Offer Evaluation & Comparison Guide

How to Use This Guide

An offer is the start of a decision, not the end of the search. Work through the framework below to see the full picture beyond base salary, use the worksheet to score offers side by side, and — if you'll need visa sponsorship — read that section before you sign anything. This applies whether you have one offer to evaluate or several to compare.

The 7 Factors Beyond Base Salary

1. **Total cash compensation** — base salary plus signing bonus, expected annual bonus, and employer 401(k) match.
2. **Equity** — valued realistically, not at the headline number. For a public company, discount RSUs by roughly 20–30% for stock-price risk. For a private company, dividing the stated option value by about 4 is a rough way to account for dilution and exit uncertainty.
3. **Benefits & perks** — health insurance quality, HSA contributions, and parental leave are the ones with real dollar value; free snacks aren't.
4. **Role fit** — what you'll actually learn, who you'll report to, and how much real scope the role carries.
5. **Career trajectory** — where this role positions you three years out, not just what it pays on day one.
6. **Work environment** — remote/hybrid policy, typical hours, travel, and commute.
7. **Risk & stability** — the company's runway, recent layoffs, and how volatile the role itself tends to be.

A rough formula for year-one total comp:

> *Base salary + signing bonus + expected cash bonus + year-1 equity vesting + 401(k) match + health insurance value − relocation costs − cost-of-living difference*

Commute is easy to underweight — a one-hour-each-way commute, three days a week, works out to roughly $13,500 a year in time alone. Worth putting a number on it rather than shrugging it off.

Scoring Worksheet

Copy this table once per offer. Score each factor 1–10, set weights that sum to 100% based on what matters most to you right now, then multiply score × weight and total the last column.

Factor	Weight	Score (1–10)	Weighted
Total cash compensation	__%	__	__

Factor	Weight	Score (1–10)	Weighted
Equity (risk-adjusted)	__%	__	__
Benefits & perks	__%	__	__
Role fit	__%	__	__
Career trajectory	__%	__	__
Work environment	__%	__	__
Risk & stability	__%	__	__
Visa/sponsorship strength (if applicable)	__%	__	__
Total	**100%**		**__**

A student early in their career often weights career trajectory and role fit heavily; someone supporting a family may weight total compensation and stability higher. There's no universal weighting — the point is making your priorities explicit instead of deciding on gut feel alone.

Visa & Sponsorship Considerations

If you need sponsorship, weigh it heavily — a $12,000 salary gap looks decisive until the immigration dimension is on the table too. Model each offer over a 3-year horizon, not just year one, since PERM delays and sponsorship uncertainty carry real long-term cost.

Get commitments in writing, not verbally:

- Does the company sponsor H-1B, and is premium processing included?
- At what tenure do they sponsor PERM/green card, in writing?
- Will they commit to filing I-140?
- What's their historical H-1B approval-to-denial ratio? (A company with 300+ approved petitions and an in-house immigration team carries very different risk than one with under 10 in three years.)

If you're on OPT: confirm the employer is enrolled in E-Verify — this is non-negotiable and required by law for any employer hiring OPT workers.

If you're on STEM OPT specifically: confirm the employer is a single legal entity (not a staffing intermediary placing you elsewhere) and will sign your Form I-983 Training Plan.

Cap-exempt employers — universities, nonprofits, and government research organizations — can file H-1B petitions year-round, without the annual lottery. Worth knowing which of your offers fall into this category, since it removes a major source of uncertainty.

Sponsorship Red Flags

- Sponsorship promised only verbally, never confirmed in writing or in the offer letter

- The employer can't answer basic questions about their H-1B approval history
- You'd be placed at a client site through a staffing intermediary rather than employed directly (a particular risk for STEM OPT and the I-983 requirement)
- No clear tenure or timeline given for when PERM sponsorship would start
- Pressure to accept quickly without time to review the immigration terms specifically — a legitimate employer will let you take a few extra days for this

Negotiation & Timing Tactics

- **Negotiate each offer to its best version before comparing them.** Compare final numbers, not opening ones.
- **If you're waiting on another offer, say so.** Employers routinely grant 7–10 business days to candidates who cite a pending decision — for international candidates, citing a visa-review timeline specifically tends to work well.
- **Push back on "exploding" deadlines.** Most companies will extend by a few days if asked directly and respectfully; a refusal to extend at all is itself worth noting.
- **Get everything in writing before declining any other offer** — a verbal offer is not an offer you can act on.
- **Ask to speak with a current employee or request a manager reference**, especially if role fit or team culture is still unclear.
- **Once you're set on an offer, decline the others promptly and graciously** — the job market is smaller than it looks, and NUSTIAN's own network means these paths cross again.