

Home Equity Lines of Credit

HOW TO USE THE BOOKLET

When you and your lender discuss home equity lines of credit, often referred to as HELOCs, you receive a copy of this booklet. It helps you explore and understand your options when borrowing against the equity in your home.

You can find more information from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) about home loans at cfpb.gov/mortgages. You'll also find other mortgage-related CFPB resources, facts, and tools to help you take control of your borrowing options.

ABOUT THE CFPB

The CFPB is a 21st century agency that implements and enforces federal consumer financial law and ensures that markets for consumer financial products are fair, transparent, and competitive.

This pamphlet, titled What you should know about home equity lines of credit, was created to comply with federal law pursuant to 15 U.S.C. 1637a(e) and 12 CFR 1026.40(e).

HOW CAN THIS BOOKLET HELP YOU?

This booklet can help you decide whether home equity line of credit is the right choice for you, and help you shop for the best available option.

A home equity line of credit (HELOC) is a loan that allows you to borrow, spend, and repay as you go, using your home as collateral.

Typically, you can borrow up to a specified percentage of your equity. Equity is the value of your home minus the amount you owe on your mortgage.

Consider a HELOC if you are confident you can keep up with the loan payments. If you fall behind or can't repay the loan on schedule, you could lose your home.

After you finish this booklet:

- You'll understand the effect of borrowing against your home
- You'll think through your borrowing and financing options, besides a HELOC
- You'll see how to shop for your best HELOC offer
- You'll see what to do if the economy or your situation changes



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COMPARE A HELOC TO OTHER MONEY SOURCES

Before you decide to take out a HELOC, it might make sense to consider other options that might be available to you, like the ones below.

TIP

Renting your home out to other people may be prohibited under the terms of your line of credit.

MONEY SOURCE	HOW MUCH CAN YOU BORROW	VARIABLE OR FIXED RATE	IS YOUR HOME AT RISK?	TYPICAL ADVANTAGES	TYPICAL DISADVANTAGES
HELOC You borrow against the equity in your home	Generally a percentage of the appraised value of your home, minus the amount you owe on your mortgage	Variable, typically	Yes	Continue repaying and borrowing for several years without additional approvals or paperwork	Repayment amount varies; repayment is often required when you sell your home
SECOND MORTGAGE OR HOME EQUITY LOAN You borrow against the equity in your home	Generally a percentage of the appraised value of your home, minus the amount you owe on your mortgage	Fixed	Yes	Equal payments that pay off the entire loan	If you need more money, you need to apply for a new loan; repayment is often required when you sell your home
CASH-OUT REFINANCE You replace your existing mortgage with a bigger mortgage and take the difference in cash	Generally a percentage of the appraised value of your home; the amount of your existing loan plus the amount you want to cash out	Variable or Fixed	Yes	Continue to make just one mortgage payment	Closing costs are generally higher; it may take longer to pay off your mortgage; interest rate may be higher than your current mortgage
PERSONAL LINE OF CREDIT You borrow based on your credit, without using your home as collateral mortgage and take the difference in cash	Up to your credit limit, as determined by the lender	Variable, typically	No	Continue repaying and borrowing for several years without additional approvals or paperwork	Solid credit is required; you may need to pay the entire amount due once a year; higher interest rate than a loan that uses your home as collateral
RETIREMENT PLAN LOAN You borrow from your retirement savings in a 401(k) or similar plan through your current employer	Generally, up to 50% of your vested balance or \$50,000, whichever is less	Fixed	No	Repay through paycheck deductions; paperwork required but no credit check and no impact on your credit score	If you leave or lose your job, repay the whole amount at that time or pay taxes and penalties; spouse may need to consent
HOME EQUITY CONVERSION MORTGAGE (HECM) You must be age 62 or older, and you borrow against the equity in your home	Depends on your age, the interest rate on your loan, and the value of your home	Variable or Fixed	Yes	You don't make monthly loan payments—instead, you typically repay the loan when you move out, or your survivors repay it after you die	The amount you owe grows over time; you might not have any value left in your home if you want to leave it to your heirs
CREDIT CARD You borrow money from the credit card company and repay as you go	Up to the amount of your credit limit, as determined by the credit card company	Variable or Fixed	No	No minimum purchase; consumer protections in the case of fraud or lost or stolen card	Higher interest rate than a loan that uses your home as collateral
FRIENDS AND FAMILY You borrow money from someone you are close to	Agreed on by the borrower and lender	Variable, Fixed or Other	No	Reduced waiting time, fees, and paperwork compared to a formal loan	Forgiven loans and unreported or forgiven interest can complicate taxes, especially for large loans; can jeopardize important personal relationships if something goes wrong

