



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

Applying for a Driver’s License or State Identification Card

This fact sheet provides information to designated school officials (DSOs) and Responsible Officers (ROs) in order to help F, M or J nonimmigrants obtain a driver’s license or a state identification (ID) card. In addition to the information provided here, DSOs, ROs and nonimmigrants should familiarize themselves with the regulations, policies and other applicable information of the state or territory of residence, as each may have different requirements.

FACT SHEET OVERVIEW

- [General Questions](#) – This section provides an overview of the general driver’s license and ID processes, tips, things to know and special cases.
- [Known Issues](#) – This section discusses known problems without a current resolution, the status of fixes and other relevant information.
- [Contact Information](#) – This section provides contact information for SEVP, information on how to request help for difficult issues and individual site websites.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

What should an F, M or J nonimmigrant do before applying for a driver’s license or ID?

The nonimmigrant should contact the DSO or RO. The DSO or RO will provide guidance, assist in familiarizing the nonimmigrant with the expectations of the department of motor vehicles (DMV)¹ for that state or territory, and explain the general process of obtaining a driver’s license or ID.

When can an F, M or J nonimmigrant apply for a driver’s license or ID?

Please be aware of the following timing requirements before applying for a driver’s license or ID:

¹ SEVP uses DMV in this fact sheet as a generic term. Not every state uses this designation.

- The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) record **MUST** be in active status before applying for a benefit. Canceled, initial, completed, terminated, etc. will not work.
- Wait at least two business days from the activation date² in SEVIS to apply for a driver's license or ID.
- Wait at least ten calendar days from the date of entry into the United States to apply for a driver's license or ID. Several states and territories use the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program to determine nonimmigrant eligibility for many public benefits, including the issuance of a driver's license. Current arrival information is essential to this verification, and it takes time to distribute information from the port of entry information systems to SAVE. Please note, the nonimmigrant must have been in active status for at least two business days in this case as well.
- Several states require that a nonimmigrant have at least six months left on the Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 to be eligible for a driver's license. Either consult with the state or territory's DMV or visit its website to see if this is a requirement.

What can DSOs and ROs do to ensure a smooth application process?

- Be sure the nonimmigrant's information is correct in SEVIS, including nonimmigrant status, name, and date of birth, before sending the nonimmigrant to the local DMV office.
- The nonimmigrant's name must match on all supporting documentation. See below, [*What documentation must an F, M or J nonimmigrant present to the DMV?*](#)
- The nonimmigrant must have an *Active* SEVIS record before applying.
- The DMV will deny any nonimmigrant's application when the supporting documents are inconsistent or do not reflect the proper name, date of birth and nonimmigrant status. Review all supporting documents before the nonimmigrant applies.
- Be sure the nonimmigrant is within the program start and end dates in SEVIS, unless the nonimmigrant is participating in Optional Practical Training (OPT) or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) OPT.

Who is eligible for a driver's license or ID?

Any F, M or J nonimmigrant in lawful status may apply for a driver's license or ID. The nonimmigrant must present necessary supporting documents required to verify legal presence in the United States. For additional information specifically about accompanying spouses and dependents, see below, [*What are the requirements for an accompanying dependent?*](#)

² The date the DSO indicated that the nonimmigrant has reported to the institution by updating SEVIS information from "initial" to "active."

What is SAVE?

SAVE, the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements program, is a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) query system. It gathers data from various government databases and uses that data to ascertain if a nonimmigrant is eligible for a benefit, such as a driver's license or SSN. In the case of F, M and J nonimmigrants, SAVE pulls data from SEVIS to verify legal status in the United States.

Please note that not all states and territories use SAVE to verify status. Please check with your state or territory's DMV to find out if it uses SAVE.

For more information, please visit [SAVE's website](#).

What documentation must an F, M or J nonimmigrant present to the DMV?

For specific requirements for your state, please refer to the DMV website or contact a local DMV office. In general, the nonimmigrant should present the following:

- Valid passport
- Form I-94, "Arrival/Departure Record"
- Form I-20 (for an F or M nonimmigrant) **OR** Form DS-2019 (for a J nonimmigrant)
- Form I-766 "Employment Authorization Document" (EAD), if applicable
- Form I-797 "Notice of Action," if applicable
- SSN **OR** an SSA decision letter stating ineligibility. Please visit this [SSA website](#) for more information.

Does an F, M or J nonimmigrant need an SSN to apply for a driver's license or ID?

