

KEY DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION

Once you determine which colleges and universities you would like to apply to, you need to make sure you have all the documents required to complete each college application. The following documents are important to have on hand. You will need some for personal reference. Others you will submit directly to colleges as part of your application. Still others you will be required to provide after you are accepted but before you begin school. Consider keeping copies of all of these documents in your portfolio for easy reference as you complete applications.

- Birth certificate
- Social Security card
- State identification card (ID) or state driver's license
- Official high school transcript or HSE certificate and scores
- Sealed, official transcripts from any colleges you previously attended
- Unofficial transcripts (for personal reference)
- Personal statements
 - Professional and academic references
 - Resume
 - Rap sheet (for personal reference)
- Immunization records

You may need to pay a fee to acquire some of these documents. It's always a good idea to see if the fee can be waived if you are unemployed, under-employed, or considered low-income.

If you are currently incarcerated and are not permitted to keep documents with you, speak to your counselor to see if they can keep these documents in your file until you are released.

You may have gone by different names at different periods of your life. It is important to use the name that appears on your birth certificate when completing all forms and applications.

When using websites to obtain official documents related to your identity, be sure to check the domain designation of the web address that you are using.

A domain name is reflected by the last 3 letters associated with a web address and includes .com, .edu, .org, and .gov to name a few. Personal identity documents should come directly from government agencies. The websites of government agencies end in “.gov” for government. An example is **www.ed.gov**, the website of the U.S. Department of Education. Be wary of websites that end in other abbreviations—these websites may represent private companies looking to charge extra fees and profit from your document request, or they may be trying to steal your personal information.

BIRTH CERTIFICATE

Your birth certificate will be helpful when you are trying to obtain other forms of identification like a Social Security card, state ID card, or driver's license after your release. You must pay a fee to obtain an official copy of your birth certificate. You will need to obtain your birth certificate from the state where you were born. Fees vary by state.

Like the process of obtaining a copy of your Social Security card, you will need to prove your identity to obtain a copy of your birth certificate. There are many ways to prove your identity, including using a copy of your inmate ID and release papers if you do not yet have other forms of identification available.

IF YOU WERE BORN IN ANY OF THE FIVE BOROUGHS OF NEW YORK CITY:

You can order a copy of your birth certificate by mail by completing the Birth Certificate Form and submitting it to the address indicated on the form. A copy of this form is available in **Appendix E** for reference. A printable version of this form can be found on the internet at: www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/vr/birth1.pdf. It costs \$15 to order a birth certificate by mail.

Alternatively, you can order your birth certificate online by following the link on the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's website at www.nyc.gov/site/doh/services/birth-certificates.page.

Be aware that this city agency uses a private company to help process these requests. Because the link is embedded in a government website, the company and the link are considered safe and can be trusted. It costs \$23.30 to order a birth certificate online.

If you have questions, you can contact the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene by calling **311**, or **1 (212) NEW YORK (639 9675)** if you are calling from outside New York City.

IF YOU WERE BORN IN NEW YORK STATE BUT OUTSIDE OF NEW YORK CITY:

You can order a copy of your birth certificate by mail by completing the Mail-in Application for Copy of Birth Certificate form and submitting it to the address on the form. A copy of this form is available in **Appendix F** for your reference. A printable version of this form can be found on the internet at: www.health.ny.gov/forms/doh-4380.pdf. It costs \$30 to order a birth certificate by mail.

Alternatively, you can order your birth certificate online by following the link on the NYS Department of Health website at www.health.ny.gov/vital_records/. Be aware that this state agency uses a private company to process these requests. Because the link is embedded in a government website, the company and the link are considered safe and can be trusted. It costs \$53 to order a birth certificate online.

The NYS Department of Health does not offer a phone number where questions can be answered, as they prefer to direct people to their website. Additional information on the ordering process can be found at the NYS Department of Health website at: www.health.ny.gov/vital_records/birth.htm.

IF YOU WERE BORN IN A STATE OTHER THAN NEW YORK:

You will need to get your birth certificate from the record-keeping department of the state where you were born. The federal government maintains a list of where to find these departments at: www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/index.htm.

SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

Your Social Security number is required to access social services and apply for college, financial aid, and employment opportunities. While you rarely are required to display the card, having a physical card can be useful in obtaining other forms of ID such as a passport or driver's license, or for proving that you can work legally in the United States. If you have lost your Social Security card and need to get a new copy, you will be required to show proof of age and identity. Typically, a copy of your birth certificate and a state ID card are required. Social Security cards are made available free of charge.

- If you are in prison, ask your counselor for help getting a copy of your Social Security card. The U.S. Social Security Administration will not accept an application directly from an incarcerated person, so you must have a corrections staff member help you obtain a copy.
- If you are no longer incarcerated, you can complete an Application for a Social Security card. A printable version of this form can be found on the internet at: www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf
- Once you complete this form, mail it or bring it into a Social Security office near you to request a copy of your Social Security card. You can also request a form by calling the Social Security Administration at **1 (800) 772-1213**.

- To find a Social Security office near you use the office locator at: www.ssa.gov/locator/.
- You can also request a copy of your Social Security card online at: www.ssa.gov/myaccount/
- To request a copy of your card online, you must first create an account to establish your identity. As with all online accounts, be sure to keep a record of your login information in your portfolio.

NEW YORK STATE IDENTIFICATION CARDS

Typically, schools require students to prove their identity with a valid state ID, state driver's license, or passport before the school will issue a student ID, which gives them access to campus resources. Below are the steps for obtaining a state ID in New York, which will also be useful when applying for employment or opening a bank account.

You will need to bring proof of identity documents establishing your name, birth date, social security number, citizenship, and residence to a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) location to obtain a New York State ID or driver's license. To find a DMV office near you, use the DMV locator online: www.dmv.ny.gov/offices or call 1 (718) 966-6155.

One proof of identity document you will have ready access to is your NYS DOCCS Released Offender Identification Card, which is given to you upon your release from prison and expires 120 days from your release date. Although this gives you 120 days to get a state ID or driver's license, ideally you should obtain a state ID card as soon as possible. Your DOCCS ID card is limited in its usefulness and forces you to disclose that you were recently released from prison. In addition to your DOCCS ID card you will also need to provide one of the following documents:

- Parole Release Papers or a letter from the Superintendent of the DOCCS facility you were released from
- U.S. birth certificate or tribal birth certificate from a federally recognized tribe
- Social Security card

If you have passed the 120-day period and your NYS DOCCS Released Offender ID card is no longer valid, you can use one of the following additional documents instead to prove your identity:

- U.S. birth certificate or tribal birth certificate from a federally recognized tribe
- U.S. Military Photo ID card
- Valid U.S. passport
- Out of state REAL ID or enhanced driver's license

There are other documents that you can use to establish your identity as well. A full list of all acceptable documents, as well as the steps for obtaining a New York State ID card or driver's license can be found online: www.dmv.ny.gov/id-card/non-driver-id-card.

PROOF OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION: HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY OR HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION

Documents verifying that you have completed high school or an equivalency degree are required for all college applications. If you completed a high school equivalency degree and are currently incarcerated, the education staff or your counselor at your facility may be able to help you obtain your diploma and accompanying scores.

A NOTE ON HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE TRANSCRIPTS

Throughout this guide we refer to "official" and "unofficial" transcripts. But what is an official transcript and how is it different from an unofficial transcript? In general, official transcripts are either sealed and watermarked (if printed on paper) or sent exclusively between educational institutions (if digital). An official transcript that has been opened, copied, or scanned and then sent to a new recipient becomes "unofficial." It is important for transcripts to be official so that the recipient can be sure the information is legitimate. Whenever possible, arrange to have your transcripts sent directly to the appropriate recipients so that you do not accidentally make them "unofficial."

HIGH SCHOOL TRANSCRIPTS

High schools keep records of students' diplomas and transcripts, which is a record of the courses you completed and the grades you received. Typically, an "official" transcript is required for college applications, but it is important to carefully review the application directions to be sure that you're providing all the information and documentation needed to complete the application correctly. High school transcripts from public schools are usually sent to graduates free of charge. To obtain an official copy of your high school transcript: