



10 WEEK

SPONSORSHIP CHALLENGE

for international students

Embarking on your journey to secure a job in the US as an international student is an exciting and life-changing chapter of your life. With a bit of effort and the right strategy, you can unlock doors to incredible career possibilities. This 10-week challenge is here to empower you every step of the way – helping you build meaningful connections, strengthen your professional network, and connect with sponsors willing to support your success. The path is yours to create, and your future starts now!

We wish you success.

*The SponsorshipGuru Team
(former international students)*



To successfully complete this challenge, you are encouraged to use the following tools:

- 1) Memberships on your preferred job posting sites. We highly recommend creating and actively using a LinkedIn account, as it is essential for conducting many of the professional networking tasks found in this guide.
- 2) Telecommunication Tools – Preferably a U.S.-based cell phone or landline.
- 3) Email Address – Preferably an email address with a U.S. domain. Avoid using foreign domains, like @domain.co.uk (for the United Kingdom) or @empresa.com.mx (for Mexico). The goal is to make your profile as relatable as possible.
- 4) Computer Access – A laptop, desktop, or tablet with web browsing capabilities.
- 5) Video Conferencing Software – Use tools like Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams. Free versions of these tools are sufficient.
- 6) Transportation – Some activities may need to be conducted in person, which could require local or regional travel. If travel isn't possible, focus on virtual meetings to advance your sponsorship networking efforts.



How to tackle this challenge

Every week, you'll have a list of weekly activities and tasks to keep you on track to get sponsored. All activities have minimum goals, but as you build confidence and experience, aim to gradually set higher targets.

Adjust your strategy as needed. While trying the different activities outlined in this challenge, pay attention to which ones deliver the best results for you and focus more on those.

The key message here is that this challenge will guide you every week, helping you take meaningful steps toward landing an internship or job in the US.



How to schedule the activities in this challenge

Create a routine with a consistent schedule. We recommend a minimum of 4 hours a week, but you are highly encouraged to invest more time on this challenge. Keep in mind that finding a job is a job in itself. Next, decide when to fit this challenge into your weekly schedule. Keep these three factors in mind:

- How this challenge fits with your existing schedule (consider your work and/or class schedule).
- The time of day when you're most productive (are you an "early bird", or a "night owl").
- If possible, align some of your job search time with regular office hours (9 AM–5 PM) so you can easily reach out to employers or network as needed.

Hold yourself accountable. Stick to your schedule. Complete the activities in this challenge. Whenever it's time for job search activities, immerse yourself fully and be ready to engage.

Remember, there's a direct connection between completing all the work in this guide and reaching your career goals in the US.

WEEK 1



What's happening this week:

This week you will work on the foundation for your job search. These steps are essential for successfully completing this challenge.

Your activities:



Understand your situation: Many international students underestimate how challenging it can be to secure a sponsor and successfully navigate the immigration process.

If you had an infinite amount of time to find a sponsor, your world would be perfect. Ice cream would have zero calories, and you wouldn't even need to read this article. With an infinite amount of time, eventually, one day, you would find a willing employer, and you'd live happily ever after.

In reality, you are working within a very tight timeframe to, not only secure a job offer from a potential employer, but also to successfully navigate an immigration process. To put it more precisely, the time typically needed to find a sponsor and obtain a work visa or green card often surpasses the length of your Optional Practical Training (OPT) period. For this reason, every semester approximately 291,000 students on OPT face the heartbreaking need to leave the country because they can't secure a sponsor on time.

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So, let's work on a timeline to boost your chances of achieving your career goals in the US. To do this, we will analyze the timeline for the two most common options you have to secure employment beyond the OPT period: the H-1B visas and the EB-2/EB-3 processes.

The H-1B visa is a popular choice in the US, letting you work (temporarily) with an employer. This visa can be attained within the duration of an OPT, especially considering the “Cap-Gap Extension,” a provision that allows F-1 students to extend their F-1 status and OPT until the start of their approved H-1B employment period. However, the H-1B has an important drawback: It's a lottery. Every year, around 600,000 people vie for 60,000 spots, leaving only a 10% chance of getting one. Even with an employer on board, you might miss out due to this lottery.

The timeline for completing the H-1B process is relatively quick but requires careful timing. If you are considering this option, you should aim to secure a sponsor latest at the start of the calendar year, ideally before January. This allows the employer enough time to fulfill the requirements for the electronic application, which is due in March. Results are announced in April, with visas typically issued in October of the same year (yes, it's a fixed cycle).

But remember, only 10% of applicants get this visa. For that reason, whenever possible, we encourage you to consider employment-based immigration processes, like the EB-2 and EB-3.

