



HOW TO GET A SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE FOR 2025



Key Statistics

FREE Service



The Social Security Administration provides cards at no cost

5–10 Business Days



For your card to arrive by mail after your request is complete

45 Calendar Days



To finish at an office after you start online

3 Request Types



Original, replacement, and name change (corrected) cards

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Navigate through this comprehensive guide to find everything you need to successfully obtain your Social Security card in 2026.



Understanding Social Security Cards

What is a Social Security Card?

Your Social Security card is an official document issued by the Social Security Administration (SSA) that displays your legal name and nine-digit Social Security number. The number may be required for work, banking, credit, and government services. In most cases you only need to know the number, not carry the card.

Why You Might Need a New Card

The SSA provides Social Security cards for three main situations:

1. Original Card

- You've never had a Social Security card before
- You're an eligible noncitizen who has never had a number
- You need a number for the first time (for example, for a first job)

2. Replacement Card

- Your card was lost, stolen, or damaged
- An employer or agency has asked to see the physical card
- Your card has become worn and unreadable

3. Name Change Card

- You got married and changed your name
- You got divorced and resumed your maiden name
- You legally changed your name through court order

Eligibility and Application Methods

Start Online (Everyone Starts Here)

Who Can Finish Entirely Online:

- U.S. citizens age 18 or older whose citizenship is already on their Social Security record
- Have a driver's license or state ID from a participating state
- Requesting a replacement with no changes, or a last name change after marriage (marriage record from a participating state)
- Have a U.S. mailing address (including APO/FPO/DPO)

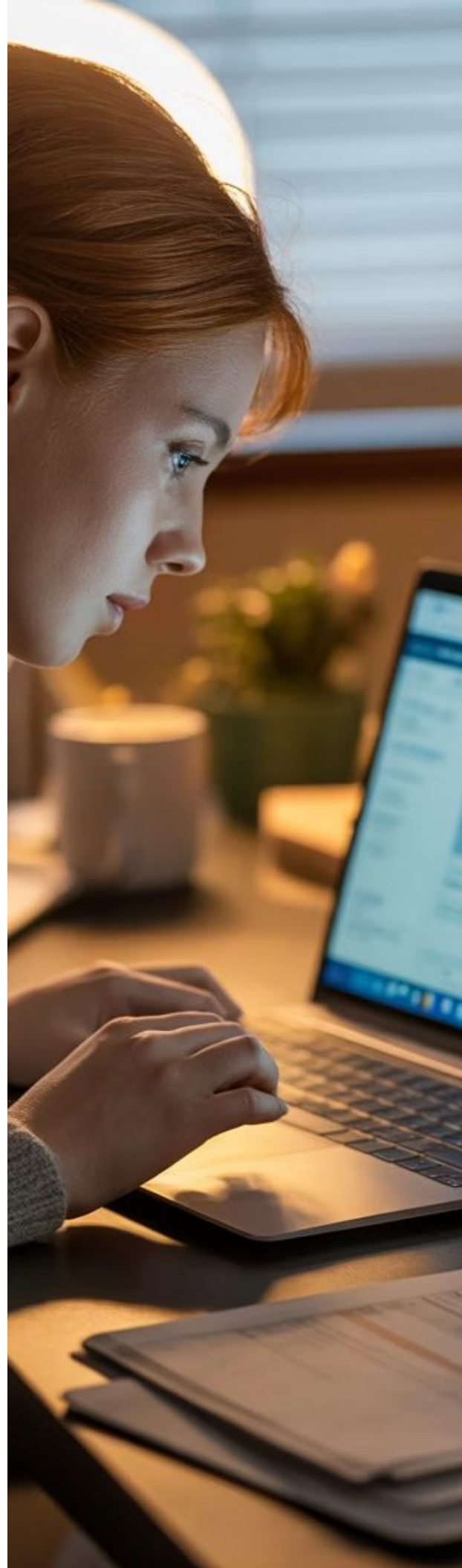
Since January 31, 2026, Social Security uses one online application at ssa.gov/number-card. It checks what it can verify electronically, then either finishes your request online or books you an appointment. Every state and D.C. participate for driver's licenses and state IDs except Alaska.

Finished at an Office (After Starting Online)

- First-time numbers (age 12 or older must have an in-person interview)
- Name changes other than a marriage-related last name change
- Non-citizens
- People without a driver's license or state ID from a participating state
- Anyone applying for someone else, such as a parent applying for a child

To Finish Online You Also Need

- Driver's license or state ID verified electronically
- Driver's license or state ID from participating state
- A Login.gov or ID.me account
- A U.S. mailing address



Required Documents by Application Type

Proof of Identity Requirements



1. PREFERRED DOCUMENTS (Choose One):

- Valid U.S. driver's license
- State-issued ID card
- U.S. passport
- Must be current and unexpired
- A birth certificate proves age and citizenship, never identity



2. ALTERNATIVES (If you can't get a preferred document within 10 workdays):

- U.S. military ID card
- Employee ID card with photograph
- School ID card with photograph
- Health insurance card (not Medicare)
- U.S. military dependent's ID card



3. FOR CHILDREN WITHOUT PHOTO ID:

- Certified copy of medical record (birth hospital record)
- Religious record established before age 5
- Final adoption decree
- School record or early periodic screening record

IMPORTANT: SSA may accept these alternatives if you don't have a preferred document or can't get a replacement within 10 workdays. Whatever you bring must be current and show your name and age or date of birth.



Proof of Citizenship or Immigration Status

U.S. CITIZENS:

- U.S. birth certificate (original or certified copy)
- U.S. passport
- Consular Report of Birth Abroad
- Certificate of Naturalization
- Certificate of Citizenship

NON-CITIZENS:

- Form I-551 (Permanent Resident Card)
- Form I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record)
- Form I-766 (Employment Authorization Document)
- Machine Readable Immigrant Visa (MRIV), in some cases
- Form I-327 (Permit to Reenter), in some cases

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS/EXCHANGE VISITORS:

- Form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Students)
- Form DS-2019 (Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status)
- Employment authorization letter from sponsoring agency
- Current, unexpired foreign passport



Proof of Name Change

When applying for a new Social Security card due to a name change, you must provide one of the following documents that verifies your legal name change. Each document must be original or certified by the issuing agency.



Marriage Certificate

Official marriage certificate or record showing both your previous and new name.



Divorce Decree

Court-issued divorce decree that specifically mentions the name change.



Court Order

Legal court order specifically issued for name change purposes.



Certificate of Naturalization

Certificate showing your new legal name after naturalization.



Adoption Decree

Legal adoption papers showing the name change for an adopted child.

IMPORTANT: You may need documents showing both your old name and new name. If your name changed more than two years ago (four for someone under 18), SSA may also ask for an identity document in your former name. An expired one is acceptable for this.

All documents must be original or certified copies. Photocopies or notarized copies are not acceptable for Social Security Administration purposes.



Document Acceptance Rules



Documents the SSA Will Accept

- Original documents
- Certified copies from the issuing agency



Documents the SSA Will Not Accept

- Photocopies of any kind
- Notarized copies
- Expired documents (with limited exceptions for name changes)
- Receipts showing you applied for a document



Document Preparation Tips

1. Verify authenticity - Ensure all documents are original or properly certified
2. Check expiration dates - Most documents must be current and unexpired
3. Confirm readability - Ensure all text and photos are clear
4. Gather extras - Have backup documents in case your first choice isn't accepted



Step-by-Step Application Process

Online Application Process



STEP 1: Start at ssa.gov/number-card

- Choose the option to replace or correct your card
- Answer the screening questions
- Have your driver's license or state ID in front of you

STEP 2: Sign In

- Sign in with Login.gov or ID.me (Social Security's own username and password ended June 7, 2025)
- Signing in is what makes a fully online finish possible
- You can apply without signing in, but you'll finish at an office



