

Hello friends,

I have created this document to share with you some tips to prepare for the NIW application. The USA has provided this incredible path to permanent residency for researchers (like us :)). I wish you all the best as you prepare to apply!

I am hoping that you already have background knowledge on NIW ([Employment-Based Immigration: Second Preference EB-2 | USCIS](#)), so I won't be going into details on this background.

Here is the list of things I submitted in my application packet (I-140 application):

- Recommendation Letters: Five letters, along with the respective CVs of the recommenders.
- Personal CV
- Educational Documents:
 - Academic transcripts (BSc and, if applicable, MSc)
 - Diploma (BSc and, if applicable, MSc)
- Employment Verification Letter: You can get this from your graduate coordinator.
- Graduate School Offer Letters: Your ND offer letter that shows you're on a scholarship and that you will be employed as a research assistant.
- International Passport: Ensure you scan all pages, especially the one having your USA visa (regardless of whether it has expired).
- Academic/Professional Memberships: For instance:
 - IEEE (for engineering students)
 - ACM Membership (for computer science/computer engineering students or those in computing-related fields)
 - NSBE Membership
 - Other professional bodies relevant to your field, like the AGU or American Chemical Society.
- Reviewer Assignments: Include proofs of your reviewer roles for academic conferences or journals. Either the invitation or the confirmation of your review submission is sufficient.
- Publications:
 - Scan the first page of each publication.
 - Don't forget to include studies currently under review in journals or conferences.
- Google Scholar Profile: Set up your profile to archive all your publications. Then, screenshot this page. I can provide my profile as an example.
- Supporting Documents:
 - All your I-20 forms, including those from your master's, if completed in the USA before starting your PhD at ND.
 - Your I-94 form is generated upon your first entry to the USA. You can get it from the official website.
 - Original birth certificate.
 - Social security card.

- **Grants and Awards:** Present proofs of all USA national awards relevant to your field. For students, these might include dissertation awards, thesis presentation awards, travel scholarships, NSBE scholarships, conference presentation awards, fellowships, and so on. For instance, I submitted various travel scholarships, conference presentation awards, and proof that I was funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF).
- **Conferences and Presentations:** Provide proofs of your conference presentations, such as screenshots where you are mentioned as an author on the conference program, or email invites to present your research. I can share examples of my submissions for clarity.
- **Future Plan Letter:** This is your chance to sell yourself and your work to USCIS. Discuss your past research and its relevance to the USA's national interest, and outline your research plan/goal within the USA. Explain why granting you permanent residency would be beneficial for advancing research in the USA.

My Tips/Advice for Building Your Application Packet in the Future:

- **Seek Scholarships:** Always seek out scholarships, especially travel scholarships, in your field and apply for them. Traveling to conferences demonstrates your interest in connecting with other professionals in your field and can strengthen your case. Two people who wrote recommendation letters for me were professors I met at two different conferences, even though those were the only times we met. Keep in mind that, when I attended these conferences in early 2018 and early 2019, I had not yet decided to apply for NIW. Nevertheless, it worked in my favor; they remembered me when I later asked them for recommendation letters.
- **Review Research Articles:** When presented with the opportunity to review research articles, take it. Actively seek out such opportunities, as this showcases your level of expertise and your interest in advancing work in your field. By the time I submitted my application, I had reviewed about four papers.
- **Leadership Roles:** Leadership roles are beneficial. If possible, take roles within student organizations like ACM, IEEE, AGS, and NSBE that are relevant to your field of study. For example, I served as the NSBE vice president for my school chapter during my MSc and as Finance Officer in the ACM-W chapter of my university when I applied. I included these details in my CV, which my lawyers found especially valuable because it highlighted my commitment to my field.
- **Collaboration and Publication:** I understand that, as a student, it can be challenging to find collaborators and publish work. However, please take on these responsibilities if possible. Our publications, particularly those that are cited, are essential. Aim for top-tier conferences or journals in your field if you can. High-impact journals and conferences with tough acceptance rates, if possible. There are various ways to increase citations for your publications; for example, publicizing them on social media platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn can be effective.
- **Network and Recommendations:** FYI, one of the people who wrote a recommendation letter for me was someone who had cited my work. I had never met this person before; I

reached out to her via email. She is an associate professor at one of the top schools in the USA and agreed to write the letter.

- **Join Academic and Professional Organizations:** Finally, consider joining academic and professional organizations. IEEE and ACM are excellent choices. For those in chemistry and chemical engineering, the American Chemical Society and the American Institute of Chemical Engineers (AIChE) are great options.

As we all progress through our Ph.D. programs, it is helpful to gather all this information and experience over the years. That way, when the time comes to apply, we will have an exceptionally strong application package! Please note that I am not suggesting that doing all these things is compulsory for a successful application. There's no one-size-fits-all formula. The activities I have outlined worked well for me.

People often say that it is rare for a student who hasn't received their Ph.D. to gain approval for an academic track NIW application—I still see these comments and questions on LinkedIn and Twitter often. I believe people think so because of the significant background work required and the expectations that one should meet before applying. However, if you have several of the above parts in place over the years (you can slowly build this experience), you can apply at any stage of your Ph.D.

If you are considering using a lawyer for your application, be sure to consult with them for a second opinion if you are not sure about what I outlined.

All the best!

Feel free to share this information with other Notre Dame students.

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