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The EB-2 and EB-3 processes will take you from an F-1 visa to a green card, usually within 18 to 24 months.

Here's a simplified timeline of the EB processes:

- Prevailing wage determination: 6 to 12 months.
- Labor certification (PERM) with premium processing: 15 days.
- Petitioning for the alien worker and adjustment of status applications: Around 12 months.

With this information, we can strategically plan when you should connect with employers, allowing you to complete your immigration process before your OPT expires. Keep in mind, the entire process spans 18 to 24 months. This timeline is suitable if you are enrolled in a STEM program, because you have a 12-month OPT plus a 24-month extension. However, this doesn't work if you have a non-STEM OPT.

To make this timeline work for you, even if you have a non-STEM OPT, you should start seeking sponsors at the beginning of your junior year. This timing ensures that the employer can finalize the prevailing wage determination by the time you graduate, thus saving an entire year from the process. It's important to note that during this prevailing wage determination phase, the employer isn't required to formally introduce you as a candidate to the immigration authorities, so it's okay that you still haven't completed your degree.



Consult with an Immigration Attorney: Job hunting without knowing your immigration and work visa options is like shooting in the dark. Most U.S. companies haven't dealt with work visas before and

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know very little about the process. Be proactive – learn which process you qualify for and boost your chances of finding a sponsor. An immigration attorney can: (1) Explain which immigration process suits you best, and (2) Help you explain it to potential employers in simple terms.

Book an appointment with an immigration attorney this week.

Need an immigration attorney? Reach out to your school's career development office for help contacting an immigration attorney.

Challenge yourself to find an immigration attorney that is willing to offer you an initial consultation at no cost, many do. Alternatively, this will be a valuable investment between \$150 - \$300.



Learn How to Address Sponsorship Questions: Companies often hesitate when it comes to sponsorship, but just because they say they don't do it doesn't mean it's a hard no. Learn how to handle common sponsorship objections.

Reach out to your career development office for guidance on how to overcome the most common employer objections to sponsorship.

Once you meet with the career development office, test your preparedness for interviews with SponsorshipGuru's simulator with real-life scenarios.

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[Click here to try the simulator](#)



Check your resume for cultural fit. Make adjustments if needed. Watch this video to understand how to navigate corporate cultural fit in the U.S. as an international graduate.



[Click here to view video](#)



End of week 1

Congratulations on completing these essential steps! With the knowledge you've gained, you're now prepared to engage with employers in the U.S., confidently navigate sponsorship discussions, and pursue your immigration process. Let's start connecting with employers!



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WEEK 2



What's happening this week:

This week marks the start of your job search outreach activities. Even if you haven't met with an immigration attorney yet, it's crucial to have an appointment scheduled soon. Don't hesitate to begin applying for jobs and networking; meeting with the attorney can happen in parallel, as it usually takes a few days for your job search efforts to show results.

We're going to kick off your sponsorship challenge by building your professional network within your school environment. This gives you a familiar and relatively easy starting point before expanding your efforts outside. Begin by leveraging the connections already available to you – professors, alumni, and other school resources. These initial steps will help you gain confidence and develop key relationships in a supportive setting.

Your activities: (try any option)



Option 1: Reach out to two professors with industry connections and ask if they'd be open to introducing you to contacts in their professional network.

Option 2: Your school should have an office dedicated to managing alumni relations. Reach out to them and ask to be connected with alumni working in your target industry.

WEEK 2



You can even narrow your request to focus on international alumni who stayed in the US. Feel free to tweak your criteria as needed.

Option 3: Alternatively, try the same approach on LinkedIn. You can search for professionals who share your alma mater and degree. Pro tip: consider using LinkedIn's Sales Navigator with a free trial. Even if you have to pay for this tool (\$99/month), it might be worth it. Sales Navigator is great for connecting with other professionals.

Option 4: Another great idea is to reach out to your school's leadership team - Vice Presidents, Deans, Trustees, and other key decision-makers. These individuals hold significant influence, but here's the best part: they genuinely want to see students succeed.



Identify and apply for 30 job opportunities with companies that either have a proven history of sponsorship or share the characteristics of those that typically sponsor. This targeted approach will help you optimize your application efforts and increase your chances of success. **Reach out to your school's career development office for help generating your own sponsorship leads.**



End of week 2

Great job! Beginning your sponsorship journey on campus was an excellent way to step into professional networking and job searching within a familiar setting. Next week, we'll take these efforts beyond the university.

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WEEK 3



What's happening this week:

Engaging your school resources last week should have given you a sense of what it's like to network in a professional context. This week, you'll take your networking efforts beyond the school by reaching out to professionals at the companies where you're applying. The goal is to combine your job applications with targeted networking. Having someone on the inside advocating for you can really boost your chances of getting hired and securing sponsorship.