STEP 3: Let the Application Decide

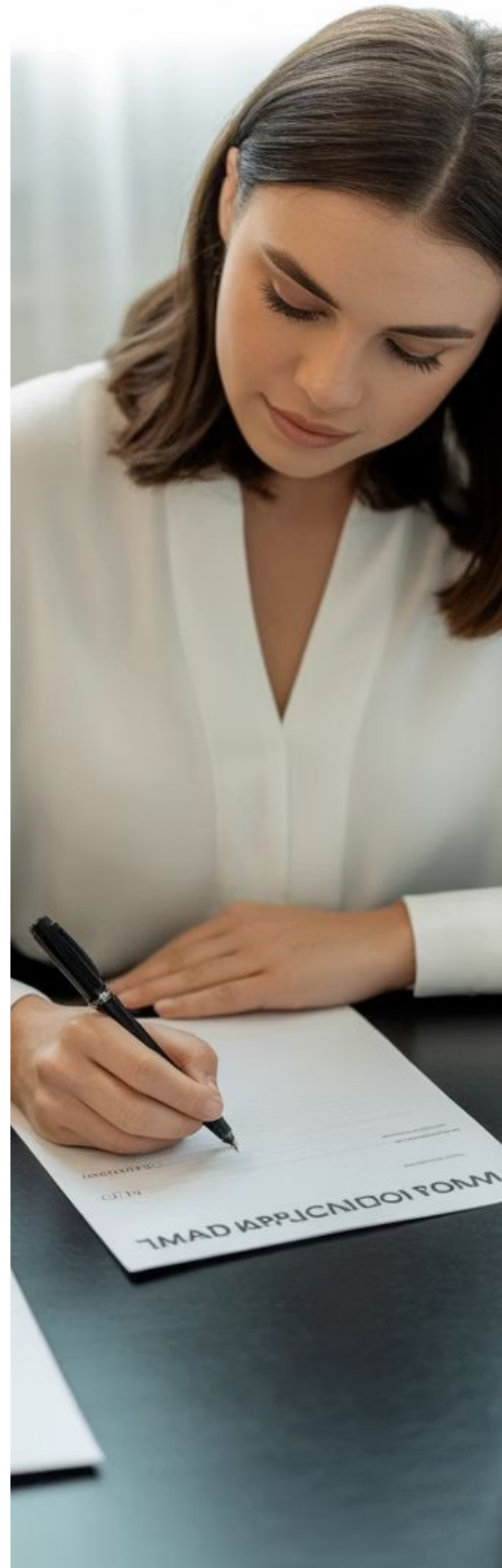
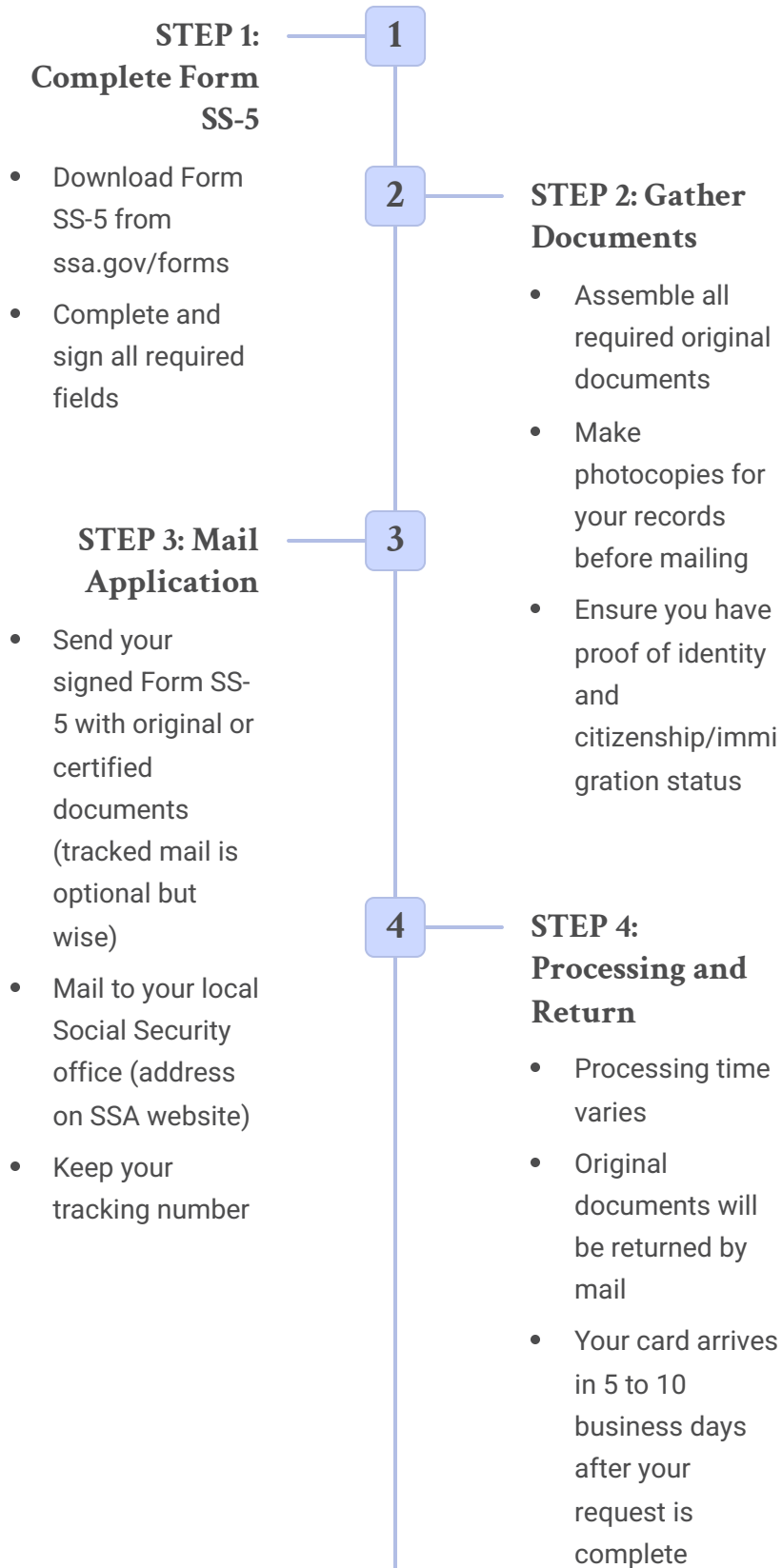
- If everything checks out, it finishes your request online
- The application checks your information electronically
- If not, it books you an appointment at an office or Card Center
- Save the online control number and finish at the office within 45 calendar days, or you start over

