



Home > Services & Benefits > Employer Information

Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program

The Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program is responsible for administering programs involving customer access to information contained in the Verification Information System (VIS) database. This database is a nationally accessible database of selected immigration status information on over 60 million records.

The SAVE Program enables Federal, state, and local government agencies and licensing bureaus to obtain immigration status information they need in order to determine a non-citizen applicant's eligibility for many public benefits. The Program also administers employment verification pilot programs that enable employers to quickly and easily verify the work authorization of their newly hired employees.

This page provides the following information:

Immigration Status Verification for Benefit Issuing Agencies

Legal Basis

Secondary Verification

Employment Verification Pilot Programs

E-Verify

Designated Pilot

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Benefits/Entitlements

Employment Verification Pilots

If you have questions or need additional information on any of the topics found on the SAVE web site, please contact the SAVE Program at 1-888-464-4218. Thanks for your interest in our program.

Immigration Status Verification for Benefit Issuing Agencies

The Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program is an intergovernmental information-sharing initiative designed **to aid eligibility workers in determining a non-citizen applicant's immigration status**, and thereby ensure that only entitled non-citizen applicants receive Federal, state, or local public benefits and licenses. The SAVE Program is an information service for benefit issuing agencies, institutions, licensing bureaus, and other entities. The **SAVE Program does not make determinations on any non-citizen applicant's eligibility** for a specific benefit or license.

LEGAL BASIS

Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), P.L. 99-603, which required the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (now Department of Homeland Security (DHS), effective March 1, 2003) to establish a system for verifying the immigration status of non-citizen applicants for, and recipients of, certain types of federally funded benefits, and to make the system available to Federal, state,

and local benefit issuing agencies and institutions that administer such benefits. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is the DHS agency responsible for administering the SAVE Program. The IRCA, as amended, mandates the following programs and overseeing agencies to participate in the verification of an applicant's immigration status: the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Program, the Medicaid Program, and certain Territorial Assistance Programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services); the Unemployment Compensation Program (U.S. Department of Labor); Title IV Educational Assistance Programs (U.S. Department of Education); and certain Housing Assistance Programs (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development).

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), P.L. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2168, also required that the Attorney General establish regulations and interim guidance for the verification of immigration status of persons applying for "Federal public benefits". The Department of Justice issued interim guidance in 1997. See "Interim Guidance on Verification of Citizenship, Qualified Alien Status and Eligibility Under Title IV of [PRWORA]", 62 Federal Register 6,344-02 (Nov. 17, 1997). This guidance is for any entity administering a non-exempt Federal public benefit, other than non-profit charitable organizations, and is not limited to the agencies and programs specified in IRCA.

The PRWORA created a very complex set of eligibility requirements that cannot be easily summarized. These requirements continue to be regularly amended by Congress. The PRWORA did not affirmatively make any person eligible for any benefit. Rather, it placed a new set of limitations on non-citizen eligibility on top of any program-specific requirements (some of which may have limited non-citizen eligibility). With certain exceptions, PRWORA made non-citizens who are not "qualified aliens" ineligible for **Federal public benefits**, and aliens who are not qualified aliens, lawful nonimmigrants, or aliens paroled into the United States under Section 212(d)(5) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) for less than one year ineligible for **state or local public benefits**. There are also limitations on the eligibility of qualified aliens for certain benefits, again with exceptions.

The PRWORA, as amended by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), P.L. 104-208, and the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA), P.L. 105-33, 8 U.S.C. 1642, defines a "qualified alien" as:

- an alien who is lawfully admitted for permanent residence under the INA;
- an alien who is granted asylum under Section 208 of the INA;
- a refugee who is admitted to the United States under Section 207 of the INA;
- an alien who is paroled into the United States under Section 212(d)(5) of the INA for a period of at least 1 year;
- an alien whose deportation is being withheld under Section 243(h) of the INA (as in effect prior to April 1, 1997) or whose removal has been withheld under Section 241(b)(3);
- an alien who is granted conditional entry pursuant to Section 203(a)(7) of the INA as in effect prior to April 1, 1980;
- an alien who is a Cuban/Haitian Entrant as defined by Section 501(e) of the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980; and
- an alien who has been battered or subjected to extreme cruelty, or whose child or parent has been battered or subject to extreme cruelty.