Your activities:



Identify 30 job opportunities. Find jobs you're interested in using your favorite online job board. Then, reach out to your school's career development office for help determining which ones are better suited for sponsorship. Apply for the ones that present the best chances.



Choose your top 5 job opportunities, then research and reach out to two employees at each of those companies. Focus your efforts on people within the department you are applying for, especially individuals who fit the profile of the hiring manager. Conversely, avoid contacting HR representatives within each company, unless that's the type of job you seek. We suggest using a simple message to connect with them:

WEEK 3



“Hi [Name], I came across the [Job Title] role at [Company Name], and I’m very interested in learning more about the position and the company. I noticed that you work in [department/team] and thought connecting with you could provide valuable insights into the culture and expectations at [Company Name]. I’d love to hear about your experience at the company and any advice you might have for someone applying for this role. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to the opportunity to connect!”



End of week 3

You're making great progress! By now, you should have applied to 60 jobs with strong sponsorship potential and approached five professionals at five different companies. Next week, we'll broaden our efforts by engaging with trade associations.



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WEEK 4



What's happening this week:

This week, while continuing the same efforts as last week, we're introducing a new activity to your job search: connecting with trade associations in your chosen field.

Trade associations are groups of businesses within a specific industry, and there's one for nearly every field you can think of. The best part? They have lots of valuable connections! They often know which companies are expanding and hiring, and they can help you get in touch with the right people.

Your activities:



Visit Onetonline.org, search for your desired occupation/career and scroll to the bottom of the page to find the 'Professional Associations' section. Visit the websites of these associations and reach out to the leaders of three different organizations, contacting two leaders from each one.



Identify 30 job opportunities using the same criteria as previous weeks. This is a crucial phase of your job search, so make sure to meet or surpass your target goals.



Choose your top 5 job opportunities, then research and reach out to two employees at each of those companies. Focus your efforts on people within

WEEK 4



the department you are applying for, especially individuals who fit the profile of the hiring manager. As recommended last week, avoid contacting HR representatives, unless that's the type of job you seek. We suggest using the template previously provided for your outreach.

End of week 4

You've now submitted 90 job applications with strong sponsorship potential and approached 25 professional connections across various companies and associations. Next week, we'll focus on leveraging your friends' networks.



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WEEK 5



What's happening this week:

This week, we're adding a new activity to your job search: reaching out to the parents of your American friends. Since you probably don't have family ties in the US, we want to turn that into an advantage. Connecting with your friends' parents who work in your target industry can significantly expand your professional network.

Your activities:



Identify two friends whose parents work in your target industry and ask your friends to introduce you. When you connect with their parents, focus on expanding your professional network through their connections.



Identify 30 job opportunities using the same criteria as previous weeks. If your applications aren't giving adequate results, it could mean you're not targeting companies that typically sponsor or match the profile of businesses that do. If this is your case, consider reaching out to your school's career development office for help assessing the profile of companies you are applying to and making search adjustments.



Choose your top 5 job opportunities, then research and reach out to two employees at each of those companies. Follow the same instructions as previous weeks.

WEEK 5



End of week 5

You've now submitted 120 job applications with strong sponsorship potential and approached 30 professional connections across various companies and associations. Next week, we'll focus on leveraging your friends' networks.

Now, let's conduct a progress check. By now, you should have had a few meaningful interactions with employers or professionals in your network, and perhaps one or more interviews. If you haven't had any companies express interest in interviewing you, it might indicate a mismatch between the jobs you're applying for and your experience or skills. If that's the case, consider visiting your career development office to review the jobs you're targeting and see how well they align with your profile.



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WEEK 6



What's happening this week:

This week, let's focus on finding new and promising companies, also known as startups. Startups are usually eager for talent and tend to be more flexible when it comes to hiring employees who need work visas.

Your activities:



Search for 'business incubators' or 'business accelerators' in your area. Once you find one, set up a meeting with the site director or manager, mentioning that you're a college student interested in learning about the types of businesses going through their program. While you learn about the companies that are undergoing the incubation or acceleration program, keep an eye out for any that catch your interest. Reach out to them and explore any job opportunities.



Identify 30 job opportunities using the same criteria as previous weeks. Remember: this specific activity is the core of your sponsorship-seeking strategy. The more targeted applications you submit, the better your chances of connecting with a sponsor!



Choose your top 5 job opportunities, then research and reach out to two employees at each of those companies. Follow the instructions we provided in previous weeks to connect.

WEEK 6



End of week 6

You've now submitted 150 job applications with strong sponsorship potential and approached 40 professional connections across various companies and associations. Next week, we are going to network through faith-based and non-profit organizations.



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WEEK 7



What's happening this week:

This week we are adding a new component to your job search: networking through faith-based and non-profit organizations. Community engagement is a huge part of the American way of life. Many successful professionals do volunteer work in these kinds of organizations because they want to give back to the community. These people typically have big networks and a strong disposition to help. Find these individuals and see if they can help you expand your network.

Your activities:



Reach out to faith-based or non-profit organizations that match your values or interests and identify volunteering opportunities through them. When you attend these volunteering events, make an effort to engage with everyone you meet. Ask them what they do for a living, and if you come across someone in your target industry, focus on expanding your network through them.



Identify 30 job opportunities using the same criteria as previous weeks. Tip: Use the criteria that your career advisor shared with you to create a list of companies with a proven track record of sponsorships. Then, visit each company's website to explore their current job openings.

WEEK 7



Choose your top 5 job opportunities, then research and reach out to two employees at each of those companies.



End of week 7

You've now submitted 180 job applications with strong sponsorship potential and approached 50 professional connections across various companies and associations. Next week, we are going to connect with your local chambers of commerce.



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WEEK 8



What's happening this week:

Let's add chambers of commerce to your job search strategy. These organizations support businesses within a specific region or industry, some even promote international trade – including with your home country! Chambers of commerce also host various business events throughout the year, from casual meetups to formal meetings.

Your activities:



Identify your local chambers of commerce (there are often several) as well as chambers that specialize in trade with your home country. Contact their leaders to learn which member companies are growing and hiring. Also, look for upcoming events they're hosting and attend to broaden your professional network.



Identify 30 job opportunities using the same criteria as previous weeks. Tip: Broaden your job search by exploring roles related to your field of interest. Visit Onetonline.org, search for your desired occupation, and scroll to the bottom of the page under the 'Related Occupations' section. Check out these alternative roles and look for job openings that match your skills and goals.



Choose your top 5 job opportunities, then research and reach out to two employees at each of those companies.

WEEK 8



End of week 8

You've now submitted 210 job applications with strong sponsorship potential and approached 60 professional connections across various companies and associations. Next week, we are going to repeat one or more of the activities that have been giving the best results.

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WEEK 9



What's happening this week:

By now, you've tried several different strategies to connect with employers and grow your professional network. It's time to double down on what's been working. Focus on repeating one or more of the activities that gave you the best results.

Your activities:



Repeat one or more of the previous activities that gave you the best results.



Identify 30 job opportunities using the same criteria as previous weeks. Repeat any of the tips in this section that gave you the best results.



Choose your top 5 job opportunities, then research and reach out to two employees at each of those companies.

WEEK 9



End of week 9

You've now submitted 240 job applications with strong sponsorship potential and approached 70 professional connections across various companies and associations.

Let's do another progress check. All your efforts to date should have led to meaningful professional connections and possibly several interviews. Even if those interviews haven't resulted in a job offer yet, the key takeaway is that your efforts are generating interviews. If this isn't the case, it may be time to reassess factors like job location, industry, and role. For example, if you're struggling to connect with accounting firms, shifting your focus to accounting roles in healthcare might yield better results (this is just an illustrative example).

Also, are you facing resistance because of your sponsorship needs? If that's the case, it might be helpful to track which types of companies you are applying for. For example, if your interviews are mostly coming from larger companies, they often have policies that automatically rule out foreign candidates. On the other hand, smaller businesses with 10-50 employees are usually more open to considering work visa applications. Make adjustments to the kinds of businesses you are targeting as needed.



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WEEK 10



What's happening this week:

This week, take time to review all the activities you completed during this 10-week challenge. Focus on identifying the strategies that delivered the best results and make a plan to repeat and refine them.

Your activities:



Choose the strategies that are working best for you, give those strategies another go, but remember to stay flexible and make adjustments as needed.



Identify 30 job opportunities using the same criteria as previous weeks. Focus on those strategies that gave you the best results.



Choose your top 5 job opportunities, then research and reach out to two employees at each of those companies.

WEEK 10



End of week 10

You've reached the final week of the program! You submitted 270 job applications with strong sponsorship potential and approached 80 professional connections across various companies and associations.

If you haven't secured a sponsor yet, don't get discouraged – keep pushing forward. You now have the tools, knowledge, and confidence to continue your sponsorship journey. Remember, your success largely depends on the number of jobs you apply to and the strength of your professional network. Stay consistent, keep expanding your connections, and trust that your efforts will pay off. It's not a question of if you'll find a sponsor, but when you'll find one. You've got this!

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