A PRACTICAL GUIDE AND WORKBOOK

Your first home deposit plan

For Kiwis saving while renting

A home should work for the life you live.

The school run. The wet shoes. The space to sit down together. Your first home starts with everyday needs and a money plan you can keep.

This guide helps you work out what you have, what you need and what to do next. You will build a deposit target, test the weekly costs and prepare for the buying process.

Make it yours.
Write on a printed copy, or type into the worksheet boxes in a PDF reader that supports forms. Save a copy before you start. The boxes do not calculate totals for you.

Clear steps. Real numbers. Room for life.

My name or household

Date I started

New Zealand edition | Information checked 16 October 2026. All money is NZ dollars. Examples are made up to explain the maths; they are not home prices, loan offers or forecasts.

START HERE

A plan you can use

You do not need to understand every property term before you begin.

Buying takes two things: enough money upfront and enough income to handle life after you move in. A small deposit does not make a large mortgage affordable.

Read and do	Pages
Understand deposits and lending	3-4
Find your weekly saving amount	5-6
Check KiwiSaver and support	7-8
Build your target and timeline	9-12
Test the cost of owning	13-14
Choose and check a home	15-17
Prepare to buy and move	18-19
Take your next steps and find help	20-22

Your first 30 minutes

1. Gather recent bank statements, payslips, debt details and your KiwiSaver statement.
2. Complete the weekly budget on page 6.
3. Read the worked example on page 9, then fill in your target on page 10.

Keep your plan honest

Mark each figure **confirmed**, **estimate** or **to check**. Keep a date and source beside it. An unknown cost needs an answer; it is not zero.

This is general education, not personal financial or legal advice. A lender decides whether to lend. Your own lawyer checks your purchase. Start Living develops homes and has a commercial interest if you buy one of its homes. Use independent advice for your decisions.

01 / UNDERSTAND THE NUMBERS

One word, two deposits

Both matter. They do different jobs.

Your contribution towards the home

This is the part of the price you pay from your own funds, such as cash, an approved KiwiSaver withdrawal or an accepted gift. The home loan pays the rest. People often call your contribution the mortgage deposit.

On a $600,000 home	Your contribution	Loan before fees
5%	$30,000	$570,000
10%	$60,000	$540,000
20%	$120,000	$480,000

A 20% deposit is a common starting point. Some lenders consider less. The required amount depends on the lender, your finances and the property. Ask before building a plan around 5% or 10%. [1]

The deposit in the sale agreement

This is a payment towards the price at the time set out in your contract. It is often about 10%, but the amount and timing can be negotiated. It forms part of the price; it is not an extra cost on top. [5]

Check the timing. A 5% mortgage deposit does not automatically cover a 10% contract deposit. Ask your lawyer to agree an amount and payment date you can meet, including when KiwiSaver funds can arrive.

Before paying, confirm the account details with your lawyer using a phone number you already trust. Do not rely only on changed bank details in an email.

Do not use your emergency money twice: once in your deposit and again as the buffer you plan to keep.

02 / THE LENDER VIEW

A deposit is only the start

The bank also checks whether you can repay the loan.

What a lender wants to understand

Your income, spending, debts, credit history and deposit all matter. The lender also checks the home it will lend against. Its answer can change if your job, debts, expenses or property choice changes. [2]

Tell the lender about credit cards, overdrafts, car loans, student loans, buy now pay later and any family loan. Ask how unused credit limits affect its assessment. Do not hide a repayment to make the numbers look better.

Three terms in plain English

Mortgage: a home loan secured against a property. If repayments cannot be made, the home can be at risk.
Interest: the price you pay to borrow. A higher rate means a higher payment on the same loan.
Pre-approval: an early lending decision with conditions and an expiry date. It is not final approval for every home. [2]

What to ask early

Which deposit options could fit me? What price range could you consider? What repayments would that mean? What must change before I apply? Does this property type need a larger deposit?

Your comfort limit matters. A bank limit is not a spending target. Choose a home budget that still leaves room for bills, repairs and a change in circumstances.

My biggest question for a lender

03 / FIND YOUR SAVING AMOUNT

Start with a normal week

Use what comes into your bank account after deductions.

Look at around three months of transactions. Then check the past year for costs that do not arrive every week: car repairs, school costs, dental visits, gifts and annual fees. Choose a period that reflects your real life.

To turn a payment into a weekly figure	Do this
Fortnightly	Divide by 2
Monthly	Multiply by 12, then divide by 52
Quarterly	Multiply by 4, then divide by 52
Yearly	Divide by 52

Example: a $1,040 yearly bill needs $20 a week. A $260 monthly bill is $60 a week. Dividing a monthly bill by four would overstate its weekly cost.

Watch for double counting

Moving money between your own accounts is not income. Shared costs should show only your household share. If your take-home pay already has KiwiSaver or student loan deductions, do not subtract them again.

If your pay changes each week

Use a cautious amount supported by your records. Keep extra pay separate until it arrives. Allow for tax and work costs on any extra earnings. A busy month should not become a promise about every month.

If there is nothing left to save: keep rent, food, power and essential payments covered. Review the target and bigger costs. Free money support is available; see page 22. Borrowing to look like you have savings adds another repayment.

WORKSHEET 1 / 15 MINUTES

My weekly money plan

Use bank records. All figures below are per week.

A Household take-home income	
Rent	
Food and household basics	
Power, water, internet and phones	
Transport and car costs	
Children, care and health	
Insurance	
Debt repayments from take-home pay	
Other regular bills	
Irregular costs set aside each week	
Spending I choose to keep	
B Total weekly spending above	
C Amount left = A minus B	

My planned transfer can be less than C. Leave breathing room for changes in food, fuel and other costs. If C is below zero, first work on the shortfall.

