

OWNERLAND REALTY

CINCINNATI HOME BUYER DOWN PAYMENT ASSISTANCE GUIDE

Version 1.1 | Publication Ready | Updated January 2026

Your Complete Resource for Buying a Home in
Hamilton, Butler, Warren & Clermont Counties

10+ Programs | Step-by-Step Instructions | Real Examples

Jeff Williamson, REALTOR®

The Jeff Williamson Group at OwnerLand Realty

■ (513) 205-7904

■ jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com

■ www.realtorincincinnati.com

Ohio License #SAL.2006003705

Why This Guide Matters

Most first-time homebuyers in Cincinnati don't know that thousands of dollars in down payment assistance is available to them right now. You could be sitting on the fence thinking you need years to save up, when the truth is: **programs exist today that could cover 3-5% of your purchase price as a grant or forgivable loan.**

I'm Jeff Williamson, a REALTOR® serving Greater Cincinnati homebuyers for nearly two decades. I've helped hundreds of families navigate these programs—and I've seen firsthand how down payment assistance transforms "not yet" into "welcome home."

This guide breaks down every verified program available to Cincinnati-area buyers in Hamilton, Butler, Warren, and Clermont Counties. No fluff. No guessing. Just the facts you need to make an informed decision.

What you'll learn:

- Which programs you qualify for based on your situation
- Exactly how much assistance you can get
- The real pros and cons of each option
- How to apply (step-by-step)
- Questions to ask lenders before committing

Ready to explore your options? Let's get started.

Why This Guide Is Different

Updated Regularly to Reflect Program Changes

Down payment assistance programs change frequently—income limits adjust annually, funding opens and closes, and new programs launch. This guide is reviewed and updated regularly to ensure you're working with current information, not outdated advice from years-old blog posts.

Built From Real Cincinnati Transactions

This isn't a generic grant list compiled from internet research. The strategies and insights in this guide come from nearly two decades of helping real Cincinnati families navigate DPA programs. I've seen what works, what doesn't, and where buyers commonly get stuck.

Designed to Help You Avoid Costly Mistakes

Many buyers unknowingly make expensive errors with DPA:

- Choosing the wrong program for their timeline
- Missing forgiveness deadlines
- Overpaying in interest
- Not combining programs effectively

This guide highlights these pitfalls so you can avoid them.

Reflects How Lenders and Sellers Actually Evaluate DPA

Not all down payment assistance is viewed equally. Some programs process quickly; others cause delays. Some sellers welcome DPA buyers; others hesitate. This guide provides realistic expectations about how your DPA choice affects your home search and offer competitiveness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: How Down Payment Assistance Really Works

SECTION 2: Quick Eligibility Self-Assessment

SECTION 3: Complete Program Directory (Ohio Programs Only)

SECTION 4: Which Program Is Right for You? (Decision Helper)

SECTION 5: How to Apply: Your Action Plan

SECTION 6: Questions to Ask Every Lender

SECTION 7: Why Working With an Experienced REALTOR® Matters

SECTION 8: Important Disclosures

SECTION 1: HOW DOWN PAYMENT ASSISTANCE REALLY WORKS

The Truth About "Free Money" for Your Down Payment

Down payment assistance (DPA) isn't too good to be true—but it's not quite "free" either. Here's what you need to understand before you get excited.

What Is Down Payment Assistance?

DPA helps cover the upfront cash you need to close on a home:

- Your down payment
- Closing costs (title, appraisal, inspections, etc.)
- Prepaid expenses (property taxes, insurance, HOA dues)

Most programs give you 3-5% of your purchase price. On a \$250,000 home, that's \$7,500 to \$12,500 you don't have to save.

The Three Types of DPA

1. Grants (Best Option)

This is actual free money. You get the funds at closing and never repay them.

Example: Communities First Ohio gives you 3-5% as a true grant. Sell next year? Keep it. Refinance in three years? Keep it. No strings attached.

2. Forgivable Loans (Most Common)

You get a second mortgage that "forgives" after you stay in the home for a set period (usually 5-7 years). If you stay the full term, you never repay a dime. Sell early, and you owe it back.

Example: OHFA Down Payment Assistance gives you 3-3.5% forgiven after 7 years. Stay 7+ years = free. Sell in year 5 = you repay the full amount.

3. Repayable Loans (Rare in Ohio)

You get a second mortgage with interest and payments. Avoid these if you can—they add to your monthly housing costs.

The Tradeoffs You Need to Know

Higher Interest Rates

DPA programs typically add 0.25% to 0.75% to your mortgage rate. Why? Because these programs are paired with specific loan products and lenders charge fees to administer them.

Math check: Is the DPA amount worth the higher rate?

On a \$250,000 loan:

- 0.5% higher rate = ~\$70/month more
- Over 7 years = ~\$5,880 extra in interest
- But you got \$10,000+ in DPA = Net savings: \$4,000+

For most buyers staying 5+ years, DPA saves money. But if you plan to move in 2-3 years, run the numbers carefully.

Lender Restrictions

You can't use DPA with just any lender. Each program has approved lenders. This limits your rate-shopping options.

Income and Price Limits

Most programs cap your household income and the home price you can pay. These vary by county and household size, but generally:

- Income limits: \$80,000 to \$165,000 (varies)
- Purchase price limits: \$300,000 to \$450,000 (varies)

First-Time Buyer Definition

You're a "first-time buyer" if you haven't owned a home in the past **3 years**. Sold your home 4 years ago? You qualify. Exceptions exist for veterans and targeted area purchases.