The PRWORA restrictions do not apply to all Federal, state, and local funded activities or programs; they apply only to non-exempt "Federal public benefits" and "state and local public benefits." Therefore, benefit providers should first determine whether the particular program they administer is providing a "Federal public benefit" or a "state and local public benefit" for which Title IV of PRWORA or other applied laws requires non-citizen eligibility. For example, emergency medical care and certain forms of disaster relief are exempt, as are other key benefits. If an agency requires further assistance in determining whether a specific benefit it administers is a Federal, state, or local public benefit, it should contact the overseeing Federal, state, or local Government agency, as that agency would be in the best position to make that determination.

With certain exceptions, the PRWORA defines "**Federal public benefit**" as:

- any grant, contract, loan, professional license, or commercial license provided by an agency of the United States or by appropriated funds of the United States; and
- any retirement, welfare, disability, public or assisted housing, post-secondary education, food assistance, unemployment benefit, or any other similar benefit for which payments or assistance are provided to an individual, household, or family eligibility unit by an agency of the United States or by appropriated funds of the United States.

- 5 The PRWORA's definition of "**state and local public benefit**" parallels the definition of Federal public benefit, except that it substitutes "state or local government" for "the United States." State or local public benefits do not include Federal public benefits; therefore, a benefit cannot meet both definitions. If a benefit qualifies as a "Federal public benefit," it is not a "state or local public benefit" regardless of whether state or local funding is also involved.

The IIRIRA requires the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, now Department of Homeland Security, to respond to inquiries by Federal, state, and local benefit issuing agencies and institutions seeking to verify or determine the citizenship or immigration status of any individual within the jurisdiction of the agency for any lawful purpose. The SAVE Program's automated and manual verification processes provide Federal, state, and local benefit issuing agencies and institutions with information which will assist them in determining an individual's eligibility under Title IV of PRWORA.

The REAL ID Act of 2005, Division B of Public Law 109-13, May 11, 2005, established certain minimum standards for the issuance of state-issued driver's licenses and state-issued identification cards in order for those documents to be acceptable for Federal purposes. To meet the requirements of the REAL ID Act, by May 11, 2008, states must, among other things, verify the lawful status of every driver's license and identification card applicant. Section 202(a) of the Act prohibits federal agencies from accepting for any official purpose after May 11, 2008, driver's licenses and identification cards issued by States not in compliance with the Act.

Section 202(c)(3)(C) of the Act mandates that all States enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the SAVE Program by September 11, 2005. The Act also requires that states be in full compliance by May 2008, in order to have their state-issued driver's licenses and state-issued identification cards recognized by the Federal government for official purposes. One provision is the routine verification of lawful status through the SAVE Program of all non-citizen applicants for a driver's license or state-issued identification card.

OTHER AGENCY SAVE PARTICIPANTS

While IRCA, as amended, only mandates selected programs to participate in SAVE, any Federal, state, or local benefit-granting authority or licensing bureau that requires verification of an applicant's/recipient's immigration status may apply for participation in the SAVE Program. The following are examples of agencies that presently participate in the SAVE Program with respect to non-mandated programs:

*Department of Defense Manpower Data Center
Social Security Administration (SSA)
Driver's Licensing Agencies in Arkansas, California, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, South Dakota, Virginia, and Wyoming
Mohegan Tribal Gaming Commission
City of New York Human Resources Administration
Palm Beach County Property Appraiser
Transportation Security Administration, HAZMAT Program
Office of Personnel Management
Federal Protective Service*

STATUS VERIFICATION PROCESS

Verification Information System (VIS), Customer Processing System (CPS)

The SAVE Program has reengineered the way it delivers immigration status verification information to Federal, state, and local benefit issuing agencies and licensing bureaus. This allows the user to make faster benefit eligibility determinations, which can result in cost savings to the Government and better service.