STEP 4: Confirmation and Delivery

- Watch your my Social Security Message Center
- Your card arrives by mail in 5 to 10 business days after your request is complete
- Your local office cannot print a card for you

Mail Application Process

Follow these four steps to apply for your Social Security card by mail:



In-Person Application Process

1

STEP 1: Locate Office

- Use the office locator at ssa.gov/locator
- Check office hours and special procedures
- Make an appointment. Starting online books one for you

2

STEP 2: Prepare for Visit

- Bring your online control number, or a completed and signed Form SS-5
- Bring all required original documents
- Wait times vary

3

STEP 3: At the Office

- Without an appointment, you may be booked for another day
- Present your documents to the representative
- The employee reviews your documents
- Ask for a receipt if you need one

4

STEP 4: After Your Visit

- Your original documents will be returned immediately
- Your card arrives by mail in 5 to 10 business days
- Check status in your my Social Security account



Fees and Processing Times

Official Fees

SOCIAL SECURITY CARDS ARE ALWAYS FREE

The SSA provides Social Security cards at no charge. Never pay a website that charges to file for a card.

Services That Are FREE:



Original Social Security cards



Replacement cards
(up to 3 per year, 10 per lifetime)



Name change cards



Correcting SSA records

Processing Times by Method

Application Method	Processing Time	Card Delivery
Online	Varies	5–10 business days
Mail	Varies	5–10 business days
In-Person	Varies	5–10 business days

Note: Processing times may be longer during peak periods or if additional verification is required.

