Straight Green Card

MARKET INTELLIGENCE REPORT

PHYSICS & ASTRONOMY EDITION

The Cap-Exempt Advantage.

441 currently-open US academic positions in **physics & astronomy** - and the H-1B filing data that shows which institutions actually sponsor.

Condensed Matter · High Energy · Astrophysics · Quantum · Optics · Biophysics

AUTHORED BY

StraightGreenCard

CURRENT AS OF

12 September 2026

WEB

www.StraightGreenCard.com

WHAT THIS REPORT COVERS · PHYSICS & ASTRONOMY

Most candidates are searching the hardest possible way.

Every year thousands of international researchers apply into the H-1B lottery, lose, and conclude America is closed to them. Meanwhile the entire academic sector sits outside that lottery by statute - no cap, no registration window, no odds to beat. This report maps that opening for **physics & astronomy**.

441
positions verified live

190
institutions surveyed

42
states covered

THE 441 POSITIONS, BY ROLE

197
Postdoctoral positions
Fellow, associate and scholar titles

159
Assistant professor lines
Tenure-track, teaching-track and research-track

85
Research staff roles
Research associate, staff scientist and research scientist

FIELDS COVERED

Condensed matter physics · High energy and particle physics · Nuclear physics · Astrophysics and cosmology · Quantum information and computing · Atomic, molecular and optical physics · Plasma physics · Biophysics · Gravitational wave astronomy · Instrumentation

What is inside.

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HOW THIS REPORT WAS BUILT

We verified 441 live **physics & astronomy** postings across **190 institutions in 42 states** on 12 September 2026, spanning elite privates, mid-tier R1s, R2s, regional comprehensives, HBCUs, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, national laboratories and cap-exempt nonprofit research institutes. Then we cross-referenced every institution against US Department of Labor disclosure data - 2.4 million rows, deduplicated to 594,822 unique cases - to establish who actually files rather than who merely could. Every position sits in a live, filterable position sheet.

WHERE THE DEPTH IS

Institutions with the most open physics & astronomy positions right now:

Oak Ridge National Laboratory	26
Los Alamos National Laboratory	23
Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory	13
Brookhaven National Laboratory	11
Indiana University Bloomington	10
University of Chicago	10
Argonne National Laboratory	10

All 441 positions, filterable

Tier, institution, department, field, deadline, salary, sponsorship note and a direct apply link for every row.

OPEN THE POSITION SHEET

SECTION 01 · THE FUNDAMENTALS

Five facts that change the entire calculation.

01

Universities are cap-exempt

Under INA 214(g)(5)(A)-(B), higher-education institutions, their affiliated nonprofits, and nonprofit and government research organizations sit outside the H-1B annual cap entirely. No lottery. No March registration window. No numerical limit. A petition can be filed on any day of the year, up to six months before your start date.

> Employer cost is roughly **$960** - universities are exempt from both the $1,500 ACWIA training fee and the $600 asylum program fee.

02

Neither fee measure reaches a cap-exempt petition

Proclamation 10973 imposed a $100,000 payment with no carve-out for universities. The District of Massachusetts vacated the implementing policy nationwide on 8 June 2026, the government appealed on 11 June, and the proclamation expires by its own terms around 21 September 2026. Separately, DHS has proposed a **$103,265** fee on every cap-subject petition (91 FR 54817), which expressly does not reach cap-exempt filings.

> Comments on the proposed fee close **24 September 2026**. It is a proposal: it affects no petition filed today.

03

It never reached a change of status filed from inside the US

The payment only ever applied to beneficiaries *outside* the United States without a valid H-1B visa. If you are here on F-1 OPT or J-1 and the petition requests a change of status, you were never in its path.

> Three traps survive: requesting consular notification instead of change of status, departing the US before adjudication, and having the change of status denied.

04 The wage-weighted lottery does not touch you

The new selection rule assigns 4x weight to Level IV wages and 1x to Level I - devastating for postdoc-scale salaries. DHS stated plainly in the rule text that cap-exempt university petitions are unaffected.

> Watch instead the DOL prevailing-wage proposal (91 FR 15454). Still only proposed, but it *would* raise the wage floor on cap-exempt petitions.

05 The rule to watch now is the 60-day grace period

On 11 September 2026 DHS proposed removing 8 CFR 214.1(l)(2), the window that lets an H-1B worker remain in the United States and change employers after a job ends. Unlike either fee measure, **this one would reach people already working at cap-exempt employers**, because it attaches to the status rather than to the employer.