No, a nonimmigrant does not need an SSN. In most states, however, the nonimmigrant will need to apply for an SSN. Follow the instructions on how to apply for a Social Security card as described on this [SSA website](#). A nonimmigrant who is ineligible for an SSN will receive a decision letter stating ineligibility. The nonimmigrant must present this SSA decision letter when applying at the DMV office to fulfill the SSN requirement.

What should an F, M or J nonimmigrant do if there is an error on the passport?

A nonimmigrant with a passport error should consult the home country embassy or consulate to find out how to correct, update or renew the passport. Most embassies and consulates have a website with information regarding this issue.

What should an F, M or J nonimmigrant do if the name on the passport does not match the name on the Form I-20 or Form DS-2019?

Prior to applying at a DMV, the nonimmigrant should consult the DSO to correct the Form I-20 or with the RO to correct the Form DS-2019 to reflect the name on the passport. Here are some suggestions and exceptions for this process:

- Enter names consistently on all official identification/travel documents (passport, visa, Form I-20 and Form I-94³). Name variations may cause problems. The earliest official document, usually the passport, sets the standard.
- If the nonimmigrant's language uses an alphabet other than English, the DSO must ensure that the nonimmigrant understands the U.S. standard of first name (given name) and last name (surname or family name) and can enter the appropriate name information on forms correctly.
- When a DSO or RO creates a SEVIS record and subsequently issues a Form I-20 or Form DS-2019, the DSO or RO must ensure that the nonimmigrant's name appears in SEVIS exactly as it does on the nonimmigrant's passport or national ID card. If no passport is available, use the name on the national ID card. Ask the nonimmigrant to carefully review and verify the spelling and name sequence entered in the SEVIS record.
- If a DSO or RO does not have a primary document from which to obtain the correct spelling of the nonimmigrant's name, the DSO or RO should not go beyond "draft" on the SEVIS record until obtaining one (e.g., passport or national ID card) and verifying the name. Do not use a student's school admission form to create the SEVIS record.
- If the nonimmigrant has only one name, enter it in SEVIS as the last name. Enter FNU (first name unknown) in the first name field. The DSO or RO must explain to the nonimmigrant that some U.S. government officials are not familiar with the FNU acronym and will assume the nonimmigrant's first name is FNU. The DSO or RO must ensure the nonimmigrant can clearly explain the acronym in case its use causes a validation problem with any government process.
- Spacing is as important as spelling and must be consistent. For instance, systems will not read "Mc Millan" and "McMillan" as the same name.
- DO NOT use hyphens. Please use a space instead.
- Consistency with capitalization is helpful but not critical.
- Enter names in English and use only standard English letters. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State (DoS) data systems do not recognize letters like ñ, é, ü, and ç. Enter names like "Muñoz" and "Sémonin" as

³ Inaccuracies on the Form I-94 cause the most problems since, in most cases, the Form I-94 is hand-written by the nonimmigrant.

“Munoz” and “Semonin.” Do not change spellings to reflect the sounds of the language of origin.

- An F, M or J nonimmigrant must enter family name (last name or surname) and first name (given name) on the Form I-94 exactly as it appears on the passport.
 - Inconsistency can occur with a Latino nonimmigrant who uses the mother's maiden name either as a middle name or as part of a compounded/combined last name.
 - The nonimmigrant may choose either way when applying for the passport but must enter the name on the Form I-94 exactly as it appears on the passport.

To minimize mistakes, recommend that nonimmigrants read the information provided by Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Counsel the nonimmigrant to hand-carry a previously prepared, unofficial copy of the Form I-94 while traveling to use as a template. Consistent name use on all forms and in all situations is necessary, especially the Form I-94.

What should a nonimmigrant do if the DMV denies the nonimmigrant a driver's license because of a discrepancy on the Form I-94?

CBP reviews requests for corrections and, if appropriate, issues the necessary replacement documents to remedy the following errors made on the Form I-94 at the time of entry into the United States:

- Improper nonimmigrant classification
- Inaccurate biographical information
- Incorrect period of admission

Officials at any designated deferred inspection location or CBP office located within an international airport can assist, regardless of the location of the document's actual issuance. See the [CBP website](#) for more detailed information. In particular, review the *Frequently Asked Questions* on the Form I-94.

What should a nonimmigrant do if a DMV official refuses to issue a driver's license because the nonimmigrant's Form I-20 or DS-2019 is not stamped?

A nonimmigrant who has transferred schools, changed status, or changed education levels may not have a stamped copy of the latest Form I-20 or DS-2019. In addition to the normally required documents when applying for a benefit, the nonimmigrant should bring the following to prove status while in the United States:

- Most recent stamped Form I-20 or Form DS-2019

- Current, unstamped Form I-20 or Form DS-2019
- Any transfer documentation from the transfer-in school (e.g., letter of admission)
- Any change of status documentation from USCIS

If the nonimmigrant has lost the stamped Form I-20 or Form DS-2019, the nonimmigrant may take the current, signed print out of the Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 to any designated deferred inspection location, or CBP office, located within a port of entry, such as an international airport, in order to receive a stamp.

Can an F or M nonimmigrant apply for a driver's license if the Form I-20 is expired?

Yes, in many cases the nonimmigrant can apply for a driver's license but should consult with the local DMV and DSO before applying. The DMV requires a nonimmigrant to present supporting documentation, such as an EAD card, validating the duration of stay in the country. All documents should reflect the nonimmigrant's program or practical training period start date and end date in the United States.

What documents should a student on the cap-gap extension present to verify legal presence?

A nonimmigrant should inform the DSO immediately after receiving an approval notice from USCIS. The DSO will print a new Form I-20 and give it to the nonimmigrant. In the comments section on Page 3, USCIS will insert new language in the nonimmigrant's SEVIS record as follows:

F-1 status and employment authorization for this student have been automatically extended to September 30, 20xx⁴. The student is authorized to remain in the United States and continue employment with an expired employment authorization document. This is pursuant to 8 *CFR* 214.2(f)(5)(iv) and 8 *CFR* 274a.12(b)(6)(iv), as updated April 8, 2008 in a rule published in the Federal Register (73 *FR* 18944). Additional information about the automatic extension is available on the SEVP website at www.ice.gov/sevis.

The local DMV will use the information on Page 3 to validate the nonimmigrant's duration of status through September 30.

Upon receiving approval for H-1B status, the nonimmigrant should return to the DMV to present the Form I-797A and request that the DMV extend the driver's license expiration date for a period of one year. The student must return to the DMV every year to extend the license for the period of stay in the United States, unless otherwise stated by the local DMV office.

⁴ USCIS will amend this date for the following year at the beginning of each fiscal year (i.e., October 1).

What are the requirements for a nonimmigrant on post-completion optional practical training (OPT)?

In a state that uses SAVE, a nonimmigrant on post-completion OPT may run into trouble when applying for a driver's license because the DMV office may try to verify status using the SEVIS ID. Because the program end date in SEVIS has already passed, SAVE will be unable to verify status when using the SEVIS ID.

Please remind the nonimmigrant on post-completion OPT to explain this to the DMV customer service representative, and suggest an alternative SAVE verification via the EAD card's A number. A nonimmigrant who uses the EAD card's A number, rather than the SEVIS ID, should not have a problem with verification.

Will all states add the 60-day grace period to a driver's license validity period?

No. Not every state adds the 60-day period after the program end date to the driver's license for an initial applicant and/or an applicant renewing a driver's license. A nonimmigrant should consult with the DMV office before applying for a state driver's license or renewing a driver's license.

Why does a former F student or J exchange visitor have trouble getting a driver's license after a change to a different status, such as to an H-1B?

Currently, SAVE may not be able to validate some former F or J nonimmigrants who have changed status. SAVE, USCIS, and SEVP are aware of this issue and are taking steps to find a work-around.

If you have a former student in this situation, please see [Information requirements for problem resolution](#).

What are the requirements for an accompanying dependent?

An accompanying dependent who applies for a driver's license or state ID should present supporting personal status documentation, as well as status documentation of the primary visa holder. Information on a practical training period or cap-gap period reflects the duration of status.

The DMV will look for consistency between the dependent's duration of status and that of the primary visa holder.

Sometimes DMV offices have difficulty when verifying dependants. The best way to alleviate this problem is to inform all nonimmigrants in this position to do the following:

- Always go to the DMV office with the primary (F-1, M-1 or J-1) status holder
- Bring the following paperwork:

- The primary and dependent's most current Form I-94
- The primary and dependent's valid passport with visa
- Proof of identity
- Proof of relationship (e.g., marriage certificate)
- The primary and dependent's most current Form I-20 or Form DS-2019

Which J exchange visitor classes have work authorization?

Officials at most DMV offices recognize that J exchange visitors in the following classes of admission have work authorization and may receive an SSN:

- Alien physician
- Au pair
- Camp counselor
- Government visitor
- Intern
- Professor
- Research scholar
- Short-term scholar
- Specialist
- Summer work/travel
- Teacher
- Trainee
- J-2 dependent

These classes of J-1 exchange visitor admission require a sponsor letter in order to receive an SSN:

- Student at a college/university
- Student intern

- International visitor

The sponsor letter must show that the J-1 exchange visitor will work or is working. The letter must include an employment start date and state that the J-1 exchange visitor needs the SSN for work purposes.

