



# Making Ends Meet

A Resource Guide





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## Introduction



The American economy experiences natural cycles. Times of extended prosperity are often followed by times of relative hardship. While this is a natural economic cycle for the country, it poses serious challenges for those who are impacted by the downward trend in the economy.

If you are having trouble making ends meet, you are not alone. Many are experiencing the effects of the struggling U.S. economy. This guide is designed to help you determine your current financial standing, identify the resources and options available to you, and help you begin the process of taking control of your financial life.

**NOTE:** The information contained in this guidebook is not a substitute for professional legal or financial advice. If you have financial or legal concerns, please seek professional guidance.

## Money Saving Strategies

If you are experiencing a financial *crunch*, you can take steps to avoid a financial *crisis*. Saving money in small increments can help get you through difficult times and can go a long way toward achieving long-term financial stability.

### ***Save on Food***




- Food is a necessity of life but eating in restaurants is not. Hundreds of dollars can be saved each year by cooking meals at home. Prepared foods and take out meals include extra charges for the preparation. While the convenience is a plus, the extra expense is a negative. Make meals at home and brown bag the leftovers for lunch. You can have a week's worth of lunches for the cost of one meal purchased from a vendor or at a restaurant. Cook several meals at the same time and freeze for the upcoming week. Or double recipes and freeze for later in the month.
- That cup of coffee you pick up from your favorite coffee shop each morning may be quite the treat, but is it worth the cost? Pick up a bag of good quality coffee – and brew it at home. Think of all the options you'll have with the money you save.
- When shopping use a list and clip coupons for the items you regularly purchase. And avoid shopping when you are hungry! It is true – we tend to spend more on impulse items when our stomachs are growling.

### ***Save on Household Jobs***

- If you lose a button, sew it on yourself instead of taking your clothes to the tailor for mending.
- When buying new clothes, stay away from items that require dry cleaning, and opt for those you can wash at home.
- If you dry clean frequently – which can extend the life of clothing – use the home dry cleaning kits now available.



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- Shop during sales. Rather than insisting on new clothes, consider trading gently worn garments with friends and family.
  - When doing the laundry make sure that each machine load is full.
  - It may be time to become your own handyman. Try doing your own painting, minor repairs, or yard work.
  - If you use a cleaning service, consider doing the cleaning yourself – or cut back to using the service every other week – or once a month. Think of the added benefit you'll get with the extra exercise!

### ***Save on Appliances***

- If you need to purchase a new appliance, look for the highest energy star rating you can find. This will trim your utility costs every time you use it.
- You can also save on heating and cooling bills by insulating your home, using a programmable thermostat, and keeping your house a little warmer in the summer and a bit cooler in the winter. A few degrees can make a significant difference.



### ***Save on Utilities***

- Drop phone services you don't use. If you are paying for cell phone service and a land line, discontinue one of them.
- If you have cable or satellite television, cut the premium channels. Many local libraries have DVDs of current movies available for loan.

### ***Save on Your Car***

- Save gas and mileage by combining your errands.
- Keep your tires properly inflated and your engine tuned to save up to \$100 each year in operating costs.

### ***Save on Living Expenses***

- If you are living alone, think about sharing your expenses by taking in a roommate or boarder. Let your spare room help pay your rent.

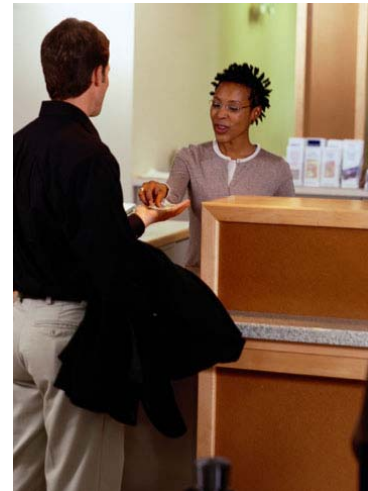




While these suggestions may seem like little things, implementing even a few of them can save you money and help improve your financial outlook.