HOW HELOCS WORK

PREPARE FOR UP-FRONT COSTS

Some lenders waive some or all of the up-front costs for a HELOC. Others may charge fees. For example, you might get charged:

- A fee for a property appraisal, which is a formal estimate of the value of your home
- An application fee, which might not be refunded if you are turned down
- Closing costs, including fees for attorneys, title search, mortgage preparation and filing, property and title insurance, and taxes

PULL MONEY FROM YOUR LINE OF CREDIT

Once approved for a HELOC, you can generally spend up to your credit limit whenever you want. When your line of credit is open for spending, you are in the borrowing period, also called the draw period. Typically, you use special checks or a credit card to draw on your line. Some plans require you to borrow a minimum amount each time (for example, \$300) or keep a minimum amount outstanding. Some plans require you to take an initial amount when the credit line is set up.

MAKE REPAYMENTS DURING THE “DRAW PERIOD”

Some plans set a minimum monthly payment that includes a portion of the principal (the amount you borrow) plus accrued interest. The portion of your payment that goes toward principal typically does not repay the principal by the end of the term. Other plans may allow payment of the interest only, during the draw period, which means that you pay nothing toward the principal.

If your plan has a variable interest rate, your monthly payments may change even if you don’t draw more money.

ENTER THE “REPAYMENT PERIOD”

Whatever your payment arrangements during the draw period—whether you pay some, a little, or none of the principal amount of the loan—when the draw period ends you enter a repayment period. Your lender may set a schedule so that you repay the full amount, often over ten or 15 years.

Or, you may have to pay the entire balance owed, all at once, which might be a large amount called a balloon payment. You must be prepared to make this balloon payment by refinancing it with the lender, getting a loan from another lender, or some other means. If you are unable to pay the balloon payment in full, you could lose your home.

RENEW OR CLOSE OUT THE LINE OF CREDIT

At the end of the repayment period, your lender might encourage you to leave the line of credit open. This way you don’t have to go through the cost and expense of a new loan, if you expect to borrow again. Be sure you understand if annual maintenance fees or other fees apply, even if you are not actively using the credit line.

TIP

If you sell your home, you are generally required to pay off your HELOC in full immediately. If you are likely to sell your home in the near future, consider whether or not to pay the up-front costs of setting up a line of credit.

GET THREE HELOC ESTIMATES

Shopping around lets you compare costs and features, so you can feel confident you’re making the best choice for your situation.

	OFFER A	OFFER B	OFFER C
INITIATING THE HELOC			
Credit limit	\$		
First transaction	\$		
Minimum transaction	\$		
Minimum balance	\$		
Fixed annual percentage rate	%		
Variable annual percentage rate	%		
» Index used and current value			
» Amount of margin			
» Frequency of rate adjustments			
» Amount/length of discount rate (if any)			
» Interest rate cap and floor			
LENGTH OF PLAN			
» Draw period			
» Repayment period			
INITIAL FEES			
» Appraisal fee	\$		
» Application fee	\$		
» Up-front charges, including points	\$		
» Early termination fee	\$		
» Closing costs			
DURING THE DRAW PERIOD			
» Interest and principal payments	\$		
» Interest-only payments?	\$		
» Fully amortizing payments	\$		
» Annual fee (if applicable)	\$		
» Transaction fee (if applicable)	\$		
» Inactivity fee	\$		
» Prepayment and other penalty fees	\$		
DURING THE REPAYMENT PERIOD			
» Penalty for overpayments?			
» Fully amortizing payment amount?			
» Balloon repayment of full balance owed? . .			
» Renewal available?			
» Refinancing of balance by lender?			
» Conversion to fixed-term loan?			
MY BEST HELOC OFFER IS:			

How variable interest rates work

Home equity lines of credit typically involve variable rather than fixed interest rates.

A variable interest rate generally has two parts: the index and the margin.

An index is a measure of interest rates generally that reflects trends in the overall economy. Different lenders use different indexes in their loans. Common indexes include the U.S. prime rate and the Constant Maturity Treasury (CMT) rate. Talk with your lender to find out more about the index they use.