Scam Prevention and Safety

Common Social Security Scams

PHONE SCAMS:

The Scam: Callers claim your Social Security number has been "suspended" due to suspicious activity

The Hook: They demand personal information, money, or gift cards to "reactivate" your number

The Reality: The SSA will never call to threaten you or demand immediate payment

ONLINE SCAMS:

The Scam: Fake websites that look official and charge fees for "expedited" service

The Hook: They promise faster service for a fee

The Reality: Start at ssa.gov and follow its links; sign-in is through [Login.gov](https://login.gov) or [ID.me](https://id.me)

IDENTITY THEFT TACTICS:

The Scam: Scammers use caller ID spoofing to make calls appear to come from SSA

The Hook: They already have some of your personal information to sound legitimate

The Reality: SSA does call people for real business, but an unexpected call demanding your number, money, or gift cards is a scam



How to Protect Yourself

RED FLAGS - HANG UP IF SOMEONE:

- Threatens to suspend your Social Security number
- Demands immediate payment via gift cards, wire transfer, or cash
- Asks for your Social Security number, bank account, or credit card information
- Claims there's a warrant for your arrest related to your Social Security number
- Pressures you to act immediately

PROTECTIVE ACTIONS:

- Never give personal information to unsolicited callers
- Only use official SSA websites (ssa.gov)
- Report suspicious calls to the SSA fraud hotline: 1-800-269-0271
- Keep your Social Security card in a secure location
- Only carry it when absolutely necessary



Reporting Fraud

If you suspect Social Security fraud or scams, it's important to report them immediately through official channels. The Social Security Administration provides multiple ways to report suspicious activity.

Call the SSA Fraud Hotline

1-800-269-0271

This dedicated hotline is available for reporting any suspicious activity related to Social Security benefits, numbers, or identity theft.

Check current hours at
[oig.ssa.gov](https://www.oig.ssa.gov)

Submit an Online Report

oig.ssa.gov/report

The SSA's Office of Inspector General provides a secure online form where you can submit detailed information about suspected fraud or scams.

Available 24/7 for your convenience

Mail a Written Report

Social Security Fraud Hotline
P.O. Box 17785
Baltimore, MD 21235

For situations where you prefer to provide documentation or a written statement about suspected fraud.

When reporting fraud, try to provide as much detail as possible, including names, dates, and descriptions of suspicious activity. Your report can be anonymous if you prefer. Remember that reporting fraud helps protect the Social Security system and prevents others from becoming victims.

Employment Verification (Form I-9)

Understanding Employment Verification

When you start a new job, your employer must verify your identity and eligibility to work in the United States using Form I-9. Your Social Security card can be part of this process.

Form I-9 Document Categories

1 LIST A DOCUMENTS (Establish Both Identity and Work Authorization):

- U.S. Passport or Passport Card
- Permanent Resident Card (Form I-551)
- Foreign passport with temporary I-551 stamp
- Employment Authorization Document (Form I-766)
- Foreign passport with a Machine Readable Immigrant Visa that has a temporary I-551 notation

2 LIST B DOCUMENTS (Establish Identity Only):

- U.S. driver's license or state ID card
- School ID card with photograph
- U.S. military ID card
- Voter registration card
- Tribal identification document

3 LIST C DOCUMENTS (Establish Work Authorization Only):

- Social Security card (unrestricted)
- Original or certified copy of birth certificate
- U.S. Citizen ID Card (Form I-197)
- Employment authorization document issued by DHS (other than Form I-766)

How Your Social Security Card Fits In

IF YOU PROVIDE A LIST A DOCUMENT:

- No other documents needed
- Social Security card not required

IF YOU PROVIDE LIST B AND C DOCUMENTS:

- Social Security card (List C) + Driver's license (List B) = Complete verification
- Birth certificate (List C) + Driver's license (List B) = Alternative combination

WHILE WAITING FOR YOUR REPLACEMENT CARD:

- Driver's license + birth certificate works for most situations
- Passport alone satisfies all requirements
- Employer cannot specify which documents you must provide

Special Situations

Replacing a Child's Card

A parent with custody can apply for a child; both parents do not need to appear. You prove your own identity, the child's identity, and your relationship. Because you're applying for someone else, expect to finish at an office.