## Smart Banking

Banking today is a competitive, consumer-driven process. Banks are always looking for new customers. They attempt to attract certain types of customers and offer products with those customers in mind. In today's competitive banking environment, many offer a wide range of products, some with incentive offers and higher interest rates for preferred customers, and other products with higher fees, lower interest rates and, in some cases, hidden costs.



Shop wisely to get the most from your bank:

- Be sure your bank is insured through the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). The FDIC provides government insurance on your accounts up to certain limits. This means that if you fall within those limits you will not lose your deposits if the bank fails. Most “bricks and mortar” banks are FDIC insured, but some internet-based banks are not. Shop carefully and ask questions.
- Choosing a bank for convenience may save you time but cost you money. Rather than location, consider these questions: Will your account earn interest, or will it cost you money? Is there an incentive offered to open a savings *plus* a checking account? If you opt for only one account, what terms apply to the type of account you select? Are there rules about retaining certain balances or limiting the number of deposits or withdrawals you make during the year?
- It is important to know the interest rates and fees that will apply to your accounts. Inquire about any penalties for overdrawing or failing to meet minimum balance requirements. Ask about the possibility of setting up some type of overdraft protection.

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- Once you have an account, there are steps you can take to avoid fees and service charges. Balance your checkbook monthly and track your accounts. By maintaining good records, you can avoid the cost of overdrafts, or the fees charged for the services used to cover any overdrafts. If you have an account that requires a minimum balance, always maintain that balance. Fees charged for dipping below the requirement may exceed the benefit of any interest you receive.
  - Buy inexpensive, standard checks rather than those with fancy pictures and wallets. In some cases you will save money by getting checks from a printing company rather than through your bank. Consider using online payment services to decrease check and postage costs.
  - Be careful to avoid costly automated teller machine (ATM) transactions. When using an ATM in your bank's network, you will typically not incur any fees. But using an ATM outside of your bank's network can be costly. Review the information on ATM fees carefully. You can also ask for cash back on purchases made with a check or your bank debit card.

Getting the best service and account package for your needs requires smart shopping. But once your decision has been made, the job's not over. Banking is a constantly changing business and financial institutions are merging and expanding almost every day. Each new bank in your area will offer new opportunities. Make a point of reviewing your banking needs, accounts, and terms regularly. Don't be afraid to make a change – it could save you money.

## Understanding Your Creditworthiness

We've become a nation that depends on credit. In the financial world, your creditworthiness is equal to your financial trustworthiness. When banks or credit card companies provide you with credit, they want to know the likelihood that you will pay them back in a timely manner and according to the terms of the loan agreement. To have a good credit standing, you must show lenders you have a stable history of employment and loan repayment.

## ***Fair Isaac (FICO) Scoring***

The most commonly used credit assessment tool is the FICO score, developed by professionals at the Fair Isaac Corporation. FICO assigns a credit score based on the amount of credit you have in total, how much credit you have in use, your payment history, how long you have had the credit accounts, and how often you apply for new credit. Each factor is combined to determine a number between 300 and 850. The higher your score, the greater your creditworthiness and the more access you have to credit under the most favorable terms.

## ***Obtaining Your Credit Reports***

You have probably seen commercials for credit monitoring services and thought they were just for people concerned about identity theft. In truth, these services provide information that is important for everyone to review periodically.

You can pay to subscribe to a credit reporting agency which will report your credit score to you. Or, you can get a *free* copy of your credit report annually from these three reporting agencies:

TransUnion:

(877) 322-8228

<http://www.transunion.com/>

Equifax:

(800) 685-1111

<http://www.equifax.com/home/>

Experian:


(888) 397-3742

<http://www.experian.com/>



Credit reports list every credit account in your name or linked to your social security number. They show the credit limit on each account, the amount of credit in use, and the payment history. All late payments are recorded, including how late those payments were. Banks use this information to determine your creditworthiness: *Are you a good risk? Should you get the loan?*





One benefit of reviewing these reports is to correct any inaccuracies before you need to access credit. Mistakes in credit reporting are not unusual and it requires time and effort to correct them. These mistakes can even cost you money. You may be denied credit or even employment based on the information contained in these reports. You may also be required to pay higher interest on existing accounts if creditors determine you have too much open credit.