> Comments close **10 November 2026**. A specific account of what losing that window would do to a research career counts for more than another voice on the fee.

No lottery. No March registration window. No numerical limit.

FACT 01 · UNIVERSITIES ARE CAP-EXEMPT

SECTION 02 · THE FEE MEASURES

Three measures, and the one that reaches you.

The facts most likely to be out of date in any advice you read elsewhere, including this page. Verified against the Federal Register and the court record.

21 Sep 2025

Proclamation 10973 takes effect

$100,000 payment required. No exemption for universities or nonprofit research.

8 Jun 2026

D. Mass. vacates it nationwide

Held the payment is a *tax*, not a fee. The government appealed on 11 June and that appeal remains pending.

25 Aug 2026

DHS proposes a $103,265 cap-subject fee

91 FR 54817, docket USCIS-2026-0298. Reaches cap-subject petitions wherever the worker is, and expressly not cap-exempt filings.

11 Sep 2026

DHS proposes ending the 60-day grace period

A separate rule would remove 8 CFR 214.1(l)(2). Unlike the fee, this one would reach people already working at cap-exempt employers.

~21 Sep 2026

Built-in sunset of the proclamation

The proclamation expires by its own terms twelve months after the effective date, absent extension.

24 Sep 2026

Comments close on the proposed fee

More than 8,500 comments filed as of publication. Comments on the grace-period rule close 10 November.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU, PRACTICALLY

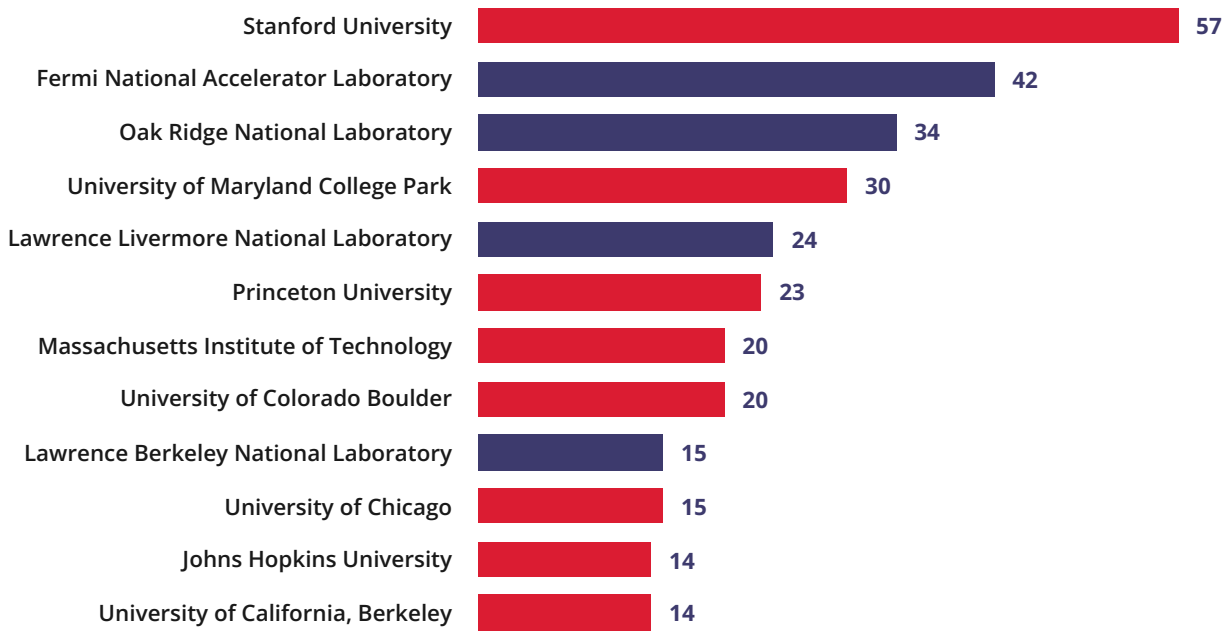
Neither fee measure reaches a petition filed by a university, an affiliated nonprofit or a nonprofit research organisation. The grace-period proposal is the one to read, because cap exemption is no shield against it: it attaches to your status, not to your employer.

