

Unlocking Tomorrow's Talent: A Guide to Hiring International Students

Did you know?

South Central Minnesota's existing talent pools won't be enough to meet the needs of local businesses in the coming years.

The Minnesota Chamber Foundation projects that Minnesota's labor force will remain flat over the next decade. By 2040, any population growth will depend on attracting newcomers rather than natural growth.

For employers, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity: tapping into broader talent sources is crucial to sustaining your workforce and navigating economic hurdles.

International students are an essential part of the solution. They can play a vital role in revitalizing Minnesota's communities, strengthening industries, and creating skilled talent pipelines.



Why hire international students?

Effortless Hiring Process

You can hire international students **without extra paperwork or cost** through the CPT and OPT programs.

Local Talent at Your Fingertips

In 2024, over **14,975** international students called Minnesota home.

Economic Impact

International students contributed **\$459.5 million** to Minnesota's economy in 2023.

Commitment to the Region

81.7% of international students stated they'd stay in Southern Minnesota if offered a job.

Filling Critical Workforce Gaps

International students often specialize in high-demand fields such as STEM, healthcare, agriculture, and IT.

Highly Skilled, Highly Motivated

Multilingual, highly skilled, and driven, international students foster innovation, helping your organization stay ahead in competitive markets.

Hear from Local Employers and Colleges

“Minnesota State University consistently has over 1,400 international students on campus, with over half of these students being enrolled in STEM-related degree programs. These students bring innovation and state of practice knowledge to our communities, and we are fortunate to have them in our campus family.”

- Aaron Budge, PhD.
Interim Executive Director, School of
Applied Agriculture, Food & Natural
Resources, MSU-Mankato

“We hired an international student for a Fall internship and the process was effortless! The student intern was very professional and reliable. He wanted to be exposed to as many tasks and processes as possible, with a genuine love of learning and appreciation of the opportunity.”

- Karen Bleick
Director of HR, FUN.com

“Hiring our international intern was a seamless process. Once on board, they quickly became a valuable asset to our team, consistently delivering high-quality work.”

- Joelle Baumann,
Special Events Manager,
Greater Mankato
Growth

Hiring without extra paperwork:

The benefits of the CPT and OPT program



Employers can hire international students just like other employees through the Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) programs.

These programs, managed by USCIS, make hiring highly skilled talent easy and cost-effective.

How CPT and OPT work:

CPT (Curricular Practical Training):

- Allows work while students are in school.
- Ideal for internships, co-op programs, and part-time positions.
- Can last up to 1 year for full-time roles or as needed for part-time positions.

OPT (Optional Practical Training):

- Post-graduation work authorization for 1-3 years, depending on the field of study.

Why Choose CPT and OPT?

No Extra Costs or Paperwork: Students manage their own work permit requirements. Universities typically guide students through the necessary steps.

Access to Skilled Talent: CPT and OPT provide a direct pathway to hire highly skilled, motivated individuals already familiar with Minnesota.

Long-Term Talent Pipeline: Employers can sponsor work visas after the CPT or OPT period ends, creating a pathway to retain exceptional talent long-term. Many international students will secure permanent work authorization of their own.

How to Get Started?

- Engage international students early in their school career
- Optimize job listings
- Build university partnerships

For more information on how to get started see the recommendations on the next page.

Engaging a Global Workforce

Recruiting and Hiring

Opportunity

Action Item

1. Engage international students early

Engage international students early using OPT (Optional Practical Training) and CPT (Curricular Practical Training).

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Hire students through internships, part-time work, or project-based work while they are studying using CPT or OPT.

2. Optimize your job listings

Use visa-friendly language to attract global talent:

Some online application forms may discourage international students from applying, especially when they are immediately asked if they require sponsorship.

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Use terms such as “OPT-friendly,” or “Sponsorship options for eligible candidates” if your organization supports visa sponsorship.

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Avoid disqualifying questions (e.g., “Do you require sponsorship?”) upfront. For CPT and OPT candidates, sponsorship is not needed initially.

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Be transparent about your willingness to hire international students.

3. Connect with local universities and career colleges

Build relationships with local universities and career offices:

These offices can guide employers and facilitate connections with students actively seeking job or internship opportunities.

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Connect with internship coordinators and international student offices at local universities.

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Attend career fairs and host workshops or networking events targeting international students.

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Advertise your job openings in platforms used by local universities, such as Handshake.

Interested in learning more? Check our full report on international student hiring at www.rndc.org/global_talent_toolkit or by scanning the QR Code below.



This handout was developed by Region Nine Development Commission staff with the support of the Workforce Taskforce in South Central Minnesota.