

# Steps to Apply for DACA for the First Time

(Last updated December 2, 2022) – On July 16, 2021, a Texas federal court ruled that DACA is [illegal](#). While USCIS can accept first-time applications, this decision prevents USCIS from approving or processing them. Therefore, if you choose to submit a first-time application, you will not get a response on this application or be refunded for the application fee. You should consult with an accredited representative or lawyer if you have additional questions about submitting a first-time application, as there may be risks and benefits to doing so. [Learn More](#)

## Overview

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”) program was created through an executive order issued on June 15, 2012 by President Obama. DACA gives eligible undocumented immigrants:

- temporary deportation protection, and;
- a work permit that allows them to get a social security number.

Like other important policy changes, the DACA program was not a result of an overnight decision. DACA was made possible by many years of struggle and a movement led by undocumented young people.

DACA is a temporary solution that is a crucial first step in the right direction, but because it is not a lawful status and could be changed or terminated at any time, we encourage individuals to get involved in advocating for the passage of a permanent solution.

For an overview of possible long-term immigration options, check out our guide [Beyond DACA: Immigration Options Every Undocumented Person Should Know](#).

You can also use Immigrants Rising’s free, anonymous, and online [Immigration Legal Intake Service](#) to help you understand your eligibility for DACA and long-term immigration options.

**Read on to learn more about how to successfully submit a DACA application for the first time.** If you are renewing your DACA, check out [Steps to Renew DACA](#).

## 1. Understand Your Eligibility for DACA

It’s important to learn as much as you can about DACA to figure out whether it makes sense for you to apply.

First, you’ll want to confirm that you’re eligible for DACA. To be eligible, you must:

- Have been under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012
- Have entered the U.S. before you turned 16 years old
- Have continuously resided in the U.S. since June 15, 2007, up to the present time
- Have been physically present in the U.S. on June 15, 2012, and at the time you are applying for DACA
- Have had no lawful status on June 15, 2012
- Currently enrolled in school (or have returned to school), graduated, obtained certificate of completion (e.g. GED), OR be an honorably discharged U.S. veteran
- Have not been convicted of a felony offense, a significant misdemeanor offense, multiple misdemeanor offenses, or otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety

## 2. Get Legal Advice

We recommend you consult with an immigration attorney or a Department of Justice accredited representative before you decide whether to apply. They can help you weigh the benefits and risks of applying for DACA.

For tips on how to find an attorney, check out our [Getting Legal Help](#) resource.

## 3. Gather Your Application Documents

Carefully review the official [USCIS instructions](#) for gathering your pre-application documents.

Below is a summary of what you'll need. DO NOT send original documents, as they will not be returned:

- Two (2) passport-style photographs (for the Employment Authorization application) with your name and date of birth written on the back
- Copy of foreign passport biographic page and any prior visa & I-94 cards (if available)
- Copy of original birth certificate and translation OR unexpired passport
- Copy of every criminal and/or traffic court case on record (if applicable)
  - Every incident/arrest/police report
  - Every criminal complaint/charging document from the district attorney (or other prosecutor)
  - Every final criminal court disposition record. That is the final ruling from the judge in your case stating the outcome after settlement, trial, or dismissal
  - Post-conviction showing that you completed all terms of probation/sentence.
- Copy of school records, such as:
  - Proof of Enrollment
  - Report Cards and/or Transcripts
  - School Identification Card(s)
  - Awards from high school (and college, if applicable)
  - Copy of high school diploma or GED certificate (if applicable)
- Proof of entry prior to age 16, continuous residence in U.S. since June 15, 2007 and presence on June 15, 2012, such as:
  - Federal Income Tax Returns or Tax Transcripts (filed independently or as a dependent)
  - Employment records, letters from internships & volunteer work, medical records
  - Leases, rental receipts, other dated receipts, utility bills, cell phone bills
  - Bank statements, credit card statements, copies of canceled checks
  - Birth certificates of children and/or siblings born in the U.S. for the stated period
  - Affidavits from relatives, friends, teachers, and churches attesting to your presence
  - Photographs placing you in the U.S. since the age of 16 & since 2007

## 4. Prepare Your DACA Application Fees

The total application fee for DACA is **\$495**. Starting April 1, 2024, the cost to file DACA online will increase to \$555 and \$605 to file on paper. Due to USCIS' uncertain withdrawal time, money orders and cashier's checks are recommended, but personal checks are accepted. Checks must be made payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland

Security.” Do not abbreviate. Cash is not accepted.