### ***The Impact of Bad Credit***

As noted above, a poor credit history and FICO score can impact your ability to access credit, your eligibility for more favorable terms from creditors, your ability to lease property, and even your ability to obtain employment.

- Fair or not, some employers look at credit reports to judge character and to determine how trustworthy you may be as an employee.
- With a low credit score you will pay the highest interest rates on all types of credit. If you do receive credit, lenders will be less lenient if you are late with a payment.
- Landlords require credit checks as part of the rental process. A poor credit history can result in limited housing options. Even federal programs through the Department of Housing and Urban Development require credit checks as part of the screening process.
- A bank may not just reject a new loan application if you have poor credit; some banks review your credit before they allow you to open a checking account. Why? A person with poor credit presents the risk of bounced checks. The fees associated with irresponsible bank account management are too high for banks to take a risk on the person with poor credit.



## ***Repairing a Poor Credit History***

If you have a poor credit history or a low credit score, there are steps you can take to improve it, but credit repair is typically not a quick fix. Securing credit and managing it responsibly over time is the only way to improve your credit. Proper credit management includes the following:

- Paying bills on time each month.
- Paying your balance in full, or paying more than the minimum if possible. If you carry a balance, try to add an additional payment each month to improve your standing with the creditor.
- Avoiding the use of the entire credit limit on your credit card account or through lines of credit.
- Closing any credit cards you no longer use. It is not enough to zero out the balance, you must call the credit card company and formally request the account closure. Remember one of the factors influencing your FICO score is the sum of all open credit.



Take the necessary steps, and have patience. As your credit history improves, lenders will be more likely to extend credit to you.


## **Common and Costly Credit Offers**

Retailers and credit card salespeople don't always go into great detail when you open a line of credit, and many consumers don't know the best questions to ask to protect themselves. As a result, many people sign up for credit offers that may be quite costly!

### ***Offers that Defer Interest***

Most credit card offers of deferred interest payments are set for a specific period of time. When that time is up you must pay the balance in full or pay part of the balance that will now include the deferred interest. You can continue to make monthly payments, and the interest will continue to accrue from that time forward.





Most deferred interest offers also have interest rates that are significantly higher than average credit card interest rates. If you can't afford the item at the time of purchase, consider whether or not you will really be able to better afford it when payment is due!

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Note that special promotional offers are often limited to people with the best credit scores. If your score is not high enough to qualify for the special offer, you may be asked to accept an alternative offer that includes higher interest rates and fees.

### ***Offers to Transfer Balances***


Credit card companies may also offer low or no interest on transferred balances. There are hidden costs in offers like these:

- The first cost is the transfer balance fee. This is usually a minimum of three percent of the amount of the transfer. This fee will usually be added to the amount you transfer, thereby adding to your balance. If you do not calculate this amount into your balance and exceed your credit limit, you may face fees and be penalized with a higher interest rate than the rate you were paying before the balance transfer.
- If you are transferring to an existing account which already carries a balance, be aware that most companies credit your payments to the balance at the lowest interest rate first. This means you will pay longer on your higher interest balances. Most companies also revoke the promotional rate if you make a late payment or exceed your credit limit.
- Pay attention to the promotion's expiration date. When the promotion expires any outstanding balance is charged interest at the new current annual rate.

### ***Offers to Open New Credit Cards***

Your credit score drops each time you apply for credit. New credit inquiries account for 10% of most peoples' FICO scores – the most commonly used credit score. Inquiries are also noted on your credit reports. As a consumer, you must decide if opening a charge account to save at the





checkout counter is worth paying higher interest on your existing accounts for months. If not, turn the offer down.

### ***Every Offer Has Fine Print!***

Every credit card agreement comes with stipulations and conditions written in fine print. Few people take the time to truly understand the credit terms they are accepting when they agree to credit offers.

- For example, most consumers don't realize that credit card agreements require you to take any disputes to a mediator before you can file a lawsuit.
- Did you know if you want to dispute a charge on your statement there is a time limit – usually 45 days – for you to provide a written affidavit to the creditor? If you complain after that time, you may have no recourse.

In the end, it is up to you to read the available information and ask questions to protect yourself and truly benefit from credit offers. If there is something you don't understand, do your research and ask questions *before* you sign on the dotted line.

## **Keys to Financial Fitness**


If you are trying to get a handle on your spending and expenses, it is important to learn the signs of financial fitness. When you reach a level of financial fitness, you can survive economic downturns and better handle emergencies that arise.

# **Emergency Savings = 6 Month's to 1 Year's Income**

### ***Having More than Just Enough***

Being financially fit means having more than just the amount needed to cover your bills and expenses each month. Financial experts recommended that you have a safety net of cash in the bank that will cover your expenses





for six months to one year. This emergency fund should be in an account separate from other accounts you use regularly. As your financial situation improves, add money to your emergency account. Be sure to re-evaluate your expenses on a regular basis to make sure your emergency account can still provide that safety net.

### ***Using Credit Cards Appropriately***

People who are financially fit don't need to use credit cards for items and services they consume quickly, such as vacations or meals. If you are using credit for items like these – and you are financially fit – you are in a position to pay your credit card balance in full each month. Paying interest for years on something that is quickly consumed often leads to long-term financial problems. This is particularly true when you face serious illness, a job loss, or other types of emergencies.

### ***Saving Money***


Financial fitness emphasizes saving. As your income increases, have the additional monies direct deposited into your emergency or other savings account. Not only will this increase your long-term stability, but it will provide assurance that you are living within your means. If you are in a position in which you must have that raise or bonus before it arrives, you are likely living beyond your means.



### ***Making and Reaching Financial Goals***

A financially fit person sets and achieves financial goals. If you anticipate needing a new car or taking an exotic vacation, make sure the money is available before the purchase is made. Determine a set amount that you dedicate to the goals you have set and put it aside every pay period. Many employers offer direct deposit options to more than one account when processing payroll. You can then have the majority of funds deposited to your main account, and a portion deposited to a designated savings account. In a sense you never see the money sent directly to a savings account, making it a painless way to save!





Achieving long term financial fitness can lead to opportunities for investment and the ability to secure your financial future for years to come. The discipline is well worth it.

## Are You Overextended?



Government figures show that many households with a total income of \$50,000 or less are spending more money each month than they take home. Constantly being overextended can have dire consequences.

Some families have covered the gap by borrowing against the equity in their homes via home equity loans. This means that many no longer have cash equity in their homes since that money is the collateral for the loan. Making matters worse, declining home values mean that many now owe more than the home is currently worth. This can trap families in their home for the foreseeable future or push them toward foreclosure if they can no longer afford the mortgage payments, but can't sell.

In other cases people are relying on credit cards to pay for daily living expenses such as food and transportation. It may be that initially it was possible to keep up with the credit card payments. But with larger required payments due to rising balances – or interest rate increases – over time even making the minimum monthly payment has become impossible.

If you find yourself barely meeting your bills each month or constantly using credit to pay your bills, these are signs you are overextended. This is a tenuous position to be in during good economic times, and a devastating one in a bad economy. Being overextended can create extreme situations including home foreclosure, credit card defaults or bankruptcy – all of which have long-term consequences for your ability to obtain credit.

**If you are overextended, you are definitely not alone.** But with difficult decisions ahead, some perhaps impacting your survival, it is important to take steps now to improve your situation.



## Taking Control of Debt

Many Americans took advantage of prosperous times and easy access to credit, resulting in a society with a substantial amount of debt. The hidden danger of debt is not only the cost of interest and fees, but the crisis that arises when a job loss, illness or other emergency keeps you from paying your bills. If you are in debt, you *can* take steps to get your finances under control.

### ***Start by Getting a Clear Picture***

In order to manage your money you must have a clear picture of what is coming in and where your money goes. Most people know that rent or mortgage, car payments, and utility bills are among their “big” expenses. However, they often have no idea what happens to the rest of their money.

### ***Create a Budget***

To begin the process of getting out of debt, you must have – and stick to – a budget. Start by tracking your expenses. For an entire month, write down every penny you spend. Carry a notebook and save receipts. Make sure every financial transaction is represented. At the end of the month, review your records. Classify each expenditure according to its level of importance. Then use this information to establish your budget.

