

Rental Application Essentials: How Newcomers Can Use Alternative Documents

Understand standard rental application documents and identify newcomer documents that may be used as alternatives.

This guide provides an overview of the typical documents required by landlords or property managers when applying to rent a house or apartment. It highlights which documents newcomers might use as substitutes. While this resource helps identify potential alternatives, it's important to note that not all housing providers, especially larger corporate rentals, may accept these alternative documents. For best results, discuss your options directly with the housing provider and explain that these documents can legally serve as substitutes for traditional rental application materials.

Required for Rental Applications	Common Documents That Meet These Requirements	Alternative Documents for Newcomers	Document Overview: What It Is and How to Obtain It
Proof of identity		Driver's License or State ID card	<p>A card provided by a state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office. Once state requirements are met, newcomers can apply for a driver's license or a state ID card. Requirements vary by state, but generally need proof of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) identity: one of the documents cited below or a valid foreign passport (ii) residency: a lease and/or utility bill from the same address), and (iii) legal status: again, one of the documents cited below.
		I-94 Card issued by the U.S. Customs & Immigration Service (USCIS)	Document issued to you by USCIS. The I-94 is an important document for most non-U.S. citizens entering the U.S. It serves as proof of legal entry and records the date of arrival and the terms of admission.
		Travel Document	USCIS issues different types of travel documentation that can serve as proof of identity This includes: U.S. Passport, Permanent Resident Card (Green Card), Employment Authorization Document (EAD), Refugee Travel Document, Advance Parole Document, Temporary Protected Status Document, and more.
		Form I-766 Employment Authorization Card	Your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) with a C11 (an alien paroled in the U.S. in the public interest or temporarily for emergency reasons) category can serve as proof of identity.
		Form I-551 Permanent Resident Card (Green Card)	Officially known as Form I-551, this card provides proof of lawful permanent resident status. It is usually issued when refugees adjust their status after one year of residence.
		Social Security Number (SSN) and Card	Newcomers, including those with refugee status and certain other status that carries work authorization, can apply for a Social Security number.
		Passport	<p>You can share a copy* of your passport as proof of identity and citizenship or legal status in a foreign country.</p> <p>*Note: Never give anyone the original passport; share a paper copy or photo of it.</p>



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Criminal history report	Background check report		This report is obtained by landlord using your Social Security Number to access your credit history.
		Consular Certificate or Attestation	Newcomers can obtain a certificate or attestation from their Embassy or a Consulate in the U.S. This document states that they have no criminal history or that they are in good legal standing with their country of origin. This attestation can be used as proof of character and background.
		I-94 Card issued by the U.S. Customs & Immigration Service (USCIS)	This is an USCIS-issued document that refugees and asylum seekers receive following extensive background checks by U.S. and international agencies. It is issued before a person is admitted to the U.S. as documentation of refugee or asylum status, and it verifies that all due background checks are complete.
Rental history	Previous rent history		This information is requested on the rental application and, typically, a rental applicant shares previous addresses and landlord contact information. NOTE: Newcomers will not be able to provide this information, which is OK.
	References		Contact information of people who know you and can confirm that you will be a good tenant. Before you give others' names to a landlord, you should ask them if this is OK with them for you to name them as references. Possible references are these: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your manager at work Co-workers Your sponsor Airbnb host, if you stayed in an Airbnb on arrival Host family contact, if you lived with family on arrival
		Resettlement Agency Letter of Support	This is a letter from a resettlement agency telling the landlord or apartment building rental agent that you have support for renting in the U.S., and that the agency will support you if needed.
		Co-signer or Guarantor	The name of a lease co-signer, usually a friend or family member with a good credit history and rental experience, who agrees to take responsibility if you cannot pay your rent. The co-signer's credibility can help ease concerns about your lack of U.S. rent payment history.
		Proof of Income	Documents such as recent pay statements, bank statements showing regular deposits, or a job offer letter stating a start date and pay amount can help verify financial capacity to pay rent.
		Proof of Subsidy or Assistance Programs	Documentation verifying housing assistance, government subsidies, or support from a resettlement agency gives assurance that some or all of the rent will be covered by reliable sources.
		U.S. Sponsor Letter of Support	You can include a letter of support from your U.S. sponsor, especially if you lived with them.

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Proof of employment	Job offer letter		When you are offered a job, employers should give you with a written Offer Letter than includes employment start date, job title, and compensation (pay). If you do not have such a letter, ask your employer to provide one for use when applying to rent housing.
	Pay stubs		These are copies of your pay summary, which you get from your employer weekly, biweekly, or monthly when you are paid.
		Taxes Paid Documentation (W2 Form)	You will receive a W2 form from your employer(s) by mail each January to verify how much you earned and how much Federal, State, and local taxes you paid the prior year. You will use this to file an income tax return with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS). See information below about Income Tax Returns.
		Employment Contract or Agreement	This is a signed document from an employer that outlines the terms of employment, including job responsibilities, salary or hourly wage, and employment duration, if there is a specific end date. This is a formal indication of job security and expected income.
		Government Benefit Letters	Letters indicating eligibility for and receipt of government benefits such as unemployment insurance, Social Security benefits, or refugee resettlement assistance show stable source(s) of income, even if the income is not from traditional paid employment.
			Form I-766

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Ability to pay	Credit report		This might be an option if you already have a credit history. For example, if you have had an active credit card for at least 2 months, a landlord can check your credit report using your SSN number. NOTE: A check of you credit history can have an impact on your credit score.	
	Pay stubs		These are copies of your pay summary, which you get from your employer weekly, biweekly, or monthly, depending on when you are paid.	
	Job offer letter		When you are offered a job, employers should give you with a written Offer Letter than includes the start date of employment, job title, and compensation (pay) you will receive. If you do not have one, ask your employer to provide one so you can use it when applying to rent an apartment or house.	
	Employment Contract or Agreement			A signed contract from an employer that outlines the terms of employment, including job responsibilities, salary, and duration of employment. This provides a clear, formal indication of job security and expected income.
	Government Benefit Letters			Letters indicating eligibility for and receipt of government benefits such as unemployment insurance, Social Security benefits, or refugee resettlement assistance. Demonstrates a stable source of income, even if it is not from traditional employment.
		Commitment to Pay a High Deposit or Several Months' Rent in Advance		Some landlords might not require one or all of the usual documents (as above) if you offer to pay the first three months' rent in advance
	Income Tax Return			All wage earners must file Federal, State, and local income tax returns each year by April 15th for all income earned during the prior year. The completed forms will show if you paid enough, not enough, or too much in taxes. If you paid too much, you will receive money back; if you paid too little, you will need to pay more.
			Resettlement Agency Promissory Note	A Promissory Note is a signed document promising to pay a stated amount of money to a specified person (or the bearer of the Note) on a specific date or on demand. Some Resettlement Agencies provide these to newcomers to guarantee the landlord or rental property manager that the rent will be paid. If you are working with an agency, ask your case worker if the agency can provide one.