Fee exemptions are available but only to people who meet the stringent requirements.

### **Financial Assistance:**

Reach out to your local immigrant rights organizations and legal service providers to find out if they have any DACA fee assistance available.

Other organizations have established loan programs to cover the cost of applying for DACA:

- [Mission Asset Fund](#) provides a 0% interest, credit-building immigration loan in California to help pay for the DACA fee
- [Self-Help Credit Union](#) has a DACA loan program to help individuals pay for the DACA fee and other application costs

## **5. Download the Correct Application Forms From USCIS**

USCIS will reject applications that use outdated forms, so it is important to use current application forms. Please [visit the USCIS website](#) to find the following forms in their current versions: (1) Form I-821D, (2) Form I-765; (3) Form I-765WS; and (4) Form G-1145.

## **6. Fill Out the Application Accurately**

Please refer to USCIS’ Form I-821D Instructions, which can be found [here](#).

- Tips for filling out your application:
- Write your name and date of birth the same way on each form.
- Answer all questions completely and accurately.
- Provide all required supporting documentation and evidence.
- If you are filing on paper, USCIS prefers you type your answers into the form and then print it. If you are filling out your form by hand, use **black ink**. If you make a mistake, please start over with a new form.
- If you are filing online, visit [this page](#) for more information.
- Copy/Scan/Save to your drive your entire application for your records.
- Label your photographs with your full name and date of birth.
- Sign all forms.

## **7. Create a Cover Letter (For Paper Filings Only)**

A cover letter is useful for the USCIS agent reviewing your application to overview the application package at a glance and serves as a checklist for you. Please refer to [United We Dream’s sample cover letter](#) as a starting point.

## **8. Prepare and Send Your Application**

When sending your application, it is advised that you (1) do not have the forms stapled (paper clips are preferred) and (2) have it compiled in the following order:

1. \$495 if you file before April 1, 2024
2. \$555 Fee if filing online and \$605 for a paper filing after April 1, 2024
3. Cover Letter

4. Completed Form G-1145
5. Completed Form I-821D
6. Completed Form I-765
7. Completed Form I-765WS
8. Copies of any supporting evidence

The location of the USCIS facility receiving your application will differ based on where you reside. Please use the [USCIS reference guide](#) to find the correct location.

We highly recommend that you select a delivery option that allows you to track your package.

## 9. Track the Status of Your Application

**E-Notification Confirmation:** If you filled out [Form G-1145](#) you should receive a one-time e-Notification when your application has been received by USCIS.

**Paper Receipt Confirmation:** You should also receive a paper receipt in the mail within 1-4 weeks of sending your DACA application even if you requested an E-Notification.

You can track the progress of your DACA application [online here](#). You may check manually each time or create an account with [my.uscis.gov](#) and enable push notifications.

## 10. Attend a Biometrics Appointment

Within four (4) months of getting your DACA receipt, you should get an appointment notice to visit an Application Support Center (ASC) to have your biometrics taken. Make sure to bring a valid government-issued photo ID (e.g. your passport) to your appointment.

## 11. Look Out for a Possible Request for Evidence (RFE)

If anything is missing from your application, or if USCIS has questions, you may be mailed a “Request for Evidence” (RFE). You will need to respond to this RFE with additional proof by the deadline given. If you ignore this request, your case will be automatically denied.

## 12. Await Notification of DACA Approval

The application processing time can take several months. You can track the processing times of all DACA applications [here](#).

If your DACA is approved, you will receive a work authorization card valid for [two \(2\) years](#).

## 13. Prepare for Your DACA Renewal

**Remember:** DACA is temporary and you would need to renew it every two years. Read our [Steps to Renew DACA](#) to learn how you can prepare for your renewal.

**You got this! We wish you great success in pursuing DACA and other long-term immigration options!**