SECTION 03 · WHO ACTUALLY FILES

Capability is universal. Practice is not.

Every institution below is cap-exempt and could sponsor you tomorrow. These are the ones that demonstrably do in **physics & astronomy**. When a department says "we only do J-1", this is your evidence that it is one administrator's habit, not a policy. Red bars mark the elite institutions.

CERTIFIED PHYSICS & ASTRONOMY RESEARCH PETITIONS, FY2025



Source: US Dept of Labor OFLC disclosure files, FY2025 Q1-Q4, deduplicated by case number, certified only, restricted to academic and research employers. Figures extracted by column name, since Q1 carries 97 columns and Q2-Q4 carry 98. An LCA is a wage attestation filed *before* the I-129, so it overstates approvals.

See which of these are hiring right now

The position sheet cross-references every institution above against its open postings.

OPEN THE POSITION SHEET

SECTION 03 · WHO ACTUALLY FILES

The deepest physics & astronomy filers, ranked by total petitions.

INSTITUTION	ST	TIER	TOTAL FY25	POSTDOC TITLED	PROXY POSTDOC	ALL RESEARCH TITLES	MEDIAN POSTDOC WAGE
Stanford University	CA	ELITE	71	8	27	57	$80,000
Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory	IL	T2-3	64	0	20	42	–
Oak Ridge National Laboratory	TN	T2-3	47	19	0	34	$87,951
University of Maryland College Park	MD	ELITE	31	14	0	30	$78,584
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory	CA	T2-3	27	8	0	24	$126,138
Princeton University	NJ	ELITE	28	12	7	23	$70,363
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	MA	ELITE	22	10	0	20	$73,618
University of Colorado Boulder	CO	ELITE	21	13	7	20	$71,656
Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory	CA	T2-3	20	4	0	15	$79,476
University of Chicago	IL	ELITE	19	13	0	15	$76,364
Johns Hopkins University	MD	ELITE	17	4	1	14	$72,544
University of California, Berkeley	CA	ELITE	15	8	0	14	$79,267
Texas A&M University	TX	T2-3	16	8	0	13	$56,186

Read the postdoc column, not the total

An institution can dominate on total volume and still show zero postdoc-titled petitions. That is not absence from the market, it is invisibility to anyone searching for the word. The **Proxy postdoc** column counts the same role filed under another title. Page 12 explains what to search instead.

Two different animals

Some employers here are pure research shops with almost no faculty lines. Others are faculty-weighted and hire almost no postdocs at all. Match the institution to the role you want, not to its brand.

SECTION 04 · WAGES & FLAGS

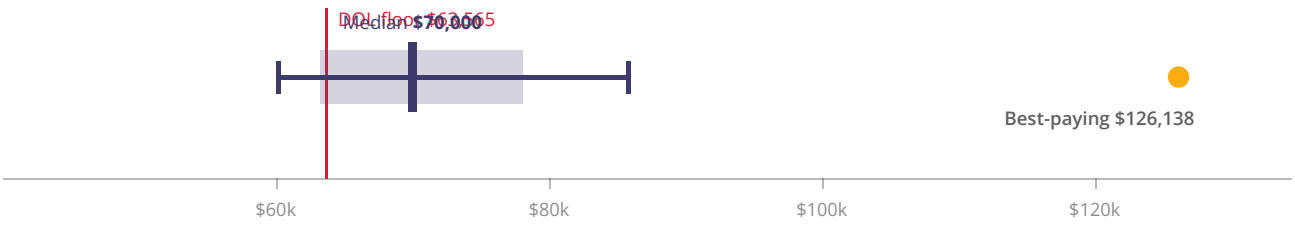
What the sector actually pays.

Offered wages on 358 certified physics & astronomy postdoctoral petitions, FY2025.

$70,000
Median offered wage

$63,565
Median prevailing wage - the DOL floor an employer must clear

DISTRIBUTION OF OFFERED WAGES



10TH PERCENTILE	25TH PERCENTILE	MEDIAN	75TH PERCENTILE	90TH PERCENTILE
$60,006	$63,274	$70,000	$78,085	$86,000

The median **prevailing** wage, the DOL floor an employer must clear, was **$63,565**. The heaviest physics & astronomy filer was **Stanford University** with 57 postdoc petitions. The best-paying was **Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory** at $126,138. Across all academic employers this field accounted for **1,280** certified petitions in FY2025.