My deposit transfer each week	
Payday and transfer day	
Next budget review date	

04 / CHECK YOUR OPTIONS

KiwiSaver and low deposits

Confirm the rules before you count the money.

KiwiSaver first-home withdrawal

You generally need at least three years of KiwiSaver membership and must intend to live in the home. You must leave $1,000 in the account. Money transferred from an Australian complying superannuation scheme cannot be withdrawn for this. Some previous owners may qualify through an extra assessment. [3, 4]

Ask your provider for your eligible amount, documents and processing time. Your balance is not the same as your withdrawal amount. Ask how the money reaches your lawyer and whether it can meet the contract deposit date. [3, 4]

First Home Loan

This Kāinga Ora-backed loan is offered by participating lenders with a deposit from 5%. You must still pass the lender's checks. [1, 2]

The May 2026 brochure lists: over 18; an eligible NZ citizenship or residency status; a first buyer or qualifying previous owner; and a home to live in. Before-tax income over the last 12 months must be below $95,000 for one buyer without dependants, or $150,000 for one buyer with dependants or multiple buyers combined. Ask the lender to confirm the full criteria. [2]

The scheme has a lender mortgage insurance premium of 1.2% of the loan amount. It protects the lender. Ask whether you must reimburse it upfront or add it to the loan, and ask about other fees. Adding a fee means more debt and interest. [2]

Do not budget for closed schemes. The First Home Grant ended in May 2024. First Home Partner is closed to new applications. They are different from First Home Loan. [6, 7]

Rules can change. Recheck with your provider and lender when you apply. For homes on multiple-owned Māori land, ask Kāinga Ora about Kāinga Whenua; it has separate rules. [4]

WORKSHEET 2 / CONFIRM THE FUNDS

What money can I use

Keep the proof with your plan. A guarantee is not cash.

Cash savings today	
Less money needed for bills already due	
Less emergency money I will keep	
A Cash available for the buying plan	

KiwiSaver

Provider and date checked	
B Eligible withdrawal confirmed by provider	
Documents due and processing time	

Family or other help

A **gift** does not need repayment. A **loan** does. A **guarantee** can put another person's assets at risk. Agree the terms, get the lender's acceptance and use separate legal advice where needed. If buying together, agree ownership shares and what happens if someone wants to leave.

Type of support and who provides it	
C Confirmed funds accepted by lender	
D Available funds = A + B + C	

Still to confirm, with a person and due date

Keep possible help out of D until confirmed. Do not add a guarantee to D. Check legal treatment with your own lawyer before relying on family arrangements.

05 / A WORKED EXAMPLE

See how the gap works

Made-up household. A 10% deposit assumption. No growth or interest forecast.

The target	Amount
Home price	$600,000
Deposit at 10%	$60,000
Buying and moving costs allowance	$6,000
Emergency money to keep	$5,000
Total funds needed	$71,000

The money today	Amount
Cash savings, before setting aside the above costs	$20,000
Provider-confirmed KiwiSaver withdrawal	$30,000
Total funds counted	$50,000
Remaining gap: $71,000 minus $50,000	$21,000

Saving $250 a week closes a $21,000 gap in **84 weeks**: $21,000 ÷ $250. That is about 19 months. This ignores price changes, interest, investment gains or losses and future KiwiSaver contributions.

Two safe ways to handle your buffer. Here, it is added to the target. On your worksheet, it is removed from available cash on page 8. Use one method. Do not do both.

The $6,000 cost allowance is just an example. Get quotes for your own purchase. If costs rise or the target home changes, recalculate. The lender must still approve the loan.

WORKSHEET 3 / BUILD YOUR TARGET

My deposit gap

Bring D from page 8. It already excludes money kept for bills and emergencies.

Price estimate and source	
A Target home price	
B Deposit percentage agreed or to check	
C Deposit target = A × B ÷ 100	

Buying costs paid outside the deposit

Get quotes. Include costs for unsuccessful property checks too. Write a question mark if a cost is still unknown.

Lawyer or conveyancer	
Building inspection and specialist reports	
LIM and other council or title records	
Lender valuation, application and cash fees	
Moving, connections and rent overlap	
Other costs, insurance due or rates adjustment	
E Total buying costs above	
F Total target = C + E	
G Available funds from page 8, line D	
H Gap = F minus G, or zero if negative	

Do not include an added-to-loan fee in E as well. Record that fee in the mortgage total on page 14. Do not use KiwiSaver for general costs without confirmation from your provider and lawyer.

Cash needed early / date	

06 / MAKE THE GAP SMALLER

Choose changes that matter

A plan needs to work beyond the first enthusiastic week.

Start with the gap on page 10. Compare changes by what they save, what they cost to make and what they ask of your life. Keep spending that matters to you in the budget.

Possible change	Effect in one year
Save $15 a week on unused services	$780
Save $60 a week after extra travel costs	$3,120
Earn an extra $100 a week after tax and costs	$5,200
Choose a home $50,000 cheaper at a 10% deposit	Deposit target drops $5,000; loan also falls

These are maths examples, not expected savings. A cheaper home can bring higher transport costs or shared fees. A move can cost money upfront. Check the whole change.

Reduce debt with a clear reason

Paying down expensive debt can free up money and improve your position. Ask a lender how debt repayment and saving would affect your application. Keep emergency money so one car repair does not send you back to credit.

Protect money you need soon

A house deposit needs to be available when the contract says. Investments, including KiwiSaver funds, can fall in value. Talk to your provider or a qualified adviser about risk and your buying date before changing funds.

Choose two changes first. Give each a dