

Diversity visa entrants have the option to self register after the lottery opens, or use a paid lottery service anytime during the year. This article will discuss the issues involved if you decide to enter *before* the U.S. State Department announces the official diversity visa lottery instructions.

The risk of entering before the official announcement is that a critical rule will change that renders your lottery application obsolete. If your birth country appears on the new visa-ineligible list, then your entry will be invalid. In this case, if you use lottery service and enter early in the year, they should list their policy for rule changes and refund your money. In a [previous article](#) we speculated that countries ineligible in 2008 will also be ineligible in 2009. However, there is no guarantee of this, nor is there any guarantee there will not be other changes that could affect your application.

For example, last year the [specifications for photographs](#) changed. If you submitted a registration in the older format before the official announcement, then your photograph was invalid and would have been rejected by the government system. Of course, if you used an ethical lottery service, they should have contacted you for a replacement photo if your digital image did not meet the new specifications..

The government could also mandate changes to personal eligibility requirements. For example, they could require all applicants to have a 4-year college degree. If so, this would be a very disruptive change that would invalidate *millions* of previously submitted applications. If you unknowingly use an fraudulent service they may not refund to your money--or worse, they may fail to even notify you of this change. If you paid in advance for more than one year and for additional add-on services such as "free" airline tickets, then you may lose a considerable sum of money.

Another complicating factor is that after the official State Department instructions are announced, lottery services need additional time to post the new rules on their web site and implement changes to their software that handle lottery entries. This introduces a delay of at least several days, rendering your application at risk during the transition.

Based on these considerations, the safest option is to just enter yourself at the official [U.S. State Department website](#)

after the lottery opens. But if you use a service, and there are several

[good reasons](#)

why you may prefer or even need to use one, then wait at least two weeks

*after*

the start of the lottery open registration period to enter. For example, if the lottery opens October 1, then enter after October 15. But do not wait too long because if there is a problem with your application, the service needs time to contact you and you need time to respond before the lottery closes, usually around December 1st. Definitely use a

[highly rated service](#)

, and never wait until the last week to enter since the government computers are usually overused and unavailable then.