

A green icon of a target with an arrow hitting the bullseye.

Career Pathways

Planning for Your Career in the United States

While you may have a definite idea of what your career will be in the United States based on your professional experience, establishing yourself in a new country is also a chance to reach new goals and consider new possibilities. By being flexible, you can take steps toward advancing in your career.

Getting Started


The first step in planning for your career success in the U.S. is researching your options. To get started, ask yourself the following:

- What are my short- and long-term employment goals?
- What options are available to me now based on my current skills and qualifications?
- What are the requirements in terms of time, cost, and additional training? Do I need a license? What is the cost of the licensing process? Do I need to take any examinations?
- Whom can I talk to about my career options?

Exploring Career Options

The next step is to find ways to get local experience and firsthand knowledge about career options. You can gain local experience in the following ways:

- Informational interviews
- On-the-job training or apprenticeships
- Volunteering (unpaid work)
- Internships or midternships

 Midternships, or mid-career internships, can be helpful opportunities for internationally educated immigrants and refugees to gain U.S. working experience.

Meeting professionals in your field, joining a professional association, and attending industry conferences are great ways to expand your understanding of the field, improve your skills, and begin to build your network in the U.S.

Creating Short- and Long-Term Goals

Another important step in your career planning process is developing short- and long-term goals. A successful plan includes not only the desired outcome, but also realistic steps toward achieving that outcome and the time they will take to complete. Your plan should also allow you to pursue more than one goal at a time, and it should anticipate some setbacks along the way. You will need patience to reach your goals, and it's normal to change your mind or adapt to new circumstances and opportunities as they arise.

A clear goal-oriented plan may look something like this:

Goal: Pursue opportunities to meet others in my field so that I can develop my professional network.

- Contact professional associations in my field to find out about local events. Professional associations work to control entry into the profession, set and maintain standards, and represent the profession in discussions with other bodies.
- Plan to attend a professional networking event. Set a realistic goal of meeting at least three new people.
- Volunteer at an organization where I can develop relationships with professionals in my field—consider opportunities on [Idealist](#), [VolunteerMatch](#), or with organizations such as [Upwardly Global](#), a national non-profit that supports internationally trained immigrants and refugees.
- Join a local professional mentorship organization.

Advancing on your career pathway in the U.S. can take time, and you may face obstacles along the way. Focus on what you can control and make a plan. Remain flexible, be persistent, and take initiative.



Learn more: [Understanding Related and Alternative Careers](#)



Worksheet: Planning for Success

Since there are many things to consider when planning for your professional future in the United States, use this worksheet to help organize your thoughts and determine your next steps. Consider the following as you plan:

Goals

These can be as big or as small as you like. Some examples might include “become licensed,” “improve my professional English vocabulary,” or “identify careers that I can work in temporarily while pursuing my more ultimate career goal.”

Steps to Get There

What steps can you take to achieve your goal? Are there any requirements, such as licensing? In what order should the steps be completed?

Time Frame

How long will it take to achieve your goal? If there are multiple steps, approximately how long will each step take?

Cost

Some goals or steps can be achieved without spending any money, such as practicing English with a conversation partner. Others can be expensive, such as taking college courses or licensure exams. Examine your options and decide what you are willing and able to spend to achieve your goal. If it will take time to save the necessary money, go back and add that time to your Time Frame (see above).

Resources

What resources are available to help you achieve your goal? Resources are anything that can help you: job boards, classes, coaching or tutoring, scholarships, mentoring programs, information, professional associations, and so on. National resources for each career pathway are available at [“Additional Resources” link], but remember to look for local resources too. These may be available through your local public library, social services office, or local non-profits.