### ***Cut Out Expenses where Necessary***


If your monthly expenses exceed your income, the bottom line is that something must go. Take a look at everything, even those things you think you can't live without. Items to consider may include cable television service, cell phones, a second car, health club memberships, and evenings out. The tried and true means of gaining control over spending is to adhere to a realistic budget. You cannot continue to spend money you do not have.





## ***Pay Down Your Credit Cards***

If you are carrying credit card debt that is making it difficult to make ends meet, taking the following steps can improve your situation:

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- There are two strategies for getting out from underneath credit card debt. One is to start with the cards with the highest interest rates. While making minimum payments to your other cards, pay as much as you can swing on the highest interest rate card. When that card is paid off, concentrate on the card with the next highest interest rate. This method is often recommended because getting rid of the higher interest debt will save you money in the long run. However, if you need to get a sense of accomplishment to keep up your resolve, start with the card with the smallest balance first. Get your momentum going by that payoff, and then tackle the next smallest balance.
  - Call your credit card companies and ask them to lower the interest rates on your accounts. In return for assurance that your intention is to pay what is owed, many will agree to a decrease in the rate.
  - If you are able to access new credit, consolidate high interest balances to low or no interest accounts.
  - If your credit is maxed out and you are having difficulty keeping up, consult a Consumer Credit Counseling Service for help. These organizations can assist you with budgeting and working with creditors. Although most credit counseling services charge a monthly fee, it may be worth it to have the assistance and structure in place to improve your finances.

No matter what plan you put in place to improve your situation it is critical to take action now while you still can. Ignoring financial problems only provides time for them to grow.

## **Your Rights When Dealing With Creditors**


When the phone rings many fear a creditor is on the line, and choose not to answer. Others dread the daily mail delivery for fear a final notice may have arrived. Many people think ignorance is bliss, and in not responding, compound the problem. It is important to know your rights when dealing with creditors and debt collection agencies, and to avoid falling into the trap of making the situation worse.

## ***Your Rights with Creditors***

If you are one of the millions of people who live in fear of their creditors, take heart – and take steps to improve the situation by understanding your rights and addressing the issues head on.



- If you receive an eviction notice this does not mean you should immediately begin to pack. As a tenant you have certain rights. Local Legal Aid offices have attorneys who can discuss your particular situation and offer guidance. Legal efforts may mean you will be able to remain in your home, and in many cases, that you will no longer receive threatening calls or letters from creditors. If you do have to move, legal representation can assist you in establishing a timeline for the move that is favorable to you. To exercise your rights you must act quickly. Ignoring the notice or waiting until the last possible minute to act will compromise your ability to protect yourself.
- If you are getting harassing telephone calls from creditors, you have the right to insist that they stop. Creditors may not call you at work if your employer disapproves of such contacts, nor may they call before 8:00 AM or after 9:00 PM. They are not allowed to discuss your debt with anyone other than yourself unless you designate a third party to act on your behalf. Creditors who contact you by phone must send written confirmation of the call within five days. Debt collection agencies are never allowed to harass you, threaten you with violence or public disclosure of your debt, or use profane language.
- You can stop collectors from contacting you by writing a letter asking them to end contact with you. After receiving your letter the creditor may send a response informing you they will not contact you again. *This does not mean, however, that the debt is forgiven or that the creditor will not pursue legal methods to obtain payment.* It is important to know that when contact ends with a creditor you may not



be informed of the legitimate actions being pursued to recover the debt.

**If you feel a creditor has violated the law**, you have the right to file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). If the FTC rules in your favor, you may be entitled to compensation for damages.

Although you may prefer not to be contacted by creditors, remember that without action or payment, a creditor will continue to use all methods available to collect the debt. In some cases, you may be able to negotiate an end to the collection process by agreeing to pay a lesser amount.

## **Filing for Bankruptcy**

Bankruptcy is often viewed solely as a financial decision, but in fact bankruptcy can impact your financial, social, and personal well-being. The decision to file bankruptcy is not something to be made casually; because of the many ramifications, it is important that you explore your options and consult legal and financial professionals before you proceed.

