THE FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER PLAYBOOK

SAN ANTONIO AND ALL OF TEXAS. VERIFIED SEPTEMBER 2026.

PREPARED BY

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THE MYTH THAT KEEPS RENTERS RENTING

YOU NEED 20% DOWN

Most people believe you have to save twenty percent of the purchase price before you can buy a home. On a $300,000 house that is $60,000, and believing it costs renters years.

That is a myth. The loans first-time buyers actually use run from zero down to 3.5% down, and Texas runs entire programs whose only job is covering that down payment for you. This guide walks you through both halves.

SECTION 1: THE LOANS THAT GET YOU IN

Before any assistance program enters the picture, the loan itself asks for far less than you think. Here is what the four main paths require up front.

VA AND USDA DOWN	CONVENTIONAL DOWN	FHA DOWN
$0	**3%**	**3.5%**

1. **FHA: 3.5% DOWN**

   The flexible-credit workhorse. 3.5% down with a credit score of 580 or above, and FHA is forgiving on thinner files while you are still building history.

2. **VA: 0% DOWN**

   If you served, this is usually the play: nothing down and no monthly mortgage insurance. There is a one-time funding fee that can roll into the loan, and it is waived entirely if you receive VA disability compensation.

3. **USDA: 0% DOWN**

   Nothing down in USDA-eligible areas. The catch is geography: eligibility is checked address by address, and around San Antonio the answer changes street by street. We run the address before you fall in love.

4. **CONVENTIONAL: 3% DOWN**

   First-time buyer conventional options go as low as 3% down, and one of them lets the entire down payment come from gifts and grants. That detail is what makes the assistance programs in the next section stack so well.

YOUR NEXT STEP

FULL LOAN COMPARISON GUIDE

Every program broken down side by side: down payments, credit fit, mortgage insurance, and who each loan is built for.

movingtexas.ai/loan-comparison-packet

SECTION 2: THE MONEY THAT COVERS YOUR DOWN PAYMENT

Texas runs real programs that hand first-time buyers the down payment: as a grant, as a second loan that forgives itself while you simply live in the house, or as a zero-payment second you repay only when you sell or refinance. Most buyers have never heard of any of them. Here is the landscape, statewide first, then San Antonio.

STATEWIDE PROGRAMS

STATE-CHARTERED NONPROFIT

TSAHC: HOME SWEET TEXAS

Assistance up to 5% of the loan. On government loans it can be an outright grant you never repay; on conventional it is a second lien forgiven after 3 years in the home. Credit floors around 620 to 640, income limits apply, and a homebuyer class is required. **You do not have to be a first-time buyer to use it.**

SAME MONEY, HIGHER INCOME CEILING

TSAHC: HOMES FOR TEXAS HEROES

The same mechanics, reserved for public school district teachers, aides, librarians, counselors and school nurses, police and public security officers, firefighters and EMS, corrections officers, veterans and active military, and nursing or allied health faculty. If you wear one of those hats, this track allows a higher income than Home Sweet Texas.

THE STATE AGENCY

TDHCA: MY FIRST TEXAS HOME

Up to 5% of the loan for down payment and closing costs, structured as a second lien that is either forgiven after 3 years or repaid when you sell or refinance. This one does require first-time status, with two exceptions: qualified veterans, and homes in federally targeted areas. A homebuyer class is required.

FOR EVERYONE ELSE

TDHCA: MY CHOICE + THE TAX CREDIT

My Choice Texas Home offers the same assistance with no first-time requirement at all. TDHCA also currently offers a Mortgage Credit Certificate, a federal tax credit on your mortgage interest. Supplies are limited and it comes and goes with funding, so ask before you count on it.

THE ONE NOBODY IN SAN ANTONIO MENTIONS

SETH: 5 STAR TEXAS ADVANTAGE

The name says Southeast Texas; the program covers nearly the whole state, San Antonio included. Up to 5% of the loan as a forgivable or deferred second, no first-time requirement, credit floor around 640, and their homebuyer course is online in English and Spanish.

THE HONEST ANSWER

WHICH ONE FITS YOU?

Your lender matches you to the program, not the other way around. The real work is picking a lender who actually runs these files. **I keep a short list of San Antonio lenders who close assisted loans every month.** Text me and I will connect you.

SAN ANTONIO LOCAL PROGRAMS

HIP 80 AND HIP 120

CITY OF SAN ANTONIO: HOMEOWNERSHIP INCENTIVE PROGRAM

The city's own program lends up to $30,000 on its lower-income tier and up to $15,000 on its higher-income tier, at zero interest with no monthly payment, and forgives it over 5 to 10 years while you live in the home. Two catches most articles skip. First, the property must sit inside San Antonio city limits, so a Bexar County address outside the line does not qualify. Second, the higher-income tier, HIP 120, never forgives a quarter of the loan: 25% comes due when you sell, refinance, or move out.

As of this writing the program is closed: it is not accepting FY2026 applications, and funding returns October 1, 2026 only if City Council renews it. Text me before you plan around it and I will tell you its status that week. If it is closed, the statewide programs above and the nonprofit below do not care about city funding cycles.

NHS OF SAN ANTONIO

A local nonprofit lending up to $12,000 as a deferred second for buyers in Bexar County and surrounding counties, with a credit floor around 580, the lowest in this guide. It works outside city limits, which makes it the natural fallback when the city line disqualifies you from HIP. First-time status is required and a homebuyer class comes with it.

THESE NUMBERS MOVE

Dollar caps, credit floors, and income ceilings in this section change without notice, and programs open and close with their funding. The city program above is the proof. Text me at 210-776-8854 and I will tell you what is current the week you ask.

YOUR NEXT STEP

NOT SURE WHICH PROGRAM FITS?

Start the intake and I will map your income, credit, and target area to the programs you actually qualify for.

movingtexas.ai/buyer-intake

SECTION 3: WHO COUNTS AS FIRST-TIME

THE 3-YEAR RULE

You are a first-time buyer if you have not owned, or held an ownership interest in, a principal residence during the last three years. A rental you never lived in does not break your status, and owning a decade ago does not count against you. The clock matters, not your history.

THE EXCEPTIONS

Federal rules restore first-time status for a displaced homemaker and for a single parent whose only ownership was with a former spouse. If your name was on a home during a marriage that ended, **you may still count as first-time.** Veterans and buyers in targeted areas skip the requirement under the state program.

> **The bigger point: several programs skip the question entirely.** Both TSAHC tracks, TDHCA's My Choice, and SETH have no first-time requirement at all. Do not rule yourself out of down payment help because you owned a home before. The label on this guide is broader than the rules underneath it.

SECTION 4: CREDIT, PAPERWORK, AND THE ONE CLASS

Every strong purchase starts months before the first showing. Three moves: gather the file, tune the credit, take the class.

GATHER THESE BEFORE YOU TALK TO A LENDER

- [ ] **LAST 2 YEARS OF W-2S**
  Plus tax returns if you are self-employed or have side income.
- [ ] **30 DAYS OF PAY STUBS**
  The most recent ones, all pages.
- [ ] **2 MONTHS OF BANK STATEMENTS**
  Every account you will draw from, all pages, even the blank ones.
- [ ] **GOVERNMENT-ISSUED ID**
  Unexpired.
- [ ] **YOUR CREDIT REPORT, PULLED BY YOU**
  Free weekly at annualcreditreport.com. Dispute errors before a lender pulls it.
- [ ] **LANDLORD AND ADDRESS HISTORY**
  Two years of addresses; lenders verify where you have lived.

CREDIT PREP THAT ACTUALLY MOVES THE SCORE

- Pay every bill on time from today forward. Payment history is the heaviest factor.
- Pay balances down below 30% of each card's limit. Below 10% is better.
- Do not close old cards. Age helps you.
- Do not open anything new. Every application dings you when you can least afford it.

TAKE THE CLASS ONCE, EARLY

Nearly every assistance program requires a homebuyer education course, and so do the 3%-down conventional loans when everyone on the loan is a first-timer. One HUD-approved course, about 8 hours, covers most of them; a couple, SETH among them, run their own online class instead, and we match the class to the program before you enroll. Do it early: **certificates expire, typically after about a year,** so a class from an old house hunt may not carry over.

SECTION 5: CLOSING COSTS ARE A SEPARATE BILL

The down payment is not the only cash the purchase asks for. Closing costs, the lender, title, appraisal, and escrow charges, generally run another 2% to 5% of the price, and they are due at the same table. **For lower-income first-time buyers the closing costs sometimes equal or exceed the down payment itself.**

THE GOOD NEWS

Every assistance program in Section 2 can put its money toward closing costs as well as the down payment, and sellers can be negotiated into paying a share of them. That negotiation is my job. Budget for both bills, then let us shrink them.

SECTION 6: THE TEXAS CONTRACT CLOCK

The offer gets accepted and two small checks immediately control everything. Texas contracts run on deadlines that do not care whether this is your first purchase.

DUE WITHIN 3 DAYS

THE OPTION FEE AND THE EARNEST MONEY

Both are due within 3 days after the contract's effective date. The earnest money, commonly 1% to 3% of the price, sits with the escrow agent and comes back to you as a credit at closing. The option fee, a much smaller negotiated amount, buys you the unrestricted right to walk away during the option period, which is when we run the inspection.

If the option fee is late, or the blank was never filled in, you have no unrestricted right to terminate. The escape hatch simply does not exist. This is the single most expensive paperwork mistake a first-time buyer can make in Texas, and it is fully preventable. We calendar it the day the contract is signed.

One program note: the city's HIP currently requires at least $500 of earnest money from you. Assistance covers a lot; it does not erase your cash at contract.

SECURITY WARNING

Wiring instructions NEVER change by email.

Wire fraud targets homebuyers during closing week. Before wiring anything, call the title company at a phone number you already have, not one from an email, and confirm the instructions verbally. Then call me. A five-minute call protects your life savings.

SECTION 7: MISTAKES THAT COST FIRST-TIMERS THE HOUSE

- Financing furniture, a car, or anything else between application and closing. Lenders re-check your credit before funding, and new debt can kill the loan at the finish line.

- Changing jobs mid-process without telling your lender first. Even a raise can cause problems if the pay structure changes.
- Treating a prequalification like a preapproval. Sellers only take the second one seriously, because only the second one involves your documents.
- Moving money between accounts without a paper trail. Every large deposit gets questioned; undocumented cash effectively does not exist.
- Forgetting that Texas property taxes and insurance ride inside your monthly payment. Budget for the full payment, not just the loan.
- Skipping the homebuyer class until the last minute. It is a precondition for most assistance, not a formality, and certificates expire in about a year.

> Programs, dollar caps, and eligibility rules here were verified in September 2026, and they change, sometimes mid-year: the city program in Section 2 closed inside its own funding year. Amounts are shown to size the opportunity, not as promises. Nothing here is lending, legal, or tax advice; your lender's numbers control. For what is current this week, text me at 210-776-8854.

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Your first home is the hardest one. That is why I exist.

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Call or text me to get started today.

BOOK A CALL | CALL / TEXT NOW | START YOUR BUYER INTAKE