What You Need to Qualify (Generally)

- ✓ Credit score 620-660+ (varies by program)
- ✓ Household income under program limits
- ✓ Purchasing a home under price limits
- ✓ Owner-occupancy (no investment properties)
- ✓ Complete homebuyer education (usually free, online)
- ✓ Work with approved lender

Key insight: Programs want to help you succeed. Requirements are more flexible than you think—especially for teachers, nurses, veterans, and first responders.

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

SECTION 2: QUICK ELIGIBILITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

Are You a Good Candidate for Down Payment Assistance?

Answer these questions to see which programs might fit your situation:

Your Location

- Buying in Hamilton County?
- Buying in Butler County?
- Buying in Warren County?
- Buying in Clermont County?
- Specifically within Cincinnati city limits?

Your Background

- First-time homebuyer? (No ownership in past 3 years)
- Veteran, active military, reservist, or surviving spouse?
- Teacher, firefighter, police officer, EMT, nurse, or physician?
- Graduated from college within the past 4 years?

Your Finances

- Credit score 620 or higher?
- Credit score 640 or higher?
- Credit score 660 or higher?
- Household income under ~\$100,000?
- Can you contribute at least \$500 of your own money?

Your Plans

- Plan to stay in the home at least 2 years?
- Plan to stay in the home at least 5 years?
- Plan to stay in the home at least 7 years?
- Ready to buy within the next 3-6 months?

Your Priorities

- Want a true grant that's never repaid?
- Okay with repaying if you sell within 5-7 years?
- Want the absolute maximum assistance available?
- Want the fastest path to forgiveness?

Quick Results

If you answered YES to "First-time buyer" + "Buying in Hamilton/Butler/Warren/Clermont":

→ **You likely qualify for OHFA Down Payment Assistance** (3-3.5%, forgiven after 7 years)

If you're also a teacher, nurse, veteran, or first responder:

→ **You qualify for OHFA Ohio Heroes** (0.25% rate discount + 3-3.5% DPA)

If you graduated college in the past 4 years:

→ **You qualify for OHFA Grants for Grads** (2.5-5% DPA, forgiven after 5 years instead of 7)

If you want a TRUE grant with no repayment risk:

→ **Explore Communities First Ohio** (3-5% grant, never repaid, no occupancy period)

If you can wait until March 2026:

→ **Prepare now for the Welcome Home Grant** (up to \$20,000, but extremely competitive—funds out in hours)

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

SECTION 3: COMPLETE CINCINNATI PROGRAM DIRECTORY

Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) Programs

Program 1: OHFA Standard Down Payment Assistance

What You Get:

- **3% of purchase price** (Conventional loans)
- **3.5% of purchase price** (FHA, VA, USDA loans)
- Forgiven after **7 years** of occupancy
- Can be used for down payment, closing costs, prepaids

Who Qualifies:

- First-time homebuyers (no ownership past 3 years), OR
- Veterans with honorable discharge (any time), OR
- Buyers purchasing in OHFA-designated target areas
- Must meet income and purchase price limits

Requirements:

- Credit score: **640+** for Conventional/USDA/VA, **650+** for FHA
- Complete free HUD-approved homebuyer education
- Use OHFA-approved lender
- Occupy home as primary residence within 60 days
- Meet debt-to-income ratio requirements

Income Limits (2025-2026 estimates):

- Vary by county and household size
- Generally \$80,000-\$165,000 range in Greater Cincinnati
- Higher limits in designated target areas
- Check current limits at myohiohome.org or ask your lender

Purchase Price Limits:

- Approximately \$300,000-\$450,000 depending on county
- Subject to annual adjustment
- Verify current limits with lender

The Fine Print:

- If you sell or refinance within 7 years, you must repay the full DPA amount
- If you sell and buy another home in Ohio within 7 years, forgiveness may transfer (ask lender)
- After 7 years, the debt is completely forgiven—nothing to repay

Real-World Example:

Sarah buys a \$280,000 home with an FHA loan:

- Gets 3.5% DPA = \$9,800
- Stays 8 years, then sells
- Owes \$0 back (forgiven after 7 years)
- Net benefit: \$9,800

Mike buys a \$250,000 home with a conventional loan:

- Gets 3% DPA = \$7,500
- Refinances in year 4
- Must repay full \$7,500

Why This Program Works:

OHFA DPA is the workhorse of Cincinnati homebuying. Thousands of local families use it every year. The 7-year forgiveness aligns with typical homeownership duration, and the 3-3.5% assistance meaningfully reduces upfront cash needs.

Pros:

- ✓ Substantial assistance (3-3.5%)
- ✓ Completely forgiven after 7 years
- ✓ Works with FHA, VA, USDA, and Conventional loans
- ✓ Free homebuyer education included
- ✓ Widely available through many lenders

Cons:

- ✗ Must repay if sold/refinanced before 7 years
- ✗ Limited to OHFA-approved lenders
- ✗ Slightly higher interest rate (typically 0.25-0.5%)
- ✗ Income and price limits may exclude higher earners

How to Apply:

1. Find an OHFA-participating lender (list at myohiohome.org)
2. Get pre-approved for mortgage
3. Discuss DPA eligibility with loan officer
4. Complete homebuyer education after submitting application
5. Shop for homes within price limits
6. DPA funds applied at closing

Source: <https://myohiohome.org/downpaymentassistance.aspx>

Status: Confirmed Active | Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Program 2: OHFA Ohio Heroes (For Public Servants)

What You Get:

- **0.25% mortgage rate discount** (saves ~\$35/month on \$250k loan)
- PLUS **same 3-3.5% DPA** as standard OHFA program
- DPA forgiven after 7 years

Who Qualifies (Must Be ONE of These):

- Veterans, active-duty military, reservists, surviving spouses
- Police officers
- Firefighters (including volunteer firefighters)
- EMTs and paramedics
- Physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses (RN, LPN, STNA)
- Teachers (pre-K through 12th grade)
- School administrators and counselors

Requirements:

- Same as standard OHFA program
- Must provide documentation proving eligible occupation
- Credit score 640+ (Conventional/USDA/VA) or 650+ (FHA)

Income & Price Limits:

- Same as standard OHFA DPA program

Real-World Example:

Jessica is a 3rd-grade teacher buying a \$270,000 home:

- Gets 0.25% rate discount = saves ~\$38/month
- Gets 3% DPA (conventional) = \$8,100
- Over 7 years: saves ~\$3,200 in interest + \$8,100 DPA = \$11,300 total benefit
- After 7 years: DPA forgiven, keeps all savings

Why This Program Is Powerful:

If you're a teacher, nurse, veteran, or first responder, Ohio Heroes stacks TWO benefits: a rate discount AND the full DPA. The rate discount alone saves \$3,000-\$4,000 over 7 years on a typical Cincinnati home.

Pros:

- ✓ Lower monthly payment (rate discount)
- ✓ Full DPA benefit (3-3.5%)
- ✓ Recognizes public service
- ✓ Same forgiveness terms (7 years)

Cons:

- ✗ Must prove eligible occupation with documentation
- ✗ All other OHFA restrictions apply
- ✗ Rate discount may be modest (~0.25%)

How to Apply:

1. Same process as standard OHFA
2. Inform lender you qualify for Ohio Heroes
3. Provide proof: employment letter, pay stub, DD-214 (veterans), teaching license, etc.
4. Lender processes rate discount and DPA simultaneously

Source: <https://myohiohome.org/ohioheroes.aspx>

Status: Confirmed Active | Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Program 3: OHFA Grants for Grads (Recent College Graduates)**What You Get:**

- Discounted mortgage interest rate (amount varies by lender)
- **2.5% or 5% of purchase price** for DPA
- Forgiven after **5 years** (not 7—this is faster!)

Who Qualifies:

- Graduated from accredited college/university within past **48 months** (4 years)
- Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate, or post-graduate degree
- Otherwise meet OHFA requirements

Requirements:

- Credit score 640+ minimum
- Proof of graduation (transcripts, diploma)
- Complete homebuyer education
- Income and purchase price limits apply

Real-World Example:

Marcus graduated with his bachelor's in 2023, buying in 2026:

- Within 48-month window ✓
- Gets 5% DPA = \$12,500 (on \$250k home)
- Stays 6 years
- Owes \$0 back (forgiven after 5 years, not 7)
- If he sold in year 6, keeps full \$12,500

Why This Program Stands Out:

Shorter forgiveness period (5 years instead of 7) is perfect if you're early-career and might relocate for job opportunities. The 5% option is also more generous than the standard 3-3.5%.

Pros:

- ✓ Faster forgiveness (5 years vs 7)
- ✓ Up to 5% assistance
- ✓ Discounted interest rate
- ✓ Recognizes education investment

Cons:

- ✗ 48-month graduation window (must have graduated recently)
- ✗ Must prove graduation with documentation
- ✗ All other OHFA restrictions apply

How to Apply:

1. Contact OHFA-participating lender
2. Provide proof of graduation and date
3. Apply for Grants for Grads program
4. Complete homebuyer education

Source: OHFA website and participating lenders

Status: Confirmed Active | Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority Programs

Program 4: Communities First Ohio

What You Get:

- **3%, 4%, or 5% of purchase price** as a TRUE GRANT
- Never needs to be repaid—ever
- No second mortgage
- Instant equity in your home

Who Qualifies:

- First-time AND repeat buyers (no first-time requirement!)
- Must meet income limits
- Income based **ONLY** on borrower (not full household—unique advantage)

Requirements:

- Minimum credit score: **620**
- Must use Communities First participating lender
- Occupy as primary residence within 60 days
- Purchase price limits apply

Income Limits:

- Based on **BORROWER** income only (not spouse or household)
- Limits vary by percentage selected (3%, 4%, or 5%)
- Contact participating lender for exact thresholds

The Big Difference:

This is a **TRUE GRANT**. No forgiveness period. No repayment. No occupancy requirement. Sell next year? Keep it. Refinance anytime? Keep it. It's yours.

Real-World Example:

Tom and Lisa buy a \$300,000 home:

- Get 5% Communities First grant = \$15,000
- Sell after 3 years to upsize
- Keep the full \$15,000 (no repayment)
- Unlike OHFA, no 7-year waiting period

Why This Program Is Underused:

Most buyers don't know about it. Fewer lenders participate compared to OHFA. But if you qualify and can find a participating lender, this is the **gold standard**—true grant, instant equity, zero repayment risk.

