ability</p>	<p>Sustained national or international acclaim in a specific field.</p>	<p>No job offer or labor certification required, but individuals must show how they will work in their area of extraordinary ability in the United States.</p>
<p>EB-1B</p> <p>Employment-Based First Preference – Outstanding professors and researchers</p>	<p>International recognition as outstanding in a specific academic area.</p>	<p>Job offer required.</p> <p>No labor certification required.</p>
<p>EB-1C</p> <p>Employment-Based First Preference – Multinational executives and managers</p>	<p>One year of employment abroad with a parent, branch, affiliate, or subsidiary of the U.S. petitioning company in a primarily managerial or executive capacity.</p>	<p>Job offer must be for employment in a primarily managerial or executive capacity with a qualifying U.S. employer that has been doing business for at least one year.</p> <p>No labor certification required.</p>
<p>EB-2 (without national interest waiver)</p> <p>Employment-Based Second Preference – Exceptional ability or advanced degree professional</p>	<p>Exceptional ability: a level of expertise significantly above that ordinarily encountered.</p> <p>Advanced degree professional: the job requires, and you possess, a degree above a bachelor's (or a bachelor's followed by at least five years of progressive experience).</p>	<p>Job offer required.</p> <p>Labor certification generally required.</p>

Pathway (i.e., employment-based immigrant visa classification)	Required education, experience, or skills	Job offer and/or labor certification required?
<p>EB-2 with National Interest Waiver (NIW)</p> <p>Employment-Based Second Preference – Exceptional ability or advanced degree professional with national interest waiver of job offer and, thus, the labor certification</p>	<p>Exceptional ability or advanced degree as described above plus:</p> <p>The proposed endeavor has both substantial merit and national importance.</p> <p>You are well positioned to advance the proposed endeavor.</p> <p>On balance, it would be beneficial to the United States to waive the requirements of a job offer, and thus the labor certification.</p>	<p>No job offer required.</p> <p>No labor certification required.</p>
<p>EB-3</p> <p>Employment-Based Third Preference – Skilled workers, professionals, or other workers</p>	<p>Skilled worker: the job requires, and you possess, a minimum of 2 years’ training or experience.</p> <p>Professional: the job requires, and you possess, at least a U.S. bachelor’s degree (or a foreign equivalent degree).</p> <p>Other worker: you are capable of performing a job requiring less than 2 years’ training or experience.</p>	<p>Job offer required.</p> <p>Labor certification generally required.</p>

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