The margin is an extra percentage that the lender adds to the index.

Lenders sometimes offer a temporarily discounted interest rate for home equity lines—an introductory or teaser rate that is unusually low for a short period, such as six months.

Rights and responsibilities

Lenders are required to disclose the terms and costs of their home equity lines of credit. They need to tell you:

- Annual percentage rate (APR)
- Information about variable rates
- Payment terms
- Requirements on transactions, such as minimum draw amounts and number of draws allowed per year
- Annual fees
- Miscellaneous charges

You usually get these disclosures when you receive a loan application, and you get additional disclosures before the line of credit is opened. In general, the lender cannot charge a nonrefundable fee as part of your application until three days after you have received the disclosures.

If the lender changes the terms before the loan is made, you can decide not to go forward with it, and the lender must return all fees. There is one exception: the variable interest rate might change, and in that case if you decide not to go ahead with the loan, your fees are not refunded.

Lenders must give you a list of HUD-approved housing counselors in your area. You can talk

to counselor about how HELOCs work and get free or low-cost help with budgeting and money management.

Right to cancel (also called right to rescind)

If you change your mind for any reason, under federal law, you can cancel the credit line in the first three days. Notify the lender in writing within the first three days after the account was opened. The lender must then cancel the loan and return the fees you paid, including application and appraisal fees.

TIP

Some HELOCs let you convert some of your balance to a fixed interest rate. The fixed interest rate is typically higher than the variable rate, but it means more predictable payments.

IF SOMETHING CHANGES DURING THE COURSE OF THE LOAN

HELOCs generally permit the lender to freeze or reduce your credit line if the value of your home falls or if they see a change for the worse in your financial situation. If this happens, you can:

- **Talk with your lender.** Find out the reason for the freeze or reduction. You might need to check your credit reports for errors that might have caused a downgrade in your credit. Or, you might need to talk with your lender about a new appraisal on your home and make sure the lender agrees to accept a new appraisal as valid.
- **Shop for another line of credit.** If another lender offers you a line of credit, you may be able to use that to pay off your original line of credit. Application fees and other fees may apply for the new loan.

WELL DONE!

For most people, a home is their most valuable asset. A HELOC can help you make the most of this asset, when you understand the ins and outs and know what to expect.

IN THIS BOOKLET:

ASK YOURSELF

Have I considered other sources of money and loans, besides a HELOC?

Have I shopped around for HELOC features and fees?

Am I comfortable with the worst-case scenario, where I could lose my home?

ONLINE TOOLS

CFPB website

cfpb.gov

Answers to common questions

cfpb.gov/askcfpb

Tools and resources for home buyers

cfpb.gov/owning-a-home

Talk to a HUD-approved housing counselor

cfpb.gov/find-a-housing-counselor

Submit a complaint

cfpb.gov/complaint

IMPORTANT TERMS OF OUR HOME EQUITY LINE OF CREDIT

This disclosure contains important information about our Home Equity Line of Credit. You should read it carefully and keep a copy for your records.

Availability of Terms – All of the terms disclosed below are subject to change.

If these terms change (other than the annual percentage rate) and you decide, as a result, not to enter into an agreement with us, you are entitled to a refund of any fees that you have paid to us or anyone else in connection with your application.

Security Interest – We will take a mortgage on your home. You could lose your home if you do not meet the obligations in your agreement with us.

Possible Actions – Under certain circumstances, we can (1) terminate your line, require you to pay us the entire outstanding balance in one payment, and charge you certain fees; (2) refuse to make additional extensions of credit; (3) reduce your credit limit and (4) as specified in the initial agreement, implement certain changes in the plan.

If you ask, we will give you more specific information concerning when we can take these actions.

Minimum Payment Requirements – You can obtain advances of credit for **10 years** up to your maximum line of credit. Payments will be due monthly. Your minimum monthly payment will equal all accrued interest as of the closing date of the billing cycle, provided the payment shall not be less than **\$50.00**, plus any amounts past due.

After the draw period ends, you will no longer be able to obtain credit advances and must pay the outstanding balance over **10 years** (the “repayment period”). During the repayment period, payments will be due monthly. Your minimum monthly payment will equal **1/120th** of the principal balance that was outstanding at the end of the draw period plus the finance charges that have accrued on the remaining balance, however, in no event shall the principal and interest payment be less than **\$50.00** monthly.