Pros:

- ✓ TRUE GRANT—never repaid
- ✓ No restrictions on selling or refinancing
- ✓ Instant home equity
- ✓ Income based on borrower only, not household
- ✓ No first-time buyer requirement
- ✓ Continuous funding (not first-come-first-served)

Cons:

- ✗ Fewer participating lenders
- ✗ Higher percentage may result in higher rate
- ✗ Income limits can be lower than OHFA for some buyers

How to Apply:

1. Contact a Communities First participating lender (list at [communitiesfirstohio.com](https://www.communitiesfirstohio.com))
2. Apply for mortgage
3. Lender determines which percentage (3%, 4%, or 5%) you qualify for
4. Grant funds provided at closing
5. No repayment ever required

Source: <https://www.communitiesfirstohio.com/>

Status: Confirmed Active | Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

City of Cincinnati Programs

Program 5: Cincinnati ADDI (American Dream Downpayment Initiative)

What You Get:

- Up to **\$14,000** (some sources say \$5,000—amount varies)
- 0% interest deferred loan
- Forgiven after **5 years**
- Can be used for down payment and closing costs

Who Qualifies:

- First-time homebuyers only
- Low to moderate income households
- Property must be within **Cincinnati city limits** (not suburbs)

Requirements:

- Must meet income limits (typically 80% of Area Median Income)
- Property must be within Cincinnati city limits
- Must be first-time buyer

Income Limits:

- Approximately \$65,000-\$85,000 for typical household (estimate)
- Verify exact limits with City of Cincinnati

IMPORTANT NOTE:

This program's current status is unclear. The City of Cincinnati has a webpage for ADDI but provides minimal detail. Some sources reference it, but I could not verify current funding or active application processing.

Before relying on this program:

- Call City of Cincinnati Community & Economic Development: **513-352-6146**
- Ask: Is ADDI currently funded? What are the income limits? How do I apply?

Pros (If Active):

- ✓ Substantial assistance (\$5,000-\$14,000)
- ✓ Zero interest

✓ Forgiven after 5 years

Cons:

- ✗ Cincinnati city limits only (excludes most suburbs)
- ✗ First-time buyer requirement
- ✗ Unclear current status
- ✗ Must repay if sold within 5 years

How to Apply (If Active):

1. Confirm program status: 513-352-6146
2. Verify income and property eligibility
3. Work with approved lender
4. Coordinate DPA application through City

Source: <https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/community-development/homeownerrenter-assistance/american-dream-downpayment-assistance/>

Status: UNKNOWN—Verify directly with City before proceeding

Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Federal Home Loan Bank of Cincinnati Program

Program 6: Welcome Home Grant (Highly Competitive)

What You Get:

- Up to **\$20,000** grant for most homebuyers
- Some sources mention **\$25,000 for veterans** (unconfirmed for 2026)
- Can be used for down payment and closing costs
- TRUE GRANT—no repayment after 5-year retention period

Who Qualifies:

- Income-eligible homebuyers (typically 80% of Area Median Income or less)
- First-time buyers AND repeat buyers (not limited to first-time)
- Must use FHLB Cincinnati member institution (bank/credit union)

Requirements:

- Must contribute at least **\$500 of your own funds**
- First-time buyers must complete homebuyer counseling before closing
- Property subject to 5-year retention deed restriction
- Must notify FHLB if selling, refinancing, or transferring within 5 years
- Funds available **first-come, first-served**

Income Limits:

- Typically 80% Area Median Income
- Varies by county and household size
- 2026 limits not yet announced (check FHLB Cincinnati in February 2026)

CRITICAL TIMING:

This program typically opens **one day per year in March** and funds exhaust within **hours**. If you want this grant, you must be:

1. Fully pre-approved with participating lender
2. Homebuyer education completed (if first-time buyer)
3. \$500 ready in your account
4. Ready to act the MORNING it opens (usually 8 AM ET)

2026 Status:

Program expected to open March 2026 based on historical pattern. Grant amounts, income limits, and exact date not yet announced as of January 29, 2026.

Real-World Scenario:

2025 Example:

- Program opened March 13, 2025 at 8:00 AM
- Statewide funding exhausted by 10:00 AM same day
- Buyers who weren't pre-approved missed out

Why This Program Is So Competitive:

\$20,000 is life-changing for most buyers. Everyone wants it. Limited funding. It's like trying to buy concert tickets the moment they go on sale—you snooze, you lose.

Pros:

- ✓ Substantial grant (\$20,000)
- ✓ True grant after 5-year retention period
- ✓ Not limited to first-time buyers
- ✓ Can be combined with OHFA DPA (verify with lender)

Cons:

- ✗ EXTREMELY competitive—funds out in hours
- ✗ Must be fully ready when it opens
- ✗ Annual funding (miss it = wait a year)
- ✗ 5-year retention deed restriction
- ✗ Must notify FHLB of any changes (sale, refi, etc.)

How to Prepare NOW:

1. Contact FHLB Cincinnati member institution (bank/credit union) TODAY
2. Get fully pre-approved for mortgage
3. Complete homebuyer education if first-time buyer
4. Save \$500 for required contribution
5. Monitor FHLB Cincinnati website for 2026 announcement (likely February)
6. Set alarm for opening day, be ready at 8:00 AM ET

Source: <https://www.fhlbcin.com/housing-programs/welcome-home-program/>

Status: Program Exists—2026 Details Not Yet Announced

Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Low Down Payment Loan Programs (Not DPA, But Important)

Program 7: FHA Loans (3.5% Down)

What You Get:

- Only **3.5% down payment** required
- Down payment can come from gift, grant, or DPA program
- Can be LAYERED with DPA programs above
- More lenient credit requirements

Who Qualifies:

- Any buyer (first-time or repeat)
- Primary residence only
- Minimum credit score typically 580 (some lenders require 620-640)

Requirements:

- Property must meet FHA appraisal standards
- Mortgage insurance required (upfront + monthly)
- Debt-to-income ratio limits apply
- Owner-occupancy required

FHA + DPA Combination:

This is powerful: Use FHA loan (3.5% down) + OHFA DPA (covers the 3.5%) = effectively \$0 out of pocket for down payment. You only pay closing costs.