Some states require a J exchange visitor to apply for an SSN even if ineligible. In such a case, the SSA will issue a letter stating ineligibly. Please have the J exchange visitor take this letter to the DMV office when applying for a driver's license.

I am having a problem not listed here. What do I do?

There are cases where nonimmigrants cannot receive verification for an unknown reason. In general, as long as the nonimmigrant is in active status in SEVIS, the SAVE system is designed to handle these issues by performing what is called an additional or secondary verification.

This means that after a failed initial attempt, the DMV office can push the nonimmigrant's data to SAVE for a manual verification. This takes about 5-7 business days to complete.

Many times, however, a failed initial response from SAVE brings up a message requesting that the nonimmigrant return to the institution to correct the SEVIS record. If everything is fine in the SEVIS record to begin with, returning to the school will not resolve the issue.

When this happens, it is best to do one or both of the following:

- Request that the DMV representative run an additional verification in SAVE.
- Ask to speak with a supervisor, explain the situation, and request an additional verification in SAVE.

If the above recommendations do not result in the process moving forward, please see the Contact Information section below on contacting SEVP for assistance.

KNOWN ISSUES

Background

SEVP, in conjunction with USCIS, actively collects data from stakeholders to identify problematic trends and patterns. SEVP recently helped to resolved an issue in which **ALL** F, M, and J nonimmigrants who have ever transferred or changed education levels, could not receive an initial verification in SAVE. Please note that this is **NOT** the same issue as the program gap issue, listed below.

Program Gap Issue

A program gap is when, for example, a student completed an undergraduate program of study and has a completed SEVIS record. However, that student is still in the United States awaiting to attend a graduate program, but since it is more than 30 days before the new program start date, the new SEVIS record is in initial status. Therefore, while still legally in the country, the student has no active record in SEVIS and cannot receive a SAVE verification for a product such as a driver's license or Social Security card.

This issue **also** affects nonimmigrants who are transferring or changing education levels (and have NOT graduated) during a long break and have an active SEVIS record. However, because they are in between programs, many states cannot verify these students in SAVE. There are two reasons for this as follows:

1. SAVE can **only** verify a nonimmigrant in active status **and** within a program start date and end date.
2. Many states do not recognize the 60-day grace period or have specific length requirements (i.e., a nonimmigrant must have six or more months remaining in a program in order to receive a product).

SEVP is currently working with USCIS and SAVE to find a work-around for this issue until the launch of SEVIS II where this will no longer be an issue. In some cases, the transfer-out school may be able to hold onto the nonimmigrant's SEVIS record during the summer vacation and release it 30 or fewer days before the new program start date. This way, the nonimmigrant has no gap in active SEVIS status.

SEVP will send a broadcast message when there is an update to this issue.

Change of Status Issue (H-1B Issue)

SEVP, SAVE and USCIS are aware of an issue affecting some former F and J nonimmigrants who have changed status, specifically to an H-1B status, and are unable to receive a SAVE verification when applying for a benefit.

This issue is due to a problem in USCIS's CLAIMS 3 database. USCIS is aware of the problem and the release of CLAIMS 4 should resolve this issue. In the meantime, SEVP is working closely with SAVE and USCIS to find a workaround. There is currently no timetable for resolution.

Affected former F or J nonimmigrants should contact SEVP using the [Contact Information](#) below.

F-2 Dependents Issue When F-1 is on Post-Completion OPT or STEM OPT

SEVP and SAVE are aware of an issue which inhibits F-2 dependents from receiving an initial SAVE verification when the primary F-1 is on post-completion OPT or STEM OPT. SAVE and SEVP are currently working on a permanent solution. Until that time, please follow the following suggestions:

1. F-2 nonimmigrants should go to the DMV with the primary F-1 nonimmigrant.
2. The F-1 nonimmigrant should accompany the F-2 nonimmigrant when applying for a benefit such as a driver's license or Social Security card.
3. Bring all documents, including, but not limited to, the primary and dependent's Forms I-94, Forms I-20, F-1 nonimmigrant's EAD card, any other required documents, etc. to the DMV office.
4. Explain to the DMV customer service representative that this is a known issue and, if needed, ask to speak with a supervisor.
5. Explain that an initial verification in SAVE will not work. Verification may only succeed via a secondary or third-level verification (note: a third-level verification may take up to 90 days to complete).

