

GENERAL
INFORMATION

Social Security Number Information

A Social Security Number (SSN) is a U.S. federal government number issued by the Social Security Administration (SSA). The number is used to record an individual's earnings and is valid for life, so you only need to apply one time.

The SSN is personally identifiable information (PII) and should only be shared through a secure method and with trusted individuals. For additional information on how to protect your SSN, see the section on the next page.

All non-immigrants who will earn income at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) must obtain the SSN to properly report earnings and tax withholdings. For general SSN information, visit <http://www.ssa.gov>.

WHEN SHOULD I APPLY FOR THE SSN?

We recommend that you wait five days AFTER you have checked in with DIS to apply for the SSN. If you apply too early, the SSA may be unable to verify your immigration status, which could lead to significant delays in SSN issuance. The SSN is often required to obtain your NIH identification badge, so it is important that you apply at the appropriate time after arrival to the United States.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR THE SSN?

You must visit a local SSA office in person and present the application form and additional evidence of your age, identity, work eligibility, and lawful non-immigrant status in the United States. The information below is presented as a guide. As this is a personal application to an outside agency and instructions may change over time, all requirements should be confirmed through the SSA website.

Required Documentation:

- Form SS-5, Application for a Social Security Card – Obtain at your local SSA office or online at <http://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber>
- Valid Passport
- Official NIH invitation letter
- Form I-94 - <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>
- Enabling document per immigration status:
 - J-1 Status* – Form DS-2019
 - H-1B or O-1 Status* – Form I-797 Approval Notice
 - Other* – Employment Authorization Document, Form I-20, etc.

Tips:

- Your name should match on ALL documentation (Form SS-5, passport, Form I-94, and enabling document). Notify DIS if there are errors on any of these documents.
- If your current passport was issued less than one year ago, present your expired passport as well.
- All evidence must be originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. SSA does not accept photocopies or notarized copies of documents.
- There is no cost to apply for the SSN.

WHERE DO I APPLY FOR THE SSN?

We recommend that you apply at the SSA office nearest to your home. Enter your zip code on the Social Security Administration website for office hours, directions, and a map to the office: <https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>.

The SSA office nearest to NIH campus in Bethesda is located at 315 N. Washington Street, Rockville, Maryland 20850. You may access it via public transportation (Metro Red Line, direction Shady Grove).

CAN MY DEPENDENT (SPOUSE AND/OR CHILD) APPLY FOR THE SSN?

Dependents who are authorized to work in the United States are eligible to apply for the SSN. If your dependent is not authorized to work in the United States, s/he may be eligible to apply for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). For guidance on how to apply for the ITIN, visit <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/individual-taxpayer-identification-number>.

If your dependent will apply for an Employment Authorization Document by filing Form I-765 with USCIS, s/he may apply for the SSN on the same form. Review instructions to Form I-765 through the USCIS website: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>.

WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER I APPLY FOR MY SSN?

You should receive the Social Security card in the mail with your SSN within a few weeks. Contact the SSA directly at 1-800-772-1213 if you have any questions while you wait to receive the SSN.

If the SSA agent tells you that your case requires further verification, you can check the status of that verification online at <https://www.uscis.gov/save/casecheck>.

Once you receive the card, report your SSN to your NIH Administrative Officer (AO). S/he may have further instructions for you. You are not required to submit a copy of your SSN to DIS. Memorize your SSN and keep your card in a secure location.

HOW DO I PROTECT MY SSN?

It is essential to protect your personal information (SSN, immigration documents, credit cards, etc.) from scammers. They often have some of your personal information already, which makes it easy to believe them. You may receive a phone call or email, or visit a website that seems legitimate, but is actually an attempt to steal money, charge too much for services, or get more of your personal information. Take time to educate yourself so that you can recognize and avoid scams! If you are not sure if something is a scam, feel free to contact DIS for help. Learn how to keep your SSN safe: <https://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft>.