Real-World Example:

\$250,000 home with FHA + OHFA DPA:

- FHA requires 3.5% down = \$8,750
- OHFA DPA provides 3.5% = \$8,750
- Your cash needed for down payment: \$0
- You pay closing costs (~\$6,000-\$8,000) which DPA can also help cover

Pros:

- ✓ Very low down payment
- ✓ Lenient credit requirements
- ✓ Can combine with DPA
- ✓ Widely available

Cons:

- ✗ Mortgage insurance required (upfront + monthly)
- ✗ Property must meet FHA standards
- ✗ Slightly higher interest rates than conventional

Source: FHA-approved lenders, <https://www.hud.gov/buying/loans>

Status: Confirmed Active | Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Program 8: VA Loans (0% Down for Veterans)

What You Get:

- **ZERO down payment** required
- No monthly mortgage insurance
- Competitive interest rates
- Can combine with DPA for closing costs

Who Qualifies:

- Veterans with qualifying service
- Active-duty military
- Some reservists and National Guard
- Surviving spouses
- Must have Certificate of Eligibility (COE) from VA

Requirements:

- Obtain COE from VA (online, through lender, or by mail)
- Meet VA credit and income requirements
- Property must meet VA appraisal standards
- Funding fee applies (1.25-3.3% depending on down payment and use)
- Funding fee **WAIVED** for disabled veterans (10%+ VA disability rating)

VA + Ohio Heroes Combination:

Veterans can use VA loan (0% down) + Ohio Heroes program (3.5% DPA + rate discount). The DPA can cover closing costs, and the rate discount saves money monthly.

Real-World Example:

Marine Corps veteran buying \$275,000 home:

- VA loan: \$0 down payment required
- 30% VA disability rating: Funding fee waived (saves \$3,438)
- Ohio Heroes: Gets 3.5% DPA (\$9,625) for closing costs
- Ohio Heroes: Gets 0.25% rate discount
- Total benefit: \$13,000+ in savings

Pros:

- ✓ ZERO down payment
- ✓ No monthly mortgage insurance
- ✓ Funding fee waived if disabled
- ✓ Competitive rates
- ✓ Can combine with Ohio Heroes

Cons:

- ✗ Limited to eligible veterans/military
- ✗ Funding fee if not disabled (can be financed)
- ✗ Property must meet VA standards

How to Apply:

1. Obtain COE from VA (online: ebenefits.va.gov)
2. Contact VA-approved lender
3. If teacher/nurse/first responder veteran, ask about Ohio Heroes
4. Property must pass VA appraisal

Source: <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/>

Status: Confirmed Active | Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Program 9: USDA Rural Development Loans (0% Down in Eligible Suburbs)

What You Get:

- **ZERO down payment** required
- Below-market interest rates
- Can combine with DPA for closing costs
- Income limits actually help some middle-income buyers

Who Qualifies:

- Low to moderate income buyers
- Property must be in USDA-eligible area
- Many Greater Cincinnati SUBURBS qualify (not just "rural")

Requirements:

- Property must be in USDA-eligible area (check map: <https://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov>)
- Income limits apply (typically up to 115% of Area Median Income)
- Credit score requirements (typically 640+)
- Guarantee fee applies (1% upfront + 0.35% annual)
- Owner-occupancy required

Income Limits:

- Up to 115% of Area Median Income
- For 4-person household in Cincinnati area: approximately \$110,000-\$120,000 (estimate, verify current)

Many Cincinnati Suburbs Qualify:

USDA isn't just farmland. Many popular suburbs in Warren, Clermont, and Butler Counties are USDA-eligible. Check the map before assuming you don't qualify.

Real-World Example:

Buyer purchasing in Lebanon (Warren County):

- Property is USDA-eligible ✓
- Household income \$95,000 ✓
- USDA loan: \$0 down payment
- Below-market rate saves ~\$30/month vs conventional
- Can layer OHFA DPA to cover closing costs

Pros:

- ✓ ZERO down payment
- ✓ Below-market rates
- ✓ Many suburbs qualify
- ✓ Lenient credit requirements
- ✓ Can combine with DPA for closing costs

Cons:

- ✗ Property location restrictions (must be USDA-eligible)
- ✗ Income limits (can disqualify higher earners)
- ✗ Guarantee fee (upfront + annual)
- ✗ Longer processing times

How to Apply:

1. Check property eligibility: <https://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov/eligibility/welcomeAction.do>
2. Contact USDA-approved lender
3. Verify income eligibility
4. Can layer with OHFA DPA for closing costs

Source: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/single-family-housing-programs>

Status: Confirmed Active | Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Tax Credit Programs (Ongoing Savings)

Program 10: OHFA Mortgage Credit Certificate (MCC)

What You Get:

- Federal tax credit of up to **40% of mortgage interest** (MTC Plus) or **30%** (MTC Basic)
- Capped at **\$2,000 per year**
- Dollar-for-dollar reduction of federal taxes owed
- Lasts the LIFE of the loan (as long as you occupy the home)

Who Qualifies:

- First-time buyers OR buyers in targeted areas
- Can combine with OHFA loans (MTC Plus) or non-OHFA loans (MTC Basic)
- Income and purchase price limits apply

Requirements:

- Credit score 640+
- Must occupy as primary residence
- \$800 application fee
- Cannot use with standard mortgage interest deduction (must choose one)

Real-World Example:

Buyer with \$250,000 loan at 6.5%:

- Year 1 mortgage interest: ~\$16,000
- 40% MCC credit: \$6,400 (but capped at \$2,000)
- Saves \$2,000 on federal taxes every year
- Over 10 years: \$20,000 in tax savings
- Over 30 years: \$60,000 in tax savings

Is MCC Worth the \$800 Fee?

Almost always yes. First-year savings alone (\$2,000) exceeds the \$800 cost. Savings continue every year you own the home.

