

What to know before you buy.

VA Home Loan Field Guide

A plain-language guide for Central Texas veterans, active-duty service members, and military families.



Hi, I'm JEANETTE

Military moves aren't just about changing addresses - they're about uprooting your whole life. I've been there. I've lived it. After 21 years in the Air Force, moving my own family across the country and around the world, I know what it takes to make the transition smoother for you and your family.

Whether you're PCSing, separating from service, or retiring and starting your next chapter, I speak your language and understand the challenges you face... because I've walked in your boots.

My mission is simple: **help you buy smart and sell strong across Central Texas.** If your next move is on the horizon, it doesn't have to be hard. Together, we can make it your smoothest one yet.



What Makes Me DIFFERENT?

- Driven by one calling: helping people make decisions they won't regret.
- Step-by-step VA loan guidance from someone who's used it personally
- Experience with PCS moves, relocations, and military timelines
- A trusted local network of lenders, inspectors, and contractors



You've Earned It - **LET'S PUT IT TO WORK**

INTRODUCTION

The **VA home loan** is one of the most powerful benefits available to veterans, active-duty service members, and military families - but too many don't realize just how much it can do. With **no down payment**, **no private mortgage insurance**, and **competitive interest rates**, this program is built to help you move forward - not stay stuck renting.

But like any good mission, success starts with knowing the process and having the right game plan.

This guide is here to break it all down - in plain language - so you can **buy smart**, **avoid common pitfalls**, and make the most of the benefit you've earned. Whether this is your first home, your next PCS move, or a refinance to build long-term wealth, **I've got your six**.

Let's get you home.



Understanding VA HOME LOANS

Backed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the VA Home Loan is specifically designed to help veterans, active-duty service members, and qualifying Guard or Reserve members buy a home with better terms and fewer roadblocks.

✓ No Down Payment

That's right - in most cases, you can buy a home without putting a penny down. No waiting years to save up. No missing opportunities while rent eats up your income.

✓ No Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI)

Unlike conventional loans that make you pay PMI unless you put 20% down, the VA loan eliminates that extra cost. That's more money in your pocket every single month.

✓ Lower Interest Rates

Because it's backed by the VA, this loan usually comes with better rates than most conventional options. That means lower monthly payments and long-term savings.

✓ Flexible Credit Requirements

Let's be real - life in and out of uniform isn't always neat. The VA loan offers more flexible credit and income guidelines, making it possible to buy even if your financial history isn't perfect.

✓ Limits on Closing Costs

The VA sets boundaries on what lenders can charge you at the closing table, so you're not blindsided by last-minute fees.

Who's Eligible for a VA Loan?

Not everyone automatically qualifies for a VA home loan - you must meet certain service requirements. But if you've worn the uniform or are part of a military family, there's a good chance you've earned this benefit. Here's what you need to know:



SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

- **Veterans:** At least 90 days of active-duty service during wartime, or 181 days during peacetime.
- **Active Duty:** You need to have served at least 90 continuous days.
- **National Guard & Reserve:** Usually 6 years of service, or 90 days of active-duty if called up.
- **Surviving Spouse:** If your spouse died in the line of duty or from a service-connected cause, you may qualify as well.

GETTING YOUR CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY (COE)



Once you meet the service criteria, you'll need a **Certificate of Eligibility (COE)** to prove you're qualified. This is the VA's way of saying, "Yes, you've earned this."

You can get it in **one of three ways**:

- Through your lender of choice
- Online via the VA's eBenefits portal, or
- By requesting it directly from the VA loan center

Getting Financially PREPARED

Before you jump into the VA loan process, it's smart to **tighten up your finances**. A little prep on the front end goes a long way toward getting approved - and getting the home you want with less stress.

Here's how to get mission-ready:

- **Know Your Credit Score:** The VA doesn't require a specific credit score, but most lenders are looking for something around **620 or higher**. If your score is lower, don't panic - you may still qualify, but it's worth taking time to improve it.
 - Pay bills on time
 - Knock down existing debt
 - Avoid opening new credit accounts before applying
- **Check Your Debt-to-Income Ratio (DTI):** Your DTI is the percentage of your income that goes toward monthly debts like car payments, student loans, and credit cards. Lenders prefer a DTI of **41% or lower**. If yours is higher, let's talk strategy - sometimes small changes can make a big impact.
- **Budget for Closing Costs:** VA loans don't require a down payment, but **closing costs still apply** - usually between 2% - 5% of the purchase price. Start setting that aside now to not be caught off guard. Trust me, future-you will thank you.
- **Understand VA Home and Loan Limits:** Even though the VA doesn't cap how much you can borrow, county-specific loan limits still matter - especially if you've used part of your VA entitlement before.
 - If your loan exceeds the local limit, you may need a small down payment to cover the difference.
 - The home must also meet VA's Minimum Property Requirements (MPRs) - meaning it must be safe, sound, and sanitary.

NOTE: This isn't about being perfect - it's about being prepared.





Out-Of-Pocket COSTS

No down payment doesn't mean no costs - be prepared for expenses like inspections, deposits, and closing fees.

Option Fee & Earnest Money

Option Fee – Paid upfront for the unrestricted right to terminate during the option period. Cost: \$100–\$500+ depending on market. Credited back at closing if deal goes through.

Earnest Money – Good-faith deposit paid upfront showing buyer's commitment. Cost: ≈1% of purchase price (varies by negotiation). Applied toward closing at funding.

VA Funding Fee

The VA charges a **funding fee** to help cover the cost of the program. The fee amount varies based on factors like your down payment amount and whether you're a first-time or subsequent VA loan borrower.

NOTE: A veteran with a **service-connected disability** is **exempt** from paying the VA funding fee. Be sure to inform your lender of your disability rating.

Closing Costs

Typically range from 2-5% of the purchase price.

Home inspection - Typically \$400–\$600 (paid upfront, not refundable)

Appraisal fees - \$600 to \$800 (required by VA, usually paid upfront)

Title insurance - Protects against title defects (liens, disputes). Cost: \$1,400–\$3,500 (state-regulated, based on price). Typically, seller pays owner's policy and buyer pays lender's policy (negotiable).

Loan origination fee - charged by the lender for processing and underwriting your mortgage. Cost: Typically 0.5% – 1% of the loan amount.

Choosing a LENDER

Choosing the right lender is crucial to ensuring a smooth and stress-free VA loan process. A great lender doesn't just offer a good rate — they guide you through each step and help you make informed decisions.

Here's how to choose wisely:

➤ **Look for VA-Specific Experience**

Not all lenders understand the unique ins and outs of VA loans. Choose a lender who works **regularly with VA borrowers** - they'll be more familiar with eligibility, paperwork, and the quirks of VA appraisals or funding fees. An experienced VA lender can save you time, money, and unnecessary stress.

➤ **Compare Loan Offers**

Just because you're using a VA loan doesn't mean all rates & fees are the same. Shop around - interest rates, lender fees, and closing costs can vary from lender to lender. Even a small difference in rate makes a big impact over the life of your loan.

➤ **Ask About Fees**

Alongside the VA funding fee, ask each lender to clearly break down any: 1.) Origination charges, 2.) Underwriting or processing fees, 3.) Discount points or optional add-ons. Understanding these fees upfront helps you avoid surprises at closing.

➤ **Evaluate Customer Service**

You'll be working closely with your lender - especially during underwriting. Choose someone who:

- Answers questions clearly and promptly
- Keeps you informed on timelines and milestones
- Understands and respects your unique situation as a veteran or military family

📌 On the **last page of this guide**, you'll find a shortlist of **trusted VA lenders** I personally recommend - professionals who know the VA loan process inside and out and who consistently deliver great service to my clients.





VA Loan TIMELINE

While the VA loan process typically takes 30–45 days from the time your offer is accepted to closing, it helps to know exactly what happens at each stage.