SECTION 04 · WAGES & FLAGS

Stated in writing.

90%

Roughly **90% of physics & astronomy postings say nothing at all** about visas. Silence is not an implicit yes, and on listings hosted behind unreadable portals it is not even evidence.

WILL NOT SPONSOR

Los Alamos National Laboratory 7 postings
NO SPONSOR US citizenship required

Jet Propulsion Laboratory 5 postings
NO SPONSOR US citizen/LPR required (NASA rules)

Sandia National Laboratories 3 postings
NO SPONSOR US citizenship required

SETI Institute 2 postings
NO SPONSOR US Person (ITAR) status required

Brookhaven National Laboratory
NO SPONSOR US citizenship required

AFFIRMATIVELY WILL

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
SPONSORS open to international applicants

University of Idaho
SPONSORS visa sponsorship available

Flags are drawn from the posting text of our full-text sweep. This edition's position list was built from listing pages, which carry a title, an employer, a location and an application link but not the posting body, so the sponsorship column in the accompanying sheet is largely empty. An empty cell means we did not read the posting text, never that the employer declined.

SECTION 05 · THE HIDDEN MARKET

Thousands of postdoc jobs are not called postdoc jobs.

This is the most expensive mistake in an academic job search, and almost nobody knows about it. A large share of US institutions never use the word "postdoc" on a requisition. They hire the identical role under a different title - and every search you run for "postdoc" returns nothing from them.

448

Postdoc-titled petitions
What these institutions filed under the word you are searching for

1,880

Postdoc-equivalent petitions
What they actually filed, under other titles, for the same work

Bars drawn to scale.

The live position list confirms it independently. Of the 5,530 open positions we verified this month across all thirteen fields, **850 are doctoral research posts whose title never contains the word postdoc**, spread across 165 institutions. In physics & astronomy alone the figure is **85** at 40 institutions.

SECTION 05 · THE HIDDEN MARKET

Postdoc-equivalent petitions, FY2025

- and what the role is actually called

INSTITUTION	PETITIONS	SCALE	TITLE IT IS FILED UNDER
Mayo Clinic	164		Research Fellow
Massachusetts General Hospital	157		Research Fellow
National Institutes of Health	148		Research Fellow
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute	109		Research Fellow
Harvard University	95		Research Associate
Washington University in St. Louis	91		Staff Scientist
University of Wisconsin-Madison	90		Scientist I/II
University of Pennsylvania	85		Research Associate
Brigham and Women's Hospital	76		Research Fellow
Boston Children's Hospital	74		Research Fellow
Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center	52		Research Associate
University of Texas at Austin	39		Research Associate

Counts are across all fields. **Practical rule:** for these employers, search the title in the right-hand column. For everyone else, search both. One extra query for "Research Associate" and "Research Fellow" roughly doubles your visible market.

The position sheet already searches both

Every position in the list was found by querying research titles as well as postdoc titles.

OPEN THE POSITION SHEET

SECTION 06 · THE CONVERSATION

How to raise sponsorship without damaging your candidacy.

The most common self-inflicted wound in an academic job search is asking the wrong person, at the wrong moment, in the wrong words.

When	Never in the application or the first screen. Ask once genuine interest is established, ideally after an interview invitation or at the offer stage.
Who	The Office of International Services, not the PI or the search chair. Most say "we do J-1" because it is all they have seen; the international office knows whether cap-exempt H-1B is available.
How	Frame it as logistics, not a demand. > *"I want to make sure I can start on time. Could you connect me with the international scholars office to confirm the work authorization timeline?"*
Your leverage	The prevailing wage is the real objection, not the cost. If the posted salary already meets the OES prevailing wage for your job code and metro, say so.
The argument they respond to	J-1 bars tenure-track candidacy under 22 CFR 62.20(d)(1). H-1B carries dual intent and supports retention onto a faculty line - a departmental interest, not just yours.
Fallbacks	O-1A needs three of eight criteria. EB-1B and EB-2 NIW skip PERM entirely. Note EB-2 India is unavailable for the rest of FY2026.

Not sure which route fits your profile?

A free evaluation tells you whether to pursue employer sponsorship, self-petition, or both in parallel.

evaluate.straightgreencard.com

START FREE EVALUATION

SECTION 07 · WITHOUT SPONSORSHIP

If nobody has to sponsor you, nobody can say no.

Everything so far assumes an institution files on your behalf. For a large share of the researchers reading this, that assumption is unnecessary. If your record in **physics & astronomy** already carries peer-reviewed publications, citations, invited talks, grant participation or journal review work, the strongest routes into the United States are the ones you control yourself.

O-1A

EXTRAORDINARY ABILITY, NONIMMIGRANT

Three of eight criteria - peer review of others' work, scholarly articles and original contributions of major significance all count. **No cap, no LCA, no prevailing wage, dual intent.** Three-year initial validity.

8 CFR 214.2(o)(3)(iii) · USCIS PM Vol. 2 Part M, updated 8 Jan 2025

EB-1A

EXTRAORDINARY ABILITY, IMMIGRANT

No employer, no job offer, no PERM. Three of ten criteria plus a final merits determination. For most non-India, non-China nationals the date is current today - an approval converts to a green card with essentially no queue.

INA 203(b)(1)(A) · 8 CFR 204.5(h)

EB-1B

OUTSTANDING RESEARCHER

Employer-sponsored but **skips PERM entirely**. Three years experience, a permanent or tenure-track offer, two of six criteria. The natural companion to a cap-exempt faculty appointment.

8 CFR 204.5(i)

EB-2 NIW

NATIONAL INTEREST WAIVER

Self-petitioned, no employer, no PERM, governed by *Matter of Dhanasar*. **Harder since 15 January 2025:** USCIS tests threshold EB-2 eligibility *before* reaching Dhanasar, and the endeavour must be narrower than your occupation.

INA 203(b)(2)(B) · 6 USCIS-PM F.5

SECTION 07 · WITHOUT SPONSORSHIP

Where the queues actually stand.

CATEGORY	ALL OTHER	CHINA	INDIA
EB-1	Current	01 Jul 2023	15 Oct 2022
EB-2	Current	01 Sep 2021	Unavailable
EB-3	01 Sep 2024	01 Jan 2022	01 Jan 2014

Final Action Dates, Visa Bulletin, August 2026. EB-2 India is hard-unavailable for the rest of FY2026 and EB-1 India has retrogressed - which makes EB-1A the decisive filing for Indian nationals, not a nice-to-have.

Why run both tracks at once.

A cap-exempt H-1B is a door into academia, not a back door into industry. Under 8 CFR 214.2(h)(8)(iii)(F)(5), moving to a cap-subject employer puts you straight back into the lottery.

An approved O-1A or self-petitioned EB-1A removes that ceiling. The two tracks are not alternatives - the same publication record that wins you a postdoc is the evidence a petition is built from. Filed together, the position funds you while the petition frees you.

Your talent already belongs here. Let us prove it on paper.

O-1A, EB-1A, EB-1B and EB-2 NIW petitions built around your record, never a template. The first assessment costs nothing.

evaluate.straightgreencard.com

FREE CASE EVALUATION

SECTION 08 · OTHER EDITIONS

Wrong field? There are twelve other editions.

This report covers **physics & astronomy**. The same research - the same sweep, the same FY2025 filing analysis - exists for every field below, each with its own report and position sheet.

Biological Sciences	Molecular Biology · Genetics & Genomics · Cell Biology · Biochemistry · Microbiology & Immunology · Neuroscience · Structural & Computational Biology	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Computer Science & Artificial Intelligence	Machine Learning · Artificial Intelligence · Systems · Theory · Security · Human-Computer Interaction · Data Science	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Engineering	Mechanical · Electrical · Civil · Chemical · Biomedical · Aerospace · Industrial & Systems	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Chemistry & Chemical Biology	Organic · Inorganic · Physical · Analytical · Chemical Biology · Computational Chemistry	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Physics & Astronomy	Condensed Matter · High Energy · Astrophysics · Quantum · Optics · Biophysics	YOU ARE HERE
Mathematics & Statistics	Pure Mathematics · Applied Mathematics · Statistics · Biostatistics · Operations Research	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Materials Science & Nanotechnology	Nanomaterials · Polymers · Metallurgy · Semiconductors · Energy Materials · Characterization	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Earth, Environmental & Climate Science	Geology · Oceanography · Atmospheric Science · Climate · Ecology · Hydrology	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Public Health & Epidemiology	Epidemiology · Biostatistics · Global Health · Health Policy · Environmental Health · Health Services	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences	Pharmacology · Medicinal Chemistry · Pharmaceutics · Drug Delivery · Pharmacokinetics · Clinical Pharmacy	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Agriculture, Plant & Food Science	Plant Science · Agronomy · Soil Science · Food Science · Animal Science · Entomology	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Neuroscience & Psychology	Systems Neuroscience · Cognitive Science · Computational Neuroscience · Clinical Psychology · Behavioural Science	REPORT › POSITIONS ›
Economics, Finance & Business	Economics · Finance · Accounting · Marketing · Management · Operations	REPORT › POSITIONS ›