Pros:

- ✓ \$2,000/year federal tax savings
- ✓ Lasts life of loan
- ✓ Can combine with OHFA DPA
- ✓ Stackable benefit (DPA + MCC)

Cons:

- ✗ \$800 application fee
- ✗ Cannot also take standard mortgage interest deduction
- ✗ Must calculate which saves more (MCC vs standard deduction)
- ✗ Does not transfer to new home

How to Apply:

1. Ask OHFA-approved lender about MCC
2. Apply at same time as mortgage
3. Pay \$800 fee
4. Lender processes MCC with loan
5. Use credit when filing federal taxes each year

Source: <https://ohiohome.org/> (OHFA website)

Status: Confirmed Active | Last Verified: January 29, 2026

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

SECTION 4: WHICH PROGRAM IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Real Cincinnati Buyer Scenarios

Scenario 1: First-Time Buyer, Teacher, Modest Income

Profile:

- Elementary school teacher
- Household income \$75,000
- Credit score 680
- \$3,000 saved
- Buying in Hamilton County
- Plans to stay 7+ years

Best Options:

1st Choice: OHFA Ohio Heroes

- You're a teacher—you qualify! ✓
- Get 0.25% rate discount (saves ~\$35/month)
- Get 3.5% DPA if using FHA or 3% if conventional
- Forgiven after 7 years (you're staying 7+ years ✓)
- On \$250k home: \$8,750 DPA + \$3,000 rate savings = \$11,750 benefit

2nd Choice: Communities First Ohio

- Get 3-5% as true grant (never repaid)
- If you're unsure about staying 7 years, this is safer
- No repayment risk even if you move in 3 years

Action Plan:

1. Contact OHFA-participating lender who offers Ohio Heroes
2. Provide proof of teaching position
3. Apply for mortgage + Ohio Heroes
4. Complete free homebuyer education
5. Shop for homes under price limits

Scenario 2: Recent College Graduate, Entry-Level Job

Profile:

- Graduated 2023 (within 48 months ✓)
- First job out of college, income \$65,000
- Credit score 650
- \$2,000 saved
- Buying in Butler County
- Might relocate in 5 years for career

Best Options:

1st Choice: OHFA Grants for Grads

- Graduated within 48 months ✓
- Get 2.5% or 5% DPA
- Forgiven after 5 years (not 7)

- Perfect if you might move in 5 years for career opportunities

2nd Choice: Communities First Ohio

- True grant, never repaid
- Safer if you might move before 5 years

Action Plan:

1. Gather proof of graduation (transcripts, diploma)
2. Contact OHFA-participating lender
3. Ask specifically about Grants for Grads
4. Compare 5-year forgiveness vs Communities First instant grant
5. Choose based on how certain you are about staying 5 years

Scenario 3: Veteran, Limited Savings

Profile:

- Navy veteran, honorably discharged
- Household income \$80,000
- Credit score 620
- Only \$1,500 saved
- Buying in Warren County
- 20% VA disability rating

Best Options:

1st Choice: VA Loan + Ohio Heroes

- VA loan: \$0 down payment ✓
- VA loan: Funding fee WAIVED (you're 20% disabled) ✓
- Ohio Heroes: Get 3.5% DPA for closing costs
- Ohio Heroes: Get 0.25% rate discount
- On \$250k home: Saves \$3,125 (waived fee) + \$9,625 (DPA) + \$3,000 (rate) = \$15,750 benefit

Action Plan:

1. Get Certificate of Eligibility from VA (ebenefits.va.gov)
2. Contact OHFA-participating VA lender
3. Tell them you're a veteran AND qualify for Ohio Heroes
4. Get both benefits: VA loan + Ohio Heroes
5. Your \$1,500 saved covers closing costs (with DPA help)

Scenario 4: Repeat Buyer, Sold Home 4 Years Ago

Profile:

- Sold previous home in 2022 (more than 3 years ago ✓)
- Household income \$95,000
- Credit score 700
- \$10,000 saved
- Buying in Clermont County
- Plans to stay 10+ years

Best Options:

1st Choice: OHFA Standard DPA

- You're a "first-time buyer" (haven't owned in 3+ years) ✓
- Get 3% (conventional) or 3.5% (FHA) DPA
- Forgiven after 7 years
- You're staying 10+ years—full forgiveness guaranteed

2nd Choice: Communities First Ohio

- No first-time buyer requirement
- Get 3-5% grant
- Never repaid

Action Plan:

1. Verify you're considered "first-time buyer" (3+ years since sale)
2. Contact OHFA-participating lender
3. Apply for standard OHFA DPA
4. If income is over OHFA limit, try Communities First (borrower-only income)

Scenario 5: Higher Income, Buying in Suburb

Profile:

- Household income \$130,000
- Credit score 720
- \$25,000 saved
- Buying in Mason or West Chester (Butler County)
- Not a teacher/nurse/veteran

Challenge:

You may be over income limits for OHFA programs in non-targeted areas. But you have options:

Option 1: Check USDA Eligibility

- Many Butler County suburbs are USDA-eligible
- Income limit ~\$120,000 for 4-person household
- If you qualify: \$0 down payment USDA loan

Option 2: Communities First Ohio

- Income based on BORROWER only
- If only one spouse is on the loan, might qualify
- Get 3-5% grant

Option 3: Low Down Payment Conventional

- 3% down conventional loan (no DPA)
- Your \$25,000 saved covers 3% down + closing costs
- Avoid income-restricted programs altogether

Action Plan:

1. Check USDA eligibility for your target property
2. Ask Communities First lender about borrower-only income qualification
3. If over all limits, use conventional 3% down (you have the cash saved)

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

SECTION 5: HOW TO APPLY: YOUR ACTION PLAN

The 7-Step Process

Step 1: Identify Your Top 2 Programs

Based on Section 4 scenarios, write down your best programs:

1. _____
2. _____

Step 2: Find Approved Lenders

OHFA programs: myohiohome.org → Find a Lender

Communities First: communitiesfirstohio.com → For Lenders

Welcome Home Grant: Contact banks/credit unions, ask if they're FHLB Cincinnati members

VA loans: Search "VA-approved lenders Cincinnati"

USDA loans: Search "USDA-approved lenders Ohio"

Pro tip: Call 3-5 lenders. Not all lenders offer all programs. Ask specifically: "Do you participate in [program name]?"