1. Get Pre-Approved; Duration: 1–2 days

What happens: Your lender will review your income, credit, service history, and eligibility to issue a VA loan pre-approval letter. This letter shows sellers you're serious/financially ready.

2. Start Your Home Search + Make an Offer;

Duration: Varies (Set in buyer's agreement)

What happens: Once you're pre-approved, we'll start touring homes that meet your needs and budget. When we find "the one," I'll help you write and submit an offer. Expect a few rounds of negotiation with the seller.

3. Option Period Begins (Texas-specific);

Duration: Typically 7–10 days (Negotiated)

What happens: After your offer is accepted, the option period begins. This is your window to have the home inspected and negotiate any needed repairs. You can walk away during this period for any reason.

4. Home Inspection (Happens During Option Period); Duration: Typically 1–3 days

What happens: You'll hire a licensed inspector to check the home's condition — structure, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, roof, etc. Based on the report, we may request repairs or credits before moving forward.

5. VA Appraisal; Duration: 7–10 business days

What happens: The VA will assign a certified appraiser to verify the home's market value and ensure it meets the VA's Minimum Property Requirements. This step is required before the loan can be approved.

6. Loan Underwriting; Duration: 7–14 days

What happens: Once the appraisal is complete, your loan goes into underwriting. The lender will double-check your income, assets, credit, and appraisal to finalize your approval.

7. Final Loan Approval + Clear to Close;

Duration: Typically 1–3 days

What happens: After underwriting is complete, your lender issues a clear to close. You'll receive a Closing Disclosure outlining your final numbers.

8. Closing Day; Duration: 1–2 hours

What happens: You'll meet at the title office to sign the final documents, pay any remaining closing costs, and receive your keys. You're officially a homeowner!

Frequently Asked QUESTIONS



1. How long does the VA loan process take?

Typically, it can take 30–45 days to close a VA loan once you've found the home. However, this timeline can vary based on several factors, including the speed of your lender, the home's appraisal, and other variables.

2. Do I need perfect credit to qualify for a VA loan?

No, the VA does not have a strict credit score requirement. However, most lenders will prefer a credit score of 620 or higher. If your score is lower, you may still be eligible for a VA loan, but it could be more difficult to secure a good rate.

3. Can I use a VA loan more than once?

Yes! You can use a VA loan multiple times. However, if you've used your full entitlement, you may need to pay a down payment on your next home purchase, depending on the loan limit in your area.

4. Can I refinance my existing mortgage with a VA loan?

Yes, you can refinance with a VA Interest Rate Reduction Refinance Loan (IRRRL), which is a streamlined process that can reduce your current interest rate.

VA LOAN MYTHS

There are several misconceptions about VA loans that can discourage veterans from taking advantage of this benefit.

Let's clear up a few common myths:

Myth 1: You need perfect credit to qualify for a VA loan.

Fact: While good credit can help, the VA doesn't set a minimum credit score requirement. Lenders may have their own requirements, but veterans with less-than-perfect credit can still qualify.

Myth 2: VA loans are only for first-time homebuyers.

Fact: You can use a VA loan multiple times. As long as you still have entitlement left, you can apply for a VA loan, whether it's your first home or your tenth.

Myth 3: VA loans take forever to close.

Fact: While the VA loan process can take a little longer than a conventional loan due to additional documentation, it typically takes 30-45 days to close, which is similar to most loan types.

Myth 4: You need a down payment for a VA loan.

Fact: VA loans do not require a down payment in most cases, making homeownership more accessible.



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Let's Talk About Your NEXT MOVE

Buying a home in Texas – especially with your VA loan benefit – is one of the smartest moves you can make. The steps in this guide are just the beginning. Every buyer's journey looks a little different, and I'd love to help you map out yours.

Not sure where to start? I've got you. Whether you're 1–3 months out or just curious, **let's chat.**

Schedule Your Free Intro Call



Click Here

Prefer to text or email instead? That works too.

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DISCLAIMER

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