Children Under 18

REQUIREMENTS:

- Either parent with custody can apply
- SSA generally presumes a parent has custody unless there's evidence otherwise
- A child 12 or older applying for a first number must have an in-person interview

DOCUMENTS NEEDED:

- Child's birth certificate (age and citizenship) plus a document proving the child's identity
- Proof of the applying parent's identity
- Form SS-5 completed for the child

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

- Adoptive parents need final adoption decree
- Guardians need court appointment papers
- SSA may ask for custody papers if custody is unclear



Non-Citizens

ELIGIBLE NON-CITIZENS

- Lawful permanent residents
- Temporary workers with valid work authorization
- International students with work authorization
- Refugees and asylees with work authorization



ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- Current immigration documents from DHS
- Valid foreign passport (for temporary workers/students)
- Work authorization documentation



RESTRICTIONS

- Some cards may be marked "Valid for work only with DHS authorization"
- Cards may have restrictions based on immigration status



Name Changes

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS:

- Many people update Social Security first, but check each agency's own rules
- Tell your employer your new name so your wages post correctly
- Check the State Department's and your DMV's requirements before you apply

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS:

- Legal proof of name change
- Current identity documents in old name (may be expired for this purpose)
- New identity documents in new name (if available)



Step 1: SSA Name Change

Update your
Social
Security card
first

Step 3: Passport

Follow the
State
Department's
name change
rules

Step 2: Driver's License

Follow your
state DMV's
name change
rules

Step 4: Other Documents

Update bank
accounts,
credit cards,
etc.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Application Mistakes



MISTAKE 1: Using Unofficial Websites

Problem: Many fake websites charge fees for free SSA services

Solution: Only use ssa.gov for official information and applications



MISTAKE 2: Inconsistent Name Spelling

Problem: Different spelling on various documents causes delays

Solution: Enter your current legal name exactly, and bring documents that link any old and new names



MISTAKE 3: Submitting Photocopies

Problem: SSA requires original documents or certified copies

Solution: Only submit original documents or certified copies from issuing agencies



MISTAKE 4: Losing Track of Mailed Documents

Problem: Documents can be lost in regular mail

Solution: Use tracked mail if you mail originals (a good idea, not an SSA rule)



MISTAKE 5: Waiting Too Long

Problem: Delays can affect employment start dates

Solution: Apply as soon as you know you need a new card

Document Mistakes

1 MISTAKE 6: Bringing Expired Documents

Problem: Most expired documents are not acceptable

Solution: Check expiration dates before visiting SSA office

2 MISTAKE 7: Assuming Any Secondary Document Works

Problem: Not all secondary documents are equal

Solution: Check SSA's specific acceptable document list

3 MISTAKE 8: Not Having Backup Documents

Problem: Your first choice might not be accepted

Solution: Bring multiple acceptable documents when possible

Process Mistakes

1 MISTAKE 9: Not Scheduling Appointments

Problem: Long wait times at SSA offices

Solution: Schedule appointments online when possible

2 MISTAKE 10: Losing the Control Number

Problem: If you're routed to an office, the control number is how staff find your application

Solution: Write it down or print the screen before closing anything



Official Resources and Contact Information

The Social Security Administration provides multiple channels to access services and information. Below are the official resources you should use for all your Social Security card needs.



Social Security Administration Main Website

Visit **ssa.gov** for:

- Complete information on all SSA services
- Online application portal
- Office locator and appointment scheduling
- Forms and publications downloads



Phone Support

Contact representatives directly:

- General Information: 1-800-772-1213
- TTY Service: 1-800-325-0778
- Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM local time
- Fraud Reporting: 1-800-269-0271



Online Services

Create and access your personal account at **ssa.gov/myaccount** to:

- Check your application status
- Request a replacement card (in eligible states)
- Verify your earnings history
- Get personalized benefit estimates
- Print benefit verification letters



In-Person Office Visits

For services requiring in-person verification:

- Use the office locator at ssa.gov/locator
- Schedule appointments in advance when possible
- Bring all required documents (originals or certified copies)
- Check current hours as they may vary by location

State-Specific Resources

Requirements and services may vary by state. Check your state's specific requirements on the SSA website before applying for a card or replacement.

Online Services and State-Specific Information

Online Services

- Sign in with Login.gov or ID.me
- Check application status
- View earnings record

State-Specific Information

Start here: ssa.gov/number-card

- Every state except Alaska participates for licenses and state IDs
- The application tells you if it can verify your documents
- State-specific requirements

Additional Help

Low-Income Assistance:

- Local help may be available in your community
- Call 1-800-772-1213 if you need help applying
- Legal Aid organizations can help with complex situations

Language Assistance:

- SSA provides interpreters for over 200 languages
- Request interpreter when scheduling appointment
- Translated instructions available on ssa.gov

Disability Accommodations:

- SSA provides disability accommodations
- Sign language interpreters available
- Alternative format documents provided upon request

Final Checklist

Before You Apply

1 Preparation Checklist

- ☐ Determine which type of card you need (original, replacement, name change)
- ☐ Have your driver's license or state ID ready
- ☐ Gather all required original documents
- ☐ Make copies of documents for your records
- ☐ Set up Login.gov or ID.me (needed to finish online)

2 During Your Application

- ☐ Double-check all information for accuracy
- ☐ Save your online control number
- ☐ Keep receipts and tracking information
- ☐ Take photos of documents before mailing (if applying by mail)

3 After You Apply

- ☐ Track your application status
- ☐ Watch for your new card (5 to 10 business days after completion)
- ☐ Report any problems immediately
- ☐ Keep your new card in a safe place

After You Apply and Frequently Asked Questions

After You Apply

- ☐ Update your records with employers, banks, etc. (if name changed)

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How many replacement cards can I get?

A: You can get up to 3 replacement cards per year and 10 in your lifetime. Name changes and corrections don't count toward this limit.

Q: What if I never received my card?

A: If it hasn't arrived 10 business days after your request was completed, contact SSA. They can investigate and issue a new card if necessary.

Q: Can I get a temporary card?

A: No, SSA does not issue temporary cards. For Form I-9, an employer can generally accept a receipt for replacing a lost, stolen, or damaged card for up to 90 days.

Q: What if my employer requires a Social Security card specifically?

A: Employers cannot require specific documents. They must accept any valid combination from the I-9 list. If they insist on a Social Security card specifically, contact the Justice Department's Immigrant and Employee Rights Section (IER) at 1-800-255-7688.

Q: Does my card expire?

A: No, Social Security cards do not expire. However, the name on your card must match your current legal name.

Document Checklist by Application Type

Use these checklists to ensure you have all required documents before submitting your Social Security card application. Having the correct documents ready will help avoid delays in processing.

ORIGINAL CARD CHECKLIST

Required Documents:

- ☐ Proof of identity (primary document preferred)
- ☐ Proof of U.S. citizenship or eligible immigration status
- ☐ Form SS-5 (completed and signed), or your online control number

Application Method:

- ☐ In-person at SSA office OR
- ☐ Mail to a local SSA office (tracked mail recommended)

REPLACEMENT CARD CHECKLIST

Required Documents:

- ☐ Proof of identity (current and unexpired)
- ☐ Proof of citizenship only if born outside the U.S. or not already on your record
- ☐ Form SS-5 (completed and signed), or your online control number

Application Method:

- ☐ Start online at ssa.gov/number-card
- ☐ In-person at SSA office
- ☐ Mail to local SSA office

Remember to bring original documents or certified copies. Photocopies, notarized copies, or expired documents will not be accepted by the Social Security Administration.



Mail/In-Person and Name Change Card Checklist

Use these checklists to ensure you have all required documents before submitting your Social Security card application. Having the correct documents ready will help avoid delays in processing.

MAIL/IN-PERSON CHECKLIST

Required Documents:

- ☐ Proof of identity
- ☐ Form SS-5 (completed and signed)
- ☐ Tracked mail (optional, for mail applications)

Application Method:

- ☐ In-person at SSA office OR
- ☐ Mail to a local SSA office (tracked mail recommended)

