



In accordance with Section 22304.5(c)(2) of the California Financial Code, a credit education seminar or program is required to be available to borrowers prior to disbursing loan proceeds. A copy of this Credit Education Program can be downloaded at:



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THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING A CREDIT SCORE

Credit reports provide your credit history which includes information pertaining to your current and past credit activities. Any past loan payments or credit payments will be reported by lenders, credit card companies and/or other financial institutions to three regulated credit bureaus: Transunion, Equifax and Experian.

When you apply for credit, lenders will usually pull a credit report and check you credit score to see if you have any credit history that could impact lending. Your credit score is a number that reflects how well you have managed previous loans.

Establishing good credit and having a high credit score helps lenders determine if you are credit worthy to lend and in some cases provide better rates and terms. Making timely payments and having a long credit history will help.

WAYS TO ESTABLISH YOUR CREDIT SCORE

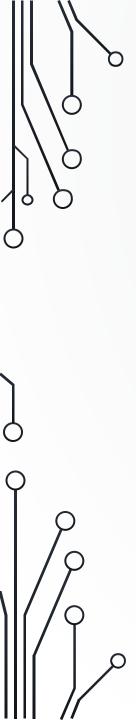
Establishing a credit history takes some time. There are several ways to get started:

- 1. Obtain a credit card: If you do not currently have credit history you will likely need to start with a low credit limit balance card. Using this card for small purchases and paying off the balance every month will quickly help build credit and increase your credit score.
- 2. Obtain a Secured Credit Card: If you don't have a credit card, you can typically obtain a secured credit card first by making a cash deposit to have the card issued. The deposit is refunded when your account is closed and/or maintained properly.
- **3. Become an Authorized User on a credit card:** If you can be added to an existing credit line where there is a long timely payment history, this can typically help establish credit.

WAYS TO ESTABLISH YOUR CREDIT SCORE (CONT...)

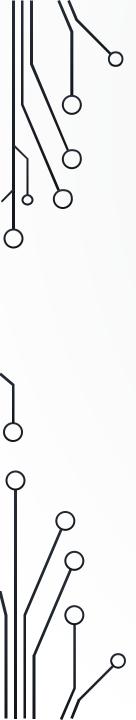
Establishing a credit history takes some time. There are several ways to get started:

- 4. Open a joint credit card: If you have obtaining your own credit card, consider opening a joint account with someone who has good credit history. Both individuals will be equally responsible for making payments and therefore late payments will negatively impact both individual's credit history.
- **5.** Request a credit increase: Once you start to establish credit history and you keep your credit in good standing for a period of time you ask for a credit limit increase. This will increase your credit limit while your credit used remains low resulting in a positive impact to your credit score. This is known as your "credit utilization rate".
- **6. Installment loans:** By obtaining installment loans like a car loan or student loans and making timely payments you can build your credit and positively impact your credit score.



WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR CREDIT SCORE

- 1. Pay bills on time. All lenders review credit history to determine if you make timely payments. Making late payments can negatively affect your credit scores which could impact the lenders decision to approve you. A review of all payments including rent and utilities are factored, so setting up auto payments or bill pay through your bank can be very helpful to make on time payments.
- **2. Pay off debt and keep balances low on credit cards.** By paying off your debt monthly and keeping balances on credit cards low you will improve your credit utilization rate which will positively impact your credit score. Typically, you will want to keep your credit utilization rate at 30% or less.
- 3. Apply for and open new credit accounts only when needed. Excessive credit can harm your credit score. It is important that you do not apply for or open more credit cards than you need. Each application for a new credit card results in a credit inquiry and having too many credit inquiries in a short period of time can negatively impact your credit and a lender's decision. When you have multiple credit cards the risk of accumulating debt and high credit limit use can impact your ability to make timely payments which will negatively impact your credit score.



WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR CREDIT SCORE (CONT....)

- 1. **Don't close unused credit cards.** Credit scores are typically higher when accounts are long-standing, so it is beneficial to keep unused credit cards for a longer credit history. If the credit card has an annual fees, you may consider canceling the card.
- 2. Dispute inaccuracies on your credit reports. You should check your credit reports at all three credit reporting bureaus, TransUnion, Equifax, and Experian. This can be done for free once every 12 months. Incorrect information on your credit reports could lower your credit score. Verify that the accounts listed on your reports are correct. If you see errors, dispute the information and get it corrected right away.
- 3. Rebuilding your credit. If you have late payments or negative information on your credit report like a bankruptcy or too many inquiries, you should refrain from obtaining any additional credit and make timely payments on your current obligations. There is no particular timeframe to determine when your credit may improve since every situation is different. Some negatively reported information such as collection accounts and bankruptcies can stay on your credit report for seven to ten years.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE A CREDIT SCORE

Payment History- Lenders want to make sure you can make timely payments. Just one missed payment can negatively impact your credit score. Missed or late payments, foreclosures, collection accounts and charge-offs are all examples of negative payment history that could be red flags to lenders.

