

■ Guide: How to Get Pre-Approved for a Loan

Getting pre-approved is your first real step toward buying a home. Pre-approval shows sellers and real estate agents that you're serious, financially qualified, and ready to move forward.

■ 1. Check Your Credit

- Why it matters: Lenders use your credit score to determine if you're a trustworthy borrower.
- What to do:
 - - Pull your free credit report at annualcreditreport.com.
 - - Aim for a 640+ credit score.
 - - If you're under 640, you may qualify with 4 tradelines showing 12 months of on-time payments (utilities, phone bill, insurance, rent, etc.).

■ 2. Save for Upfront Costs

- Why it matters: Lenders want to see you're financially stable.
- What to do:
 - - Save at least 3 months of your estimated mortgage payment.
 - - Build up an emergency fund (savings cushion) in case of unexpected costs.

■ 3. Gather Your Documents

- Lenders will ask for paperwork to prove your income, assets, and history. Be ready with:
 - - Last 2 years of W-2s or 1099s (tax forms)
 - - Recent pay stubs (last 30 days)
 - - Bank statements (last 2–3 months)
 - - Proof of other income (side jobs, benefits, etc.)
 - - Rental history (12–24 months, if applicable)

■ 4. Choose a Lender

- Compare at least 3 lenders (banks, credit unions, mortgage companies).
- Ask about:
 - - Interest rates
 - - Loan programs (FHA, VA, conventional, etc.)

- - Closing costs
- - First-time homebuyer assistance programs

■ 5. Apply for Pre-Approval

- Fill out a lender's application (online or in person).
- They'll do a hard credit check.
- Expect to get a pre-approval letter showing how much you qualify for.

■ 6. Know What Pre-Approval Means

- Pre-approval is not a guarantee, but it's close.
- It's usually valid for 60–90 days.
- It tells real estate agents you're ready to buy.

■ 7. Pro Tips for Success

- Don't open new credit cards or make big purchases before closing.
- Keep making all your payments on time.
- Stay in touch with your lender if your income or debts change.

■ Bottom Line:

Pre-approval puts you in the driver's seat. It shows sellers you're serious, keeps your search realistic, and gets you one step closer to owning your home.