The Central Indiana

First-Time Homebuyer's Guide

Plain-English answers to the questions every first-time buyer in Indianapolis, Fishers, Carmel, Noblesville & beyond is asking.

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First, a quick note from me

Buying your first home is one of the biggest financial steps you'll ever take, and if it feels a little overwhelming, that's completely normal. After more than 30 years helping people across Central Indiana finance homes, I can tell you the buyers who feel calm and confident all have one thing in common: they understood their options before they started.

That's what this guide is for. No jargon, no sales pitch, just the honest basics, so you can make smart decisions for your situation. When you're ready for specifics, I'm always happy to talk. Even if you're months away from buying, it's never too early to ask a question.

Greg

How much do you really need to put down?

The biggest myth in home buying is that you need 20% down. You don't. On a conventional loan, 20% down simply lets you skip private mortgage insurance. It has never been a requirement to buy. Here's what's often possible, depending on the program and your situation:

- **Conventional loans:** as little as 3% down
- **FHA loans:** 3.5% down, with flexible credit guidelines
- **VA loans** (veterans & eligible service members): $0 down
- **USDA loans** (eligible areas): $0 down
- **Down payment assistance:** programs that may cover part of what is left

Translation: many buyers get into a home for far less up front than they expect. The right answer depends on your credit, your savings, and your plans, which is exactly the kind of thing we can sort out in a five-minute conversation.

Down payment assistance in Indiana

Indiana buyers may have access to down payment assistance, including statewide, regional, and lender-based options. The names and details change from year to year, but here are the kinds of help that are typically out there:

Type of help	What it can offer	Good to know
Forgivable second mortgages	Help toward your down payment, often a percentage of the purchase price	Often forgiven after you stay in the home for a set number of years
Down payment & closing-cost grants	Money toward your down payment or closing costs that generally does not have to be repaid	Income limits apply; annual funding is limited
First-generation buyer assistance	Extra help if you're the first in your family to own a home	Availability and terms change year to year

Important: these programs usually require a homebuyer education course and a small minimum contribution from you, and their funding and terms change from year to year. I keep up with what's actually available right now, so before you assume you do or don't qualify, just ask me.

Loan types, in plain English

- **Conventional:** the most common loan, and a good fit when your credit is solid. Private mortgage insurance can usually be removed once you reach 20% equity.
- **FHA:** more flexible credit and down payment requirements, and a strong first-home option.
- **VA:** for veterans and eligible service members; $0 down and no monthly mortgage insurance.
- **USDA:** $0 down for homes in eligible areas. Eligibility depends on the property's location, so ask me to check an address.
- **Jumbo:** for higher-priced homes above standard loan limits.

From renting to keys: the 7 steps

1. Talk to a lender first. A quick conversation tells you your budget and the smartest loan for you.

2. Get pre-approved. This makes your offer real to sellers, and it is far stronger than 'pre-qualified.'

3. Find your real estate agent & home. Shop with confidence inside your approved budget.

4. Make an offer. Your pre-approval helps it stand out.

5. Loan processing & appraisal. I handle the heavy lifting and keep you posted at every step.

6. Final approval. We clear any conditions together, so there are no last-minute surprises.

7. Closing day. Sign, get your keys, and welcome home.

5 mistakes to avoid

- Waiting to save a full 20% while rent and home prices keep climbing.
- House-hunting before getting pre-approved.
- Making big purchases or opening new credit during your loan process.
- Chasing the lowest advertised rate without looking at the full cost.
- Assuming you won't qualify, and never asking.

Let's talk, whenever you're ready

You don't need to have it all figured out to reach out. Bring your questions, your what-ifs, even your 'this is probably a dumb question' questions. After 30+ years, I've heard them all, and helping first-time buyers feel confident is my favorite part of this job.

There's no cost and no obligation to talk. Let's figure out what's possible for you.

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This guide is for general educational purposes and is not a commitment to lend or financial advice. Loan programs, rates, and assistance availability change and are subject to eligibility. Let's review your specific situation together.

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