NAME CHANGE CARD CHECKLIST

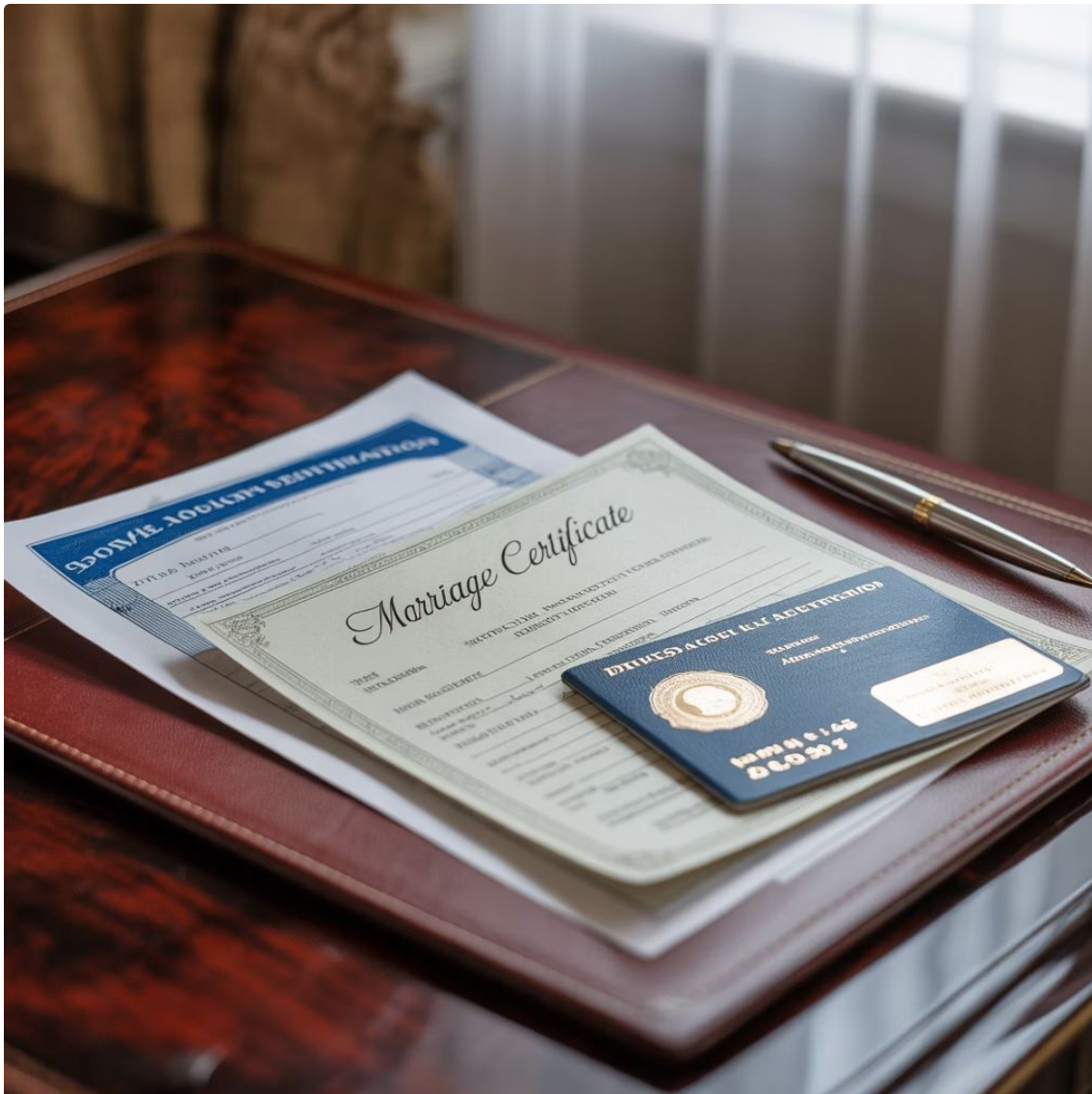
Required Documents:

- ☐ Proof of identity (may include documents in old name)
- ☐ Legal proof of name change (marriage certificate, divorce decree, court order)
- ☐ Form SS-5 (completed and signed), or your online control number

Application Method:

- ☐ In-person at SSA office OR
- ☐ Mail to a local SSA office (tracked mail recommended)

Remember to bring original documents or certified copies. Photocopies, notarized copies, or expired documents will not be accepted by the Social Security Administration.



A vertical banner image on the left side of the page. The top half shows a close-up of the American flag waving. The bottom half shows the facade of the Social Security Administration building, featuring large columns and the words "SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION" inscribed on the pediment.

Disclaimer and Contact Information (Updated October 2026)

This guide is provided for informational purposes only. Always verify current requirements and procedures at ssa.gov or by contacting the Social Security Administration directly. Government policies and procedures may change without notice.



Website

For the most current information, visit ssa.gov



Phone

Call 1-800-772-1213 for assistance

GovClarity - Making government procedures
easier, every step of the way.