How to Avoid Getting Locked Out of Your USCIS Online Account

There are many benefits to having an online account with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). These include filing online, paying fees online, checking your case status, using secure messaging to communicate with USCIS, and viewing USCIS notices for your case, such as requests for evidence and decision notices.

However, if you get locked out of your USCIS online account and cannot reset your password on your own, USCIS may take 10 business days or more to reset it.

To avoid getting locked out and having to wait for USCIS to help, you can take steps to create and maintain a secure online account. Here are some tips on how to do so.

> This tip sheet is intended for people with individual online accounts. Some of the tips may not apply to representative online accounts.

How to create a secure account

- **Use an email address that only you can access**

  o Do not use an email address shared with family, friends, or others. Your USCIS online account is an individual account, only for you. Only you should be able to create and change your password.

  o Use an email address that you check regularly. Some USCIS communications require you to respond by a deadline. Check your online account regularly so you do not miss any important notices (and to help you remember your login information).

- **Create a long, strong password (or passphrase)**

  o Your password must be between 8 and 64 characters. Security experts indicate that longer passwords are harder to hack, and passwords that have 16 characters or more are considered the strongest.

  o Include all four types of characters in your password: (1) uppercase letters, (2) lowercase letters, (3) numbers, and (4) special characters such as an exclamation point ("!") or an ampersand ("&").

  o Use a password that is easy for you to remember but hard for other people to guess.

    - Use the first letter of every word of a quote or song lyric you love.
    - Make up a word and vary the capitalization of the letters.
    - Don't use words that can be found in a dictionary.
    - Don't reuse a password from another online account.

  o Use a passphrase instead of a password. Passphrases are a few randomly picked words that you can remember. Vary the capitalization, use at least one number, and add special characters in a way that is easy for you to remember.

    - *Example:* "r@ms GraZinG 1n rA!n"

- **Create strong answers to your security questions** (if these questions are used in your USCIS online account)

  o Pick an answer that has personal details that you can easily remember, and others cannot easily guess, such as your youngest sibling's middle name or the first concert you attended.

  o Your answers do not have to be based on details from your personal life.

    - *Example:* If the security question asks, "What was the name of your childhood pet?", responding with a phrase such as "I didn't have a pet" or "I prefer not to tell" are still valid security question responses.

- **Keep your passwords safe and private**
  - Consider using a password manager, which is an online service that can help you create strong passwords, save your passwords securely, and sign you into online services. A password manager can also store your responses to security questions.
  - Do not write your password down in a place where others can find it.
- **Save the backup code that USCIS emails you** when you sign up for an account.
  - Save the backup code on your device or password manager.
  - Every time you sign in to your USCIS online account, you will receive a text or email with a one-time verification code that you must enter to sign in. If you lose access to your email address or mobile phone, you can use this backup code instead of the required one-time verification code.

How to maintain your online account

- **Log in to your online account:**
  - **Regularly, such as once a month or once every few months.** This makes sure you have time to work with USCIS to unlock your account, if necessary, before you need to access it for your pending case(s).
  - **To update your information (such as changes to your mailing address) as soon as possible.** This makes sure you can always access your cases and that USCIS has the most current information to communicate with you.
- **Don't share your USCIS online account with others.**
  - If you have an attorney or accredited representative, they can use their own USCIS online account to monitor your case as long as there is a Form G-28, *Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Accredited Representative*, on file with USCIS for that pending case.
  - Your attorney or accredited representative cannot use your online account, even if they have a Form G-28 on file with USCIS for that case.
  - If you can see information in your USCIS online account that your attorney or accredited representative cannot see in their own USCIS online account, you can share that information with your representative *outside* of your account.

What to do if you forget your password or get locked out

If you enter your password incorrectly multiple times, you will get locked out of your USCIS online account for 20 minutes before you can try logging in again. If you cannot access your email or phone to get the one-time verification code and you do not remember the backup code USCIS gave you when you created your online account, you will not be able to log in to your USCIS online account. If you forget both your password and the answers to your security questions, you will not be able to create a new password.

If you find that you cannot access your USCIS online account, go to https://my.uscis.gov/account/v1/needhelp to ask USCIS' Technical Help Desk to reset your password or unlock your account. This process is not automated. It may take the Technical Help Desk's small team 10 days or more to process your request and email you password reset instructions.

For more information, go to USCIS' Password Resets and Technical Support page.

Remember! The CIS Ombudsman's office is not a part of USCIS. We cannot help you reset your password or unlock your USCIS online account but may be able to help with other issues while you are locked out of your account. Please visit our How to Submit a Case Assistance Request page to learn more about what we can and cannot help with and how to seek help from USCIS first.