Minimum Payment Example – If you made only the minimum monthly payments and took no other credit advances, it would take **20 years** to pay off an immediate credit advance of \$10,000 at an **ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE** of **8.50%**. During that period, you would make **120** monthly payments varying between **\$72.12** and **\$65.21**, followed by **120** monthly payments varying between **\$155.52** and **\$83.91**

Fees and Charges – If property is titled in a trust, the bank may charge up to \$600 for closing fees to cover attorney review and other charges. The consumer may receive, upon request, a good faith itemization of such fees.

Early Termination Fee – If Borrower terminates this Agreement and requests a discharge of the mortgage within **36** months from the date of this Agreement, Borrower shall then be obligated to pay Lender an Early Termination Fee of **\$500.00**

Appraisal Fee – If Borrower(s) elects to have a Full Appraisal, the fee will be between - **\$450.00** and **\$750.00**

Property Insurance – You must carry insurance on the property that secures this line of credit.

Minimum Draw Requirements – None.

Tax Deductibility – You should consult a tax advisor regarding the deductibility of interest and charges for the line.

Variable Rate Information – The line has a variable-rate feature, and the annual percentage rate (corresponding to the periodic rate) and the minimum payment can change as a result.

The annual percentage rate includes only interest and not other costs.

The annual percentage rate is based on the value of an index. The index is the Prime Rate published in the Money Rates section of The Wall Street Journal (if more than one Prime Rate is published, the higher rate shall be used), as most recently published on the last business day of the immediate preceding month. To determine the annual percentage rate, we may add a margin, if disclosed below in the “Margin” column of the Historic Example, to the value of the index.

***The initial annual percentage rate is discounted and adjustable and not based on the index and margin used for later rate adjustments, the discount will be in effect until the beginning of the **13th** monthly billing cycle.

Ask us for the current index value, margin, discount if applicable and annual percentage rate. After you open a credit line, rate information will be provided on periodic statements that we send you.

Rate Changes – The annual percentage rate will change at the beginning of each monthly billing cycle. If allowed by law, the maximum **ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE** that can apply will never be more than **18.0%** per annum.

The minimum **ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE** that can apply is the initial rate at closing.

Other than as disclosed in this paragraph, there are no annual or more frequent periodic limitations on changes in the Annual Percentage Rate.

Maximum Rate and Payment Examples – If you had an outstanding balance of \$10,000 during the draw period, the minimum monthly payment at the maximum **ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE** of **18.0%** would be **\$152.88**. This annual percentage rate could be reached at the start of the **13th** month of the draw period.

If you had an outstanding balance of **\$10,000** at the beginning of the repayment period, the minimum monthly payment at the maximum **ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE** of **18.0%** would be **\$236.21**. This annual percentage rate could be reached at the start of the **1st** month of the repayment period.

Historic Example – The following table shows how the annual percentage rate and the minimum monthly payments for a single \$10,000 credit advance would have changed based on changes in the index over the past 15 years. The index values are from the last business day in the Index month of each year. While only one payment amount per year is shown, payments would have varied during each year.

The table assumes that no additional credit advances were taken, that only the minimum payments were made each month, and that the rate remained constant during each year. It does not necessarily indicate how the index or your payments will change in the future.

YEAR	REPAYMENT PERIOD STARTS	SEPTEMBER INDEX MONTH	MARGIN This is a margin we have used recently	*ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE Rounded, if applicable	MINIMUM MONTHLY PAYMENT
2009		3.25%	0.00	7.50%***	63.70
2010		3.25%	0.00	7.50%*	63.70
2011		3.25%	0.00	7.50%*	63.70
2012		3.25%	0.00	7.50%*	63.52
2013		3.25%	0.00	7.50%*	63.70
2014		3.25%	0.00	7.50%*	63.70
2015		3.25%	0.00	7.50%*	63.70
2016		3.50%	0.00	7.50%*	63.52
2017		4.25%	0.00	7.50%*	63.70
2018		5.25%	0.00	7.50%*	63.70
2019	X	4.75%	0.00	7.50%*	147.03
2020		3.25%	0.00	7.50%*	140.50
2021		3.25%	0.00	7.50%*	134.29
2022		7.00%	0.00	7.50%*	127.92
2023		8.50%	0.00	8.50%	126.65

* The Annual Percentage Rate has been adjusted to reflect any applicable interest rate caps.

** Minimum Payment Amount.

*** Initial Discounted Adjustable Rate for 12 months used recently.