Available Access Methods

VIS-CPS Web 1

Once VIS-CPS Web 1 is accessed, the user enters the non-citizen's A-number to do the initial query against the VIS database, and within seconds, the system will respond with the non-citizen's immigration status/employment eligibility statement or a system message to "Institute Additional Verification." If the non-citizen's immigration status/employment eligibility statement is returned and no material discrepancies exist between the information returned from the VIS database and that on the non-citizen's immigration document, the verification is complete. The user can print the verification case data for its records, and close the case to remove it from its workload. When a user receives the "Institute Additional Verification" message or when material discrepancies exist between the immigration document, the user is provided a data entry screen to submit additional information electronically from the non-citizen's immigration document to an Immigration Status Verifier (ISV) for processing. Upon receipt of this information, the ISV processes the request for status

verification and electronically transmits the results to the User Agency. Internet access and a supported web browser (Internet Explorer 5.5 or newer, or Netscape 4.7 or newer, but not Netscape 7.0) are required to access the VIS-CPS database using the Web 1 access method. The Web 1 access method establishes a secure Internet connection to VIS-CPS.

VIS-CPS Web 2

VIS-CPS Web 2 is very similar to VIS-CPS Web 1 except that the User Agency must enter the additional information from the non-citizen's immigration document up-front with the initial query. This includes the non-citizen's A-Number, first, middle, and last names, date of birth, user case number, and the immigration document type and its expiration date. If the non-citizen's immigration status can be verified through the VIS database, the system will provide the status to the user within seconds. If the non-citizen's status cannot be verified through the VIS database and additional verification is required it is automatically electronically sent to an ISV for processing. The ISV retrieves and responds to the additional verification request the same way as they do for VIS-CPS Web 1. VIS-CPS Web 2 also allows a user to request additional verification when material discrepancies exist between the information returned from the VIS database and that on the non-citizen's immigration document. As with Web 1, Internet access and a supported web browser (Internet Explorer 5.5 or newer, or Netscape 4.7 or newer, but not Netscape 7.0) are also required to access the VIS-CPS database using Web 2. The Web 2 access method also establishes a secure Internet connection to VIS-CPS.

VIS-CPS Web 3

VIS-CPS Web 3 is also very similar to VIS-CPS Web 1. The only difference is that the user can run initial queries using A-Numbers or I-94 Arrival/Departure Numbers. The additional verification process works exactly the same as with VIS-CPS Web 1. Internet access and a supported web browser (Internet Explorer 5.5 or newer, or Netscape 4.7 or newer, but not Netscape 7.0) are also required to access the VIS-CPS database using Web 3. The Web 3 access method also establishes a secure Internet connection to VIS-CPS.

VIS-CPS SFTP Priority Batch

VIS-CPS Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) Priority Batch is another access method currently available and is a computer match between the VIS database and the User Agency and is only available to very high-volume users. Batch is similar to PC System 2 in that if the applicant's immigration status cannot be provided by the VIS database in the initial computer match, the additional verification request is automatically electronically sent to an ISV for processing. The ISV then retrieves and responds to the additional verification request the same as he or she does for all other VIS access methods, and the results file is transmitted back to the User Agency during the next hourly computer match upload. VIS-CPS SFTP Priority Batch requires Internet access, SFTP connectivity, and custom software for formatting queries and interpreting the output file.

