

Checklist: What to Do When You Receive a Contingent Job Offer

1. Request a Formal Written Offer Immediately

Do not proceed based on verbal commitments or informal communication. Get the contingent offer in writing and review it carefully.

Action Items:

- Ask for a formal offer letter with all contingencies clearly listed
- Identify each specific requirement, such as background checks, reference checks, drug testing, licensing, or approvals
- Confirm the timelines and deadlines for each contingency
- Look for unclear or open-ended phrases like "pending HR review" that need clarification

2. Evaluate the Nature and Risk Level of the Contingencies

Determine which contingencies are routine and which could delay or cancel the offer. Know what is within your control and what is not.

Action Items:

- List all contingencies and classify them as low, moderate, or high risk
- Flag any vague conditions like "pending final approval" that could be used to withdraw the offer
- Understand how long each condition typically takes in your industry
- Consider the employer's track record, if known. Some industries are more cautious or bureaucratic than others

3. Use the Contingent Window to Negotiate Key Terms

Many candidates wait until contingencies are cleared before negotiating, which is often too late. Your influence is strongest before you fully comply.

Action Items:

- Clarify salary, benefits, remote arrangements, and start date now, not later
- Ask, "What flexibility is there if the background check process extends past the proposed start date?"
- Use this time to raise reasonable questions about relocation support, onboarding, or equipment needs, if applicable

- Ensure all agreed-upon changes are documented in an updated offer

4. Assess Alignment with Your Career Strategy

While waiting for contingencies to clear, reassess whether this role fits your long-term goals. Just because you got the offer doesn't mean it's the best move.

Action Items:

- Ask yourself whether this role supports your 12- to 24-month career vision
- Compare the offer against others you may be considering
- Reflect on the employer's communication and transparency during this phase
- Decide whether it's worth pausing your job search or whether to continue exploring options

5. Set a Professional Follow-Up Cadence

Candidates often feel awkward about checking in, but silence can lead to miscommunication or missed updates. Set a cadence that keeps you top of mind without overstepping.

Action Items:

- Send a thank-you email within 24 hours acknowledging the offer and summarizing next steps
- Confirm who to contact for each step of the contingency process
- Follow up every five to seven business days with brief, focused questions or status checks
- Avoid vague inquiries. Be specific, such as, "Has the background check cleared, or is anything else needed from my end?"

6. Continue Your Job Search Discreetly

Do not assume the role is yours until all contingencies are cleared. Staying active gives you leverage and protects you from delays or reversals.

Action Items:

- Keep applying to other roles quietly
- Avoid publicly announcing your new role until it's finalized
- Identify a deadline where, if contingencies are not met, you will move on
- Maintain relationships with other prospective employers in case this offer stalls

7. Prepare for Onboarding Ahead of Confirmation

Employers notice candidates who show readiness and professionalism, even during a conditional phase. Be the person they're glad they picked.

Action Items:

- Gather necessary documents early, such as IDs, NBI clearance, or certifications
- Review company materials, core values, and leadership profiles
- Prepare relevant questions to ask once hired
- Show continued interest and readiness without assuming the role prematurely

8. Know When to Withdraw and How to Do It Professionally

Some contingent offers are not worth waiting for. If delays or red flags accumulate, protect your time and career momentum by stepping away with professionalism.

Action Items:

- Set a personal deadline for how long you will wait for contingencies to be resolved
- Draft a professional withdrawal message that leaves the door open for future conversations
- Notify the employer if you decide to pursue other confirmed opportunities
- Leave on a positive note to preserve long-term relationships

Final Note

Receiving a contingent job offer means you are close, but not yet confirmed. How you handle this in-between phase speaks volumes to employers and protects your interests. Use this checklist to stay in control of your career and position yourself as a confident, prepared professional from day one.