If the suggestions above do not work, please see the [Contact Information](#) section below in order to request assistance.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Contacting SEVP

An F, M, or J nonimmigrant, DSO or RO, with further questions not addressed in this document, should contact SEVP at DMVSSA.SEVP@DHS.gov and/or the USCIS SAVE program at SAVE.help@DHS.gov. For questions about a specific state's motor vehicle policy, please contact that state directly.

For general SEVP policy questions, contact the SEVP Response Center at 703-603-3400 or SEVP@DHS.gov.

Problem Resolution Requests

If an F, M or J nonimmigrant applies for a driver's license or ID and the DMV is unable to issue a product, the DSO or RO should e-mail SEVP (DMVSSA.SEVP@DHS.GOV) for assistance. In the e-mail's subject line, write: DMV Issue – (name of the state). In the body of the e-mail, please provide the following information:⁵

1. SEVIS ID
2. Family name
3. First name
4. Date of Birth (DOB)

⁵ For problem resolution of accompanying dependent applications, include information of the primary visa holder.

5. Form I-94 admission number (11 digits)
6. Applicant's address (required), phone number (required), and e-mail
7. Address of the DMV office where problem occurred
8. Date of the latest DMV office visit
9. SAVE case number or Form I-797A receipt number (if available)
10. Alien registration number (9-digit A number, if available)
11. Current driver's license/ID/customer number and/or DMV receipt number (if available)
12. Explanation of the problem

Once SEVP receives the e-mail, a representative will review the case. Based on the information in SEVIS, the representative may contact the DSO directly and explain why the student cannot receive a driver's license or state ID card. In all other cases, the SEVP representative will send an e-mail to a state DMV and request a review of the case. Officials at the state DMV office generally contact the nonimmigrant directly with further information upon case resolution. If, however, the DMV contacts SEVP, SEVP will contact the stakeholder directly.

NOTE: If this is for a change of status case, for example an F-1 becoming an H-1B, **please include a scan of the Form I-797A.**

State DMV Website Information

- Alabama www.dps.state.al.us
- Alaska doa.alaska.gov/dmv/akol
- Arizona www.azdot.gov/mvd
- Arkansas www.dfa.arkansas.gov/offices/driverServices
- California www.dmv.ca.gov
- Colorado www.colorado.gov/revenue/dmv
- Connecticut www.ct.gov/dmv
- Delaware www.dmv.de.gov
- Florida www.flhsmv.gov
- Georgia www.dds.ga.gov
- Guam www.guamtax.com
- Hawaii www.stateid.hawaii.gov
- Idaho itd.idaho.gov/dmv/driverservices/ds.htm
- Illinois www.sos.state.il.us/services/services_motorists.html
- Indiana www.in.gov/bmv
- Iowa www.dot.state.ia.us/mvd

- Kansas www.ksrevenue.org/vehicle.htm
- Kentucky transportation.ky.gov/drlic
- Louisiana omv.dps.state.la.us
- Maine www.maine.gov/sos/bmv/licenses/getlicense.html
- Maryland www.mva.maryland.gov/Driver-Services/Apply/international.htm
- Massachusetts www.massdot.state.ma.us/rmv
- Michigan www.michigan.gov/sos/0,1607,7-127-1627---,00.html
- Minnesota www.dps.state.mn.us/dvs
- Mississippi www.ms.gov/hp/drivers/license
- Missouri dor.mo.gov/motorv
- Montana doj.mt.gov/driving
- Nebraska www.dmv.state.ne.us
- Nevada www.dmvnv.com/nvdl.htm
- New Hampshire <http://www.nh.gov/safety/divisions/dmv>
- New Jersey www.state.nj.us/mvc
- New Mexico www.mvd.newmexico.gov
- New York www.nydmv.state.ny.us
- North Carolina www.ncdot.org/DMV
- North Dakota www.dot.nd.gov
- Ohio www.bmv.ohio.gov
- Oklahoma www.dps.state.ok.us/dls
- Oregon www.oregon.gov/ODOT/DMV
- Pennsylvania www.dmv.state.pa.us/centers/licenseIDCenter.shtml
- Rhode Island www.dmv.ri.gov
- South Carolina www.scdmvonline.com/DMVNew
- South Dakota dps.sd.gov
- Tennessee www.state.tn.us/safety
- Texas www.txdps.state.tx.us/DriverLicense
- Utah publicsafety.utah.gov/dld
- Vermont dmv.vermont.gov/licenses
- Virginia www.dmv.state.va.us
- Washington www.dol.wa.gov
- Washington, DC dmv.dc.gov
- West Virginia www.transportation.wv.gov
- Wisconsin www.dot.state.wi.us/drivers
- Wyoming www.dot.state.wy.us