



Your First Home

A Practical Guide for Washington Families

2026 Edition

“A home starts long before you find the house.”

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

1. Are you ready to buy?
2. Self-employed? Your tax return is your proof
3. Washington help programs
4. The buying process, step by step
5. Protect your money at closing
6. After you buy: taxes

Buying a home is one of the biggest financial decisions a family makes. The good news: Washington has real programs to help first-time buyers, and most of the work happens before you ever look at a house. This guide walks you through getting ready, the help available, and the money and tax details most people learn too late.

Information in this guide is current as of October 2026. Program limits, rates, and rules change every year — verify with the program or your lender before acting on a specific number.

Start Here

The best time to prepare is 1 to 2 years before you buy. Your credit, your savings, and your tax returns from those years are what lenders will look at.

1. Are You Ready to Buy?

Lenders look at four main things. You don't need to be perfect in all of them, but knowing where you stand helps you plan.

What lenders check	What it means for you
Credit score	Most Washington State programs need at least 620. A higher score usually means a better rate.
Savings	For the down payment, closing costs, and a cushion after you move in.
Steady income	Usually two years of steady work or business income.
Existing debt	Car loans, credit cards, and other payments reduce how much you can borrow.

Working on your credit? Our free Credit & Financial Wellness guide walks you through it step by step.

How AviTaxes Helps

Not sure if you're ready? We'll look at your numbers with you and help you make a plan.

2. Self-Employed? Your Tax Return Is Your Proof of Income

If you work for yourself — construction, cleaning, landscaping, driving, a small shop — the lender doesn't see what you earn. It sees what your tax returns say you earn.

- Lenders usually ask for your last 2 years of personal tax returns, and business returns if you have them.
- They generally average the income from those years.
- A big drop in income from one year to the next can limit what they count.
- Big deductions lower your taxes, but they also lower the income the lender sees.

The Trade-Off Nobody Explains

Paying less tax and qualifying for a bigger loan can pull in opposite directions. The right balance depends on your plans — and it has to be decided before you file, not after.

How AviTaxes Helps

Planning to buy in the next year or two? Talk to us before you file. We'll help your returns and books show your real income.

3. Washington Help Programs

The Washington State Housing Finance Commission (WSHFC) works through approved lenders to help first-time buyers. Most programs consider you a first-time buyer if you haven't owned and lived in a home in the past three years.

Program	What it offers
Home Advantage	A 30-year loan plus down payment help of 3% to 5% of the loan. The help is a second loan you repay when you sell or refinance — it is not a gift.
Covenant Homeownership Program	A 0% interest loan of up to \$150,000 for down payment and closing costs, for families where you, a parent, or a grandparent lived in Washington before 1968 and belong to one of the groups the program names, including Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous families. Lower-income buyers may have it forgiven after five years.
Local programs	Some cities and counties, like Seattle, offer extra help. Availability changes with funding.

Good to Know

- Every WSHFC program requires a homebuyer education class before closing. A free online option is available.
- Income and price limits depend on your county and change every year.
- For the Covenant program, you must be approved before you start house-hunting, and demand is higher than the money available each month.

How AviTaxes Helps

We can help you gather the tax returns and income papers these programs ask for.

Learn more: Washington State Housing Finance Commission at wshfc.org, and the Covenant program at homeownership-wa.org.

4. The Buying Process, Step by Step

Step	What happens
1. Get pre-approved	A lender reviews your credit, income, and savings and tells you how much you can borrow. Ask about WSHFC programs here .
2. Take the homebuyer class	Required for state programs. Keep your certificate.
3. Find a home	Work with a real estate agent and stay within your pre-approval.
4. Make an offer	Your agent writes the offer. You may put down “earnest money” to show you’re serious.
5. Inspection and appraisal	An inspector checks the home’s condition. The lender’s appraiser confirms its value.
6. Closing	You sign the final papers, pay your down payment and closing costs, and get the keys.

Closing costs are separate from the down payment. Ask your lender for an estimate early so there are no surprises.

5. Protect Your Money at Closing

Scammers target homebuyers right before closing. They send emails that look like they come from your title company, agent, or lender, with “new” wiring instructions. Once the money is wired to the wrong account, it is very hard to get back.

- Before wiring any money, call your title company at a phone number you already know — never one from the email.
- Be suspicious of any last-minute change to where you send money.
- Never send bank details or your Social Security number by regular email.

How AviTaxes Helps

Got an email that changes where to send your money? Stop and call us or your title company first.

Want to learn more about common scams? Read our free guide, [Protect Your Money](#).

6. After You Buy: Taxes

Owning a home can change your taxes, but not always the way people expect.

- Mortgage interest on loans up to \$750,000 may be deductible.
- Property taxes may be deductible, along with other state and local taxes, up to a yearly limit.
- These deductions only help if you itemize. Many families get more from the standard deduction, so buying a home doesn't always lower your taxes.
- Keep your closing papers. You'll need them for your taxes and when you sell someday.

How AviTaxe Helps

Your first tax year as a homeowner is different. We'll make sure you get every deduction you qualify for.

Who We Are

Why We Built AviTax Pro

We built AviTax Pro for working families and small businesses. File on your own with our simple guided program, or have a preparer review your return before it's filed. Either way, you see a flat price before you start, and you get help in English or Spanish from start to finish.

About AviTaxe

AviTaxe & Accounting Solutions has prepared taxes for families and small businesses since 2012, and now also offers bookkeeping, LLC setup, and financial guidance, all in English and Spanish. Our goal is simple: give every family the same clear information that wealthier families have always had.

Book a Consultation

Visit www.avitaxes.com/contact or email avitaxes@gmail.com to talk about your situation.