### ***Changes in Bankruptcy Laws***

Current bankruptcy laws no longer guarantee a fresh, debt-free start for those who declare bankruptcy. Many people will find that bankruptcy is now a method to increase the amount of time you have to pay your debts – the debts do not simply disappear.

### ***Mandatory Counseling***



Recent changes in the law mandate that before you can file for bankruptcy you must complete credit counseling with an agency approved by the U.S. Trustee's Office. Its purpose is to assist you in assessing whether bankruptcy is truly necessary, or whether a repayment plan (approved by the court) would enable you to get back on your economic feet. If you file for bankruptcy, you will be required to have additional approved training on personal financial management before your case is discharged.





## ***Legal Representation***

In most cases, filing for bankruptcy requires legal representation. Due to the more stringent and complicated requirements under the new law, many attorneys have increased their fees to compensate for their increased time and expenses. Those fees can amount to a minimum of \$1000 and are typically paid to the attorney up front.

## ***Bankruptcy and Your Credit***

Bankruptcy filings are a matter of public record and are reported to credit reporting agencies. The information may be retained in your credit report for up to 10 years. Bankruptcy can decrease a person's credit score by as much as 100 points, making it even more difficult to obtain credit. You may find when you do obtain credit you will be subject to higher fees and interest rates.



## ***Bankruptcy's Emotional Impact***


Emotionally, bankruptcy can be difficult. As part of the bankruptcy process you are required to review and revisit your debts and obligations. You will be faced with acknowledging that despite your best efforts, you were unable to pay your debts. Through the process you must also explain your situation to credit counselors, your attorney, and the court.

As you can see, bankruptcy may leave both emotional and financial scars. Not all debts can be completely wiped out, so the promise of an automatic "clean slate" no longer applies. While in many cases, bankruptcy may be the best option, research all alternatives to determine whether other options are available to help you regain control of your finances.

## **Getting Back on Your Feet: Programs that Meet Basic Needs**

If you are struggling to meet your basic financial needs, there are programs available to assist you. In arriving at a plan to get through the tough times





and get back on your feet, it is important to remember the goal of these programs is to provide a temporary safety net when help is needed. They are not designed to provide permanent solutions.

### ***Assistance with Food***

Most communities offer community food banks and food pantries that allow local families to receive groceries and other household items. Some form of identification is usually required to receive assistance. Resources are often limited so many pantries restrict the amount of food as well as the frequency of visits. Many local churches operate small pantries to provide help in putting food on the table. Some organizations may offer additional services to assist families who are dealing with financial setbacks.

### ***Assistance with Medical Treatment***


Maintaining your health in difficult times can be a challenge, particularly if you do not have insurance coverage. Communities typically provide programs to help those who find themselves in this situation.



Most hospitals or clinics offer a program commonly referred to as “charity care assistance.” When you are deemed eligible for charity care assistance, the facility will discount or absorb your health care costs. However, these benefits may be limited to specific services and may only allow for care within that facility.

Medicaid offers a full range of services to those who are disabled or economically disadvantaged. Contact your county office to ask about eligibility requirements and make application. As a joint federal/state insurance program, Medicaid provides comprehensive medical coverage in most settings for those who are eligible.

If you do not qualify for Medicaid, but are unable to afford health insurance, your children may qualify for medical insurance under another joint federal/state program called the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The plan is administered by private insurance companies who are licensed and regulated by each state. Program details vary by state, but the



insurance coverage is either free, or very low cost. Children ages 0-19 are covered. For more information, or to make application, visit <http://www.insurekidsnow.gov> or call 1-877-Kids-Now (1-877-543-7669) to be connected with your state's CHIP program.

Prescription Assistance Programs offer low or no-cost prescription drugs to people who have limited insurance or no insurance at all. There are numerous programs, some of which are offered through the major drug companies. Some are affiliated with specific health conditions. Contact your local health department or dial 2-1-1 for more information on available programs. In many cases you may apply online or by phone. To access assistance, you will need to have a valid prescription from a doctor.

## ***Housing***


Many communities provide homeless shelters to individuals and families who have no permanent housing. However, it is important to remember that shelters do not have unlimited space, therefore available bed space cannot be guaranteed.