Every edition, always current

New fields are added to the hub as they are published. Bookmark the hub rather than an individual file.

BROWSE ALL EDITIONS

SECTION 09 · METHOD & LIMITS

What we verified, and what we could not.

How the position list was built

Every row was read off a page we fetched on 12 September 2026: 441 live **physics & astronomy** postings across 190 institutions in 42 states. Coverage spanned the Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, Nature Careers, AcademicJobsOnline, the AAS Job Register, the AEA listings, UC Recruit, jobRxiv, society boards and national laboratory career sites.

How the filing data was built

All four FY2025 DOL quarterly disclosure files - 2,422,227 rows - deduplicated by case number to 594,822 unique cases, 552,036 certified, of which 41,748 sit at academic and research employers. Every field extracted **by column name**.

Stated limitations.

01 **We read listing pages, not posting bodies.** That bought this edition's breadth and cost us detail: most rows carry no stated deadline and no sponsorship language. A blank field means we did not read the posting text.

02 **Roughly one link in twenty will not open.** Of 46 rows drawn at random, 38 were live postings, four returned only scaffolding, two were dead and two sat on hosts that refuse automated reading.

03 **Portals that block automated reading are absent** despite being active hirers. Their absence means nothing.

04 **Hiring cycles differ sharply by field.** Where this field is off-cycle in September, the count understates the year's real volume.

05 **USCIS approval counts are unavailable.** The Employer Data Hub returns HTTP 403 to automated access and no FY2025 approval data has been published. Nothing was estimated in its place.

06 **Some institutions petition through umbrella entities** and cannot be split by campus. A campus that shows nothing may be filing under another name.

07 **Postings close without notice.** Confirm any deadline on the posting itself before investing time.

Primary sources. Fee for Certain H-1B Petitions, 91 FR 54817 (25 August 2026), DHS docket USCIS-2026-0298 · Eliminating the Discretionary 60-Day Grace Period (11 September 2026) · Proclamation 10973, 90 FR 46027 · No. 25-cv-13829 (D. Mass., 8 June 2026) · State of California v. Mullin (1st Cir., appeal pending) · Chamber of Commerce & AAU v. DHS (D.D.C., 23 Dec 2025) · Weighted Selection Rule, 90 FR 60864 · 8 U.S.C. 1184(g)(5) · 8 CFR 214.2(h)(8)(iii)(F) · 8 CFR 214.1(l)(2) · 8 CFR 106.2 · 8 CFR 204.5 · 6 USCIS-PM F.5 · DOL OFLC LCA Disclosure Data FY2025 · Visa Bulletin, August 2026.

WHERE WE COME IN

You have the data. Now build the case.

Finding the position is the first half. The second is the petition - and that is where most strong candidates lose ground they never needed to lose. Whether an institution sponsors you or you petition entirely on your own record, StraightGreenCard drafts and reviews the case for **physics & astronomy researchers**, clinicians and academics, with transparency at every step.

Case drafting

O-1A, EB-1A, EB-1B and EB-2 NIW petitions built around your actual record, not a template.

Case review

An independent read of a petition before it is filed, flagging what an officer will question.

Free evaluation

A candid assessment of which route fits your profile, timeline and country of chargeability.

START YOUR FREE CASE EVALUATION

OPEN THE 441-POSITION SHEET

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Empowering Immigrant Professionals, One Case at a Time

A candid assessment of which route fits your profile, timeline and country of chargeability. The first assessment costs nothing.

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REPORT
Current as of 12 September 2026

This report is provided for general informational purposes and reflects the position as of 12 September 2026. StraightGreenCard is an immigration services company, not a law firm. Immigration law changes quickly and the measures described here remain unresolved. Nothing here is legal advice or a substitute for counsel on your individual circumstances.