VIS-CPS Web Services

VIS-CPS Web Services is the last available access method and functions like VIS-CPS Web 1 and 3. It allows user agencies to submit initial queries by A# or I# and to request additional verification when directed by a VIS/CPS system message, or when material discrepancies exist between the information returned from the VIS database and that on the non-citizen's immigration document. The additional verification process works exactly the same as with all other VIS-CPS access methods. VIS-CPS Web Services is program-to-program communication between the user agency and VIS-CPS using a secure protocol over the Internet, allowing the user agency's program to submit verification requests and receive responses. Internet access and commercial off-the-shelf software that enables development of a client web service application is required.

Manual Verification

SAVE verification is also available through a manual process if the use of VIS/CPS is not cost-effective. The SAVE Program also requires participating agencies, institutions, and other entities to use manual verification when directed by an VIS/CPS system message, or when the automated check or initial inspection of an applicant's/recipient's documentation, or information provided from such documentation, reveals material discrepancies. To conduct a manual verification, user agencies complete the Document Verification Request (Form G-845), attach copies of the non-citizen's immigration documentation, and mail it to their local immigration status verification office. Once the immigration status verification office receives and processes the Form G-845, it is returned to the User Agency via the U.S. Postal Service.

VERIFICATION INFORMATION SYSTEM (VIS)

**CUSTOMER PROCESSING SYSTEM (CPS)
ACCESS METHODS, TRANSACTION CHARGES, AND REQUIRED
EQUIPMENT**

Effective October 1, 2008

The SAVE Program is adjusting its pricing. A uniform rate of \$0.50 will apply to each request submitted electronically, with an additional \$0.50 charge if the case is referred for additional verification. A rate of \$2.00 will apply to each initial verification request submitted via the paper-based Form G-845, Document Verification Request.

The Current SAVE Cost Model (effective April 1, 2005 - October 1, 2008)

ACCESS METHOD	TRANSACTION CHARGES	EQUIPMENT REQUIRED
Web-Based (Web 1, 2, and 3)	Initial Verification - \$0.26 Additional Verification - Additional \$0.48	Personal Computer with Internet Access and a supported web browser (Internet Explorer 5.5 or newer, or Netscape 6.0 or newer, but not Netscape 7.0)
Computer Matching (SFTP Priority Batch)	Initial Verification - \$0.20 Additional Verification - Additional \$0.24	Internet access and Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) connectivity. Custom software needed for formatting queries and interpreting the output files.
Web Services	Initial Verification - \$0.20 Additional Verification - Additional \$0.24	Internet Access and commercial off-the-shelf software that enables development of a client web service application.

NOTE: A minimum monthly service fee of \$25.00 is automatically billed to user agencies whose VIS query volume totals do not exceed \$25.00. However, if no query of VIS is completed during the month, there is no charge.

SAVE PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

To join the SAVE Program and acquire access to VIS-CPS to perform immigration status verification, an agency must first establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the SAVE Program, and then establish a purchase order with the SAVE Program contractor to pay for VIS-CPS transaction fees. Access to SAVE is subject to USCIS resource limitations or other legal or policy criteria. To request participation in SAVE and to begin the MOU process, please access the following website to register: <https://www.vis-dhs.com/agencyregistration>

For additional information regarding the SAVE Program, please call 1-888-464-4218, or write to:

USCIS Save Program
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, SW, Suite 7112
Washington, DC 20024-2135

SAVE Program Employment Verification Pilot Programs

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 required the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the Social Security Administration to conduct three employment verification pilot programs: E-Verify, the Citizen Attestation Pilot, and the Machine-Readable Document Pilot programs. Since the INS became part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on March 1, 2003, the pilot programs now fall under the jurisdiction of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service's (USCIS) Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program. These pilot programs are the only means available for employers to verify the information that their newly hired employees have provided on the Form I-9 attesting that they are authorized to work in the United States.

- † The SAVE program is no longer recruiting for the Machine-Readable Document or the Citizen Attestation Pilot programs as those pilots ended in May and June 2003, respectively.