Step 3: Get Pre-Approved (Not Just Pre-Qualified)

Pre-approval = lender verified your income, assets, credit

Pre-qualification = lender's rough estimate based on what you said

You need pre-approval.

Documents you'll need:

- 2 years tax returns
- 2 most recent pay stubs
- 2 months bank statements
- Government-issued ID
- Proof of any other income
- List of debts (credit cards, car loans, student loans)

Step 4: Complete Homebuyer Education (If Required)

Most DPA programs require HUD-approved homebuyer education. Good news: it's free and online.

How to find a course:

- Call HUD: 800-569-4287
- Visit: <https://www.hud.gov/>
- Ask your lender for approved providers

When to complete it:

- OHFA programs: AFTER you submit your loan application (unusual, but that's the rule)
- Welcome Home Grant: BEFORE closing if you're a first-time buyer
- Other programs: Verify with lender

Time commitment: ~6-8 hours (usually self-paced online)

Step 5: Shop for Homes Within Program Limits

Purchase price limits vary by program and county. Your lender will tell you the maximum.

Stay under the limit. If you fall in love with a home over the limit, you can't use the program.

Step 6: Make an Offer & Mention DPA in Contract

When you write an offer:

- Your financing contingency will mention the DPA program
- Example: "Buyer to use OHFA Down Payment Assistance, subject to program approval"
- Your REALTOR® will handle this language

Sellers need to know:

- DPA doesn't delay closing (if you're pre-approved)
- DPA doesn't affect seller proceeds
- DPA is common in Cincinnati—it's not a red flag

Step 7: Close & Enjoy Your New Home

At closing:

- Your first mortgage funds the purchase
- DPA funds appear as a credit (grant) or second mortgage (forgivable loan)
- You sign occupancy agreements committing to live in the home
- You get the keys!

Post-closing:

- Occupy home within 60 days (most programs)
- Keep proof of occupancy (utility bills, driver's license address change, etc.)
- Track your forgiveness timeline (7 years for OHFA, 5 years for Grants for Grads, etc.)
- If you need to sell early, contact program administrator to discuss repayment

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

■ Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904

■ Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com

■ Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

SECTION 6: QUESTIONS TO ASK EVERY LENDER

26 Critical Questions Before You Commit

About the Program

1. Which DPA programs do you offer?
2. What is the exact interest rate with DPA versus without DPA?
3. How much will DPA save me in upfront costs?
4. How much will the higher rate cost me over [5, 7, 10] years?
5. Can I combine multiple programs? (Example: OHFA + Welcome Home)

About Forgiveness & Repayment

6. Is this a grant, forgivable loan, or repayable loan?
7. How many years until it's forgiven?
8. What happens if I sell before the forgiveness period ends?
9. What happens if I refinance before the forgiveness period ends?
10. If I sell and buy another home in Ohio, does forgiveness transfer?

About Income & Price Limits

11. What are the exact income limits for my household size and county?
12. Does the income limit include my entire household or just borrowers on the loan?
13. What is the maximum purchase price I can pay with this program?
14. Does my target property address/zip code qualify?
15. Am I buying in a "targeted area" with higher limits?

About Requirements

16. What credit score do I need?
17. Do I need to complete homebuyer education? When and where?
18. Do I need to be a first-time homebuyer?
19. How much of my own funds do I need to contribute?
20. Can the down payment be 100% DPA, or must I contribute?

About Timeline & Process

21. How long does program approval take?
22. Is funding currently available, or is there a waiting list?
23. If I apply today, when could I close?
24. What documents do I need for the DPA application?

About Your Options

25. What happens if I don't qualify for DPA?
26. Would I be better off with a lower rate and no DPA, saving my own down payment?

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

- Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904
- Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com
- Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

SECTION 7: WHY WORKING WITH AN EXPERIENCED REALTOR® MATTERS

You Don't Have to Navigate This Alone

Down payment assistance programs are complex. Lenders focus on the loan. Program administrators focus on compliance. **Your REALTOR® focuses on YOU.**

What I Bring to the Table

18+ Years Serving Cincinnati Homebuyers

I'm not new to this. I've guided hundreds of families through DPA programs. I know which lenders are responsive. I know which programs have gotchas. I know how to position your offer so sellers don't dismiss you because of DPA.

Specialized Knowledge in First-Time Buyer Programs

This is my niche. I don't just "also do" first-time buyers—I specialize in them. I understand:

- How to find homes within price limits
- How to negotiate inspection repairs when you're cash-strapped
- How to time your homebuyer education requirement
- How to explain DPA to sellers so they say yes

Connections to DPA-Friendly Lenders

Not all lenders are created equal. Some lenders:

- Drag their feet on DPA processing
- Add unnecessary overlays (extra requirements)
- Don't return calls promptly

I have relationships with lenders who WANT to do DPA deals and do them well. I'll connect you with the right lender for your situation.

Fair Housing Expertise

I know how to discuss neighborhoods, schools, and property characteristics without steering or violating Fair Housing laws. Your home search should be based on YOUR priorities—not assumptions about what "buyers like you" want.

