Applying for a Social Security Number

What is a Social Security Number (SSN)?
- Your nine-digit SSN is your link with Social Security. It helps the Social Security Administration (SSA) accurately record your wages or self-employment earnings.
- You need an SSN to get paid once you have a job and to pass a background check, which is required for some positions in the United States.

Do I need a Social Security Number?
- YES, if:
  - You have been approved for CPT or OPT.
  - You have been approved for change of status to H1B.
  - You have been approved for any other form of work authorization.
- NO, if:
  - You have no form of work authorization.
  - You are applying for a Mass State ID or Drivers’ License.
  - You are applying for an apartment or anything else that requires a background check.

Can I get a Social Security Number without work authorization?
- No. You can instead get a Rejection Letter from the SSA.
  - This letter will spare you the trouble of explaining to other government and non-government offices why you don’t have an SSN.

How do I apply for a Social Security Number or a Rejection Letter?
1. Gather all of your identification documents. You will need:
   a. Your current I-20, showing your CPT or OPT authorization, if applicable;
   b. Your current, unexpired passport;
   c. Your visa;
      i. If you changed status in the U.S., take your I-797C Approval Notice as well.
   d. Your I-94. If you don’t have an I-94 in your passport, please visit https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html to retrieve your electronic I-94
   e. Proof of your U.S. address.
      i. Any official document showing your name and your U.S. residential address.
      ii. Your Cambridge College bill, your apartment lease, a phone/utility bill, etc.
2. Visit the Social Security Administration that is most convenient for you. You can do a search by postal zip code here: https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp
3. Wait for your Social Security card to arrive. This takes 2-4 weeks, normally.
4. Keep the card safe at home. Do NOT keep it in your wallet. Do NOT send a copy to the International Office. Memorize your number, and keep the card safe!
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- **My Social Security card says “Valid only with DHS Authorization.” What does that mean?**
  - This means that your SSN is only active when you have work authorization.
  - You can keep the same SSN at all times. It will activate when you are approved for CPT, OPT, H1B, or any other employment authorization.

- **When can I apply for an SSN?**
  - You can apply for your SSN as soon as you are approved for work authorization.
  - Because your card will be notated “Valid only with DHS Authorization,” you can apply for and receive your SSN before your employment authorization begins.
    - If you are told otherwise by a Social Security Administration employee, please show them this paper. If they would like to contact the International Student Office, please ask them to call 617-873-0169. I will be happy to explain your situation to them.

Some helpful links:

- Social Security Administration office locator: [https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp](https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp)
- Applying for CPT with Cambridge College: [http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/curricular-practical-training-cpt](http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/curricular-practical-training-cpt)
- Applying for OPT with Cambridge College: [http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/optional-practical-training-opt](http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/optional-practical-training-opt)

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