SAVE Program Frequently Asked Questions

BENEFITS/ENTITLEMENTS

Q: What is the SAVE Program?

Answer: The Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program is an intergovernmental, information-sharing initiative designed to aid Federal, state and local benefit-issuing agencies and licensing bureaus in verifying a non-citizen applicant's immigration status, thereby ensuring that only eligible non-citizens receive public benefits and licenses.

Q: What is the cost of the SAVE program to the user?

Answer: The cost of access to the Verification Information System (VIS) Customer Processing System (CPS) varies by access method. There are currently five access methods available: Web-Based (Web-1, Web-2, Web-3); Computer Matching (SFTP Priority Batch); and Web Services. The transaction cost varies from \$.20 to \$.26 per query for an Initial Verification and from \$.24 to \$.48 for an Additional Verification.

Q: What is the system's response time?

Answer: For agencies using VIS-CPS, the response time for an Initial Verification is 3-5 seconds, and for an Additional Verification request, in most cases, is within 3-5 Federal government workdays.

For agencies using the manual verification method (Form G-845), the response time for mandated agencies is within 10 Federal government workdays from receipt by an Immigration Status Verification Unit and is negotiable with all other user agencies, usually within 20 working days.

Q: What are the procedures to sign a new agency into the program?

Answer: To join the SAVE Program and acquire access to VIS-CPS to perform immigration status verification, an agency must first establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the SAVE Program, and then establish a purchase order with the SAVE Program to pay for VIS-CPS transaction fees. To request participation in SAVE and to begin the MOU process, please access the following website to register: <https://www.vis-dhs.com/agencyregistration>

For additional information regarding the SAVE Program, please call 1-888-464-4218, or write to:

David H. Bounds
Chief, SAVE Program
USCIS Verification Division
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
470 L'Enfant Plaza East, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Q: What safeguards exist in the SAVE system to prevent benefit granting agencies and licensing bureaus from erroneously denying a benefit?

Answer: Under the SAVE program, a non-citizen is never denied a benefit or license based solely upon the response from an Initial Verification. An Additional Verification (automated or manual) procedure is in place as a precautionary measure.

Q: Does the SAVE Program provide information to Federal, state, and local benefit-issuing agencies and licensing bureaus to assist them in understanding the SAVE Program's role in the immigration status verification process?

Answer: Yes. The SAVE Program provides participating benefit issuing agencies and licensing bureaus with

user manuals, and conducts periodic user meetings to discuss the SAVE Program's role and address the Users' concerns. In addition, SAVE Program staff is available to answer questions either in writing or by telephone.

Q: Is the VIS-CPS database capable of providing the information that states and agencies will need?

Answer: The current SAVE Program can electronically verify the status of most lawful permanent residents as well as aliens in many other categories. For certain groups of non-citizens or when status cannot be verified immediately through an Initial Verification, the Additional Verification procedure (manual or automated) should be instituted. This additional verification ensures that all available DHS records systems can be checked and that benefits or licenses are not denied to eligible persons.

Q: For what programs do benefit providers have to verify an applicant's immigration status?

Answer: Verification is mandatory for Federal public benefit programs. State and local agencies may choose to verify immigration status for applicants for state and local public benefit programs.

Q: What can states do to verify status before a final regulation is issued on the new verification system?

Answer: The law does not address this issue; states can decide whether to rely on self certification, document review, or contacting the SAVE Program to explore the possibility of signing up with the SAVE Program which administers the current status verification system. States can also refer to the Interim Guidance on Verification published in the Federal Register on November 17, 1997.

Q: Can the SAVE Program verify sponsorship information?

Answer: Yes, the SAVE Program can supply state agencies with information that sponsors provided on the original Affidavit of Support, Form I-864, when requested through the VIS-CPS or by submitting the Document Verification Request, Form G-845S, along with the Document Verification Request Supplement, Form G-845 Supplement, to their local USCIS office.

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