Credit Utilization- Your credit utilization rate is determined by dividing your total revolving unpaid credit by the total of all your revolving credit limits. If you use more than 30% of your available credit, this could negatively impact your credit score.

Hard Credit Inquiries- As part of a loan application process, the lender will request a credit inquiry. This is recorded in your credit report each time a lender makes the request. These inquiries can remain on your credit report for up to two years which can negatively impact your credit score.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE A CREDIT SCORE (CONT...)

Types of Credit Accounts- Properly managing different types of credit accounts like a mortgage, credit cards and installment loans can give lenders a good perspective on how financially responsible you are. Having different credit accounts and making timely payments to each are good indicators for creditors when assessing your credit history.

Phone & Utility Accounts- Your utility and phone bills are typically not included in your credit history, so late payments generally will not impact your credit score, however; if you do not make payments and the account is sent to collections, it will be reported as a collection account on your credit history and will negatively impact your credit score.

Hard Credit Inquiries- As part of a loan application process, the lender will request a credit inquiry. This is recorded in your credit report each time a lender makes the request. These inquiries can remain on your credit report for up to two years which can negatively impact your credit score.



It is important to check your credit report and score to have knowledge of what your credit history looks like and to ensure the information being reported is accurate.

- 1. Visit a free credit reporting website: Numerous websites offer free credit scores. You can request a free copy of your credit report from each of the major credit bureaus every 12 months at www.annualcreditreport.com. Other organizations or that provide credit reports only offer free trials or may charge you for a copy of the report. Be aware of all terms before proceeding.
- 2. Complimentary credit scores: Check with your existing credit card holder or lender to see if you can obtain a complimentary credit score.
- 3. Non-Profit credit counseling: Credit counselors provide counseling services that often include obtaining your credit score as part of the service. You can visit the <u>Financial Counseling Association of America</u> for more information.

HOW TO OBTAIN A FREE COPY OF YOUR CREDIT REPORT

Transunion, Equifax and Experian all have a centralized website, toll-free phone number, and a mailing address so you can order your free annual reports in one place. To order your free reports:

- Visit AnnualCreditReport.com
- Call 1-877-322-8228
- Complete an Annual Credit Report Request Form and mail to:

Annual Credit Report Request Service P.O. Box 105281 Atlanta, GA 30348-5281

Under federal law, you are also entitled to a free credit report if:

- You are denied a loan, employment, insurance, or other unfavorable action based on information in your credit report
- You are unemployed and plan to look for a job within 60 days
 You are on public assistance, such as welfare
- Your report is inaccurate because of identity theft or another type of fraud
- You have a fraud alert in your credit file

If you do not qualify for a free report, you may buy a copy of your report by contacting one of the national credit bureaus:

- Equifax: 1-800-685-1111 https://www.equifax.com/personal/creditreport-services/
- Experian: 1-888-397-3742 https://www.experian.com/help/
 TransUnion: 1-888-909-8872 https://www.transunion.com/credit-help

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DISPUTING ERRORS ON YOUR CREDIT REPORT

Common mistakes reported on your credit report may include inaccurate information like name, address, credit accounts, balances, credit history and employers. Sometimes another individual's information may get reported if the name is similar to yours.

It is your responsibility to identify any errors in your credit report.

By requesting your free credit report you can check the information provided for accuracy. Check to confirm that the credit accounts reported are indeed your accounts. Check for accurate payment information especially if late payments are reported when payment was made on time. Sometimes employers you didn't work for are listed, or inaccurate collections, judgements and tax liens. Also check for any negative information like bankruptcy's that are older than 10 years and still being reported.

DISPUTING ERRORS ON YOUR CREDIT REPORT (CONT....)

Dispute credit report errors with credit reporting bureaus by writing a letter, filling out and submitting an online form, or calling their customer service number.

Each credit bureau has its own requirements for disputing an error on your credit report, but typically you will need to provide the following:

- Contact information
- complete name, address and telephone number
- Report confirmation number, if available.
- Clearly identify each mistake, such as an account number for any account you may be disputing.
- Explain why you are disputing the information.
- Request that the information be removed or corrected.
- Enclose a copy of the portion of your credit report that contains the disputed items and circle or highlight the disputed items. Include copies of all documents that support your dispute.
- Deliver your letter of dispute by certified mail and ask for a return receipt, for record of receipt.

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DISPUTING ERRORS ON YOUR CREDIT REPORT (CONT....)

- Equifax Equifax Information Services LLC P.O. Box 740256 Atlanta, GA 30348
- Experian P.O. Box 4500 Allen TX 75013
- TransUnion LLC Consumer Dispute Center P.O. Box 2000 Chester PA 19016

If you disagree with the outcome of your dispute, the best next step is to contact the entity that originally provided the disputed information to the credit bureau—in writing. You may also add a statement of dispute to your credit report which will appear whenever it's accessed or requested.