Negotiation on Your Behalf

When you're using DPA, sellers sometimes have questions or concerns. I know how to:

- Explain DPA doesn't delay closing
- Structure offers that compete with conventional buyers
- Negotiate seller concessions to further reduce your cash needed
- Protect your earnest money and contingencies

What Makes Me Different

I Educate, I Don't Pressure

This guide? This is how I work. I give you information. I answer questions. I let YOU decide what's right for YOUR family. No high-pressure tactics. No pushing you into homes you can't afford.

I've Been Where You Are

I remember my first home purchase. The nervousness. The confusion. The fear of making a mistake. I treat your transaction like it matters—because it does.

I'm Available When You Need Me

Text, call, email—I respond. Fast. You're not bothering me. This is your biggest financial decision. You deserve timely answers.

Let's Talk About Your Situation

Every buyer is different. Maybe you're a teacher looking at Ohio Heroes. Maybe you're a veteran. Maybe you graduated college two years ago and qualify for Grants for Grads.

I want to hear YOUR story and figure out YOUR best path to homeownership.

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

■ Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904

■ Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com

■ Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Ohio Real Estate License: SAL.2006003705

SECTION 8: IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

Read This Before You Act

This Guide Is Educational Only

This guide provides general information about down payment assistance programs. It is NOT:

- An offer to lend
- A loan pre-approval or commitment
- Legal advice
- Financial advice
- Tax advice
- A guarantee you qualify for any program
- A guarantee any program is currently funded

Programs Change Constantly

- Programs open and close without notice
- Funding exhausts mid-year
- Income limits adjust annually
- Purchase price limits change
- Program rules are modified
- Programs are discontinued
- New programs launch

You MUST verify current information with:

- Program administrators (OHFA, FHLB, etc.)
- Participating lenders
- Official program websites

Do not rely on this guide alone. Information was current as of January 29, 2026 but may have changed since then.

Lender Participation Required

DPA programs require specific approved lenders. Not all lenders participate in all programs. Ask lenders:

- Which programs they currently offer
- If they're currently accepting applications
- What their specific overlays (additional requirements) are

Qualification Is Not Guaranteed

Qualifying for a DPA program does not mean you qualify for a mortgage. You must:

- Meet lender credit standards
- Verify income and employment
- Verify assets and down payment funds
- Meet debt-to-income ratio requirements
- Pass full underwriting review
- Property must appraise for purchase price or higher

Fair Housing Compliance

I do not steer or direct buyers toward or away from any area based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, or disability. All homebuyers should evaluate neighborhoods based on their individual preferences, needs, and priorities.

This guide provides factual information about programs. It does not suggest where you should or should not buy.

Tax Implications

Some DPA programs have tax implications:

- Forgiven debt may be considered income (consult CPA)
- Mortgage Credit Certificates affect how you file taxes
- Mortgage interest deduction interacts with MCC

Consult a tax professional before making tax-related decisions.

Property Eligibility

Not all properties qualify for all programs. Exclusions may include:

- Certain condominiums
- Manufactured homes not on permanent foundation
- Multi-unit properties (3-4 units)
- Properties in certain locations
- Properties over price limits
- Properties needing major repairs

Verify property eligibility **BEFORE** making an offer.

Repeat Program Usage

If you've used DPA before, eligibility for future programs varies. Some programs allow repeat usage; others don't. Verify your situation with program administrators.

Contact Information

While every effort was made to provide accurate contact information, websites, phone numbers, and program names may change. If a link doesn't work, search for the program administrator directly.

Geographic Limitation

This guide focuses on Hamilton, Butler, Warren, and Clermont Counties in Ohio. Programs in other Ohio counties or other states are not covered.

As a licensed Ohio REALTOR®, I can only provide real estate services in Ohio. I cannot assist with home purchases in Kentucky or Indiana.

No Warranty

This information is provided "as is" without warranty of any kind, express or implied. I make no representation about the completeness, accuracy, or reliability of the information contained in this guide.

Your Responsibility

It is **YOUR** responsibility to:

- Verify program information with official sources
- Ask questions until you understand
- Read and understand all loan documents before signing
- Consult professionals (attorney, CPA, financial advisor) as needed
- Make informed decisions appropriate for your situation

Final Thoughts: You Can Do This

Homeownership in Cincinnati is within reach. Yes, housing has gotten more expensive. Yes, saving a down payment is hard. But programs exist to help—and thousands of buyers use them every year.

The difference between buyers who succeed and buyers who stay stuck is usually just one thing: **taking the first step.**

Make the call. Send the email. Get pre-approved. Complete the homebuyer education. Put yourself in position to act when the right home appears.

I've seen families transform their lives through homeownership. Single moms buying their first place. Veterans finally planting roots. Teachers getting the space they need for their own kids. Young couples building equity instead of paying rent.

You can be next.

Free 15-minute Cincinnati down payment assistance eligibility call.

■ Call or Text Jeff: (513) 205-7904

■ Email: jeffwilliamsonrealtor@gmail.com

■ Website: www.realtorincincinnati.com

Ohio Real Estate License: SAL.2006003705

Guide Prepared: January 29, 2026 | **Version:** 1.1 (Publication Ready)

Research Sources: OHFA, FHLB Cincinnati, Communities First Ohio, HUD, VA, USDA, and participating lenders

Coverage Area: Hamilton, Butler, Warren, and Clermont Counties, Ohio

This guide is provided as a free educational service. All homebuyers should work with licensed real estate professionals, mortgage lenders, and attorneys appropriate to their transaction.

END OF GUIDE