If you need a place to stay, contact your local shelter as soon as possible for information on the process to be admitted each day. Some shelters require co-payment, and will only allow shelter access for a certain number of nights. There are also shelters that serve specific populations like women and children, or men only. Families may be separated in order to access available beds in the shelter system.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers programs to low-income families to assist them in securing housing. Programs include training on home buying and avoiding foreclosure. There are also voucher programs to assist in paying for rent and public housing.

HUD maintains offices that cover every state, and many programs are operated in local communities. Due to the high demand for HUD services,



there are often waiting lists even for eligible families. An application is required to be added to the waiting lists.

### ***Employment***

If you are unemployed, your state and local Unemployment Office or Department of Labor will provide information and support to assist you in preparing to return to the workforce. Most offices provide information on resume writing, technology support, and job search services.

The services and programs listed above are designed to help people facing temporary setbacks with meeting their basic needs. Programs and providers vary by state and/or community. For more information on available community resources, please consult your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or WorkLife benefit program.

## **Agencies That Offer Financial Assistance**



Temporary financial assistance is available to people in need in most communities. It is important to know that such help is limited. Programs focus on assisting with basic needs, and typically do not pay for transportation costs or car payments.


### ***Rent, Mortgage and Utility Assistance***

Financial assistance for paying rent, mortgage, and utilities can generally be found through two sources. Community non-profits such as the Salvation Army offer limited assistance. Government assistance through the county Department of Human Services or Social Services is the second general source for limited help.

Assistance is considered limited because these agencies typically do not cover the full payment due – they will pay part or a maximum amount of







several hundred dollars. Non-profit organizations only provide assistance when funds are available. The beginning of the month is generally the best time to apply. These types of agencies often set limits on the number of times help may be accessed within a specified period of time. The time period may range anywhere from a period of months to two years.

### ***Temporary Cash Assistance***

Most counties offer a program called temporary assistance or cash assistance. This program is designed to help people who are faced with an emergency situation and need one-time help. In some cases, it is expected that any money given will be paid back. There are financial and residency eligibility requirements, and there may be a waiting period before a check arrives.



### ***Applying for Assistance***

These programs typically require an application process before any money is distributed. In some cases you must complete a telephone pre-screening interview before you receive an appointment to make application. There are often specific days and hours when these calls are accepted.

Most non-profits experience a high volume of calls, so patience and persistence are often handy. It may take several tries before you get through to a staff member. In other cases you may wait in line to be screened during the time frames applications are accepted.


The application process generally includes proof of need. This means you will be asked to bring an eviction or utility shut-off notice. You may also be asked for proof of residence or identification for everyone who lives in the home. Preference may be given to families with children, single mothers or other specific populations.

### ***The Focus of Help Is Temporary Relief***

Remember, both county and non-profit programs offering cash assistance are focused on helping those who are facing a temporary situation. If the help they can offer will not make any impact on your situation because of







the amount you owe, your application may be denied. Programs may also require recipients to be working to be eligible, and to provide proof of employment and household income.

There are no guarantees that programs will be available to meet any and every financial need. Non-profit agency resources are often strained in the best of times, and widespread economic challenges may limit the potential for help even further. It is recommended that those who are in serious financial straits apply to any and all local programs that provide temporary financial assistance.

## How Your Employer Can Help in a Financial Crisis

Your employer is dedicated to assisting you as you begin to address your financial challenges. You have benefits that entitle you to professional assistance through this time.



- WorkLife services can assist you in finding local non-profit and lead agencies to address your financial problems and assist you in a financial crisis. These include rental and utility assistance programs, consumer credit counseling services, and homeless shelters.
- Legal and financial benefits provided by your employer entitle you to consultation with a legal or financial professional at no charge. If ongoing help is needed, you may be eligible for a discounted rate for services.
- An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) gives you access to trained professionals who can guide you through these stressful times.

Counseling services can address your personal and emotional needs as you overcome financial difficulty and regain solid footing. Services are



available to you and your eligible family members. The assistance is provided at no cost and is confidential.

No matter what services you need, it is important to remember that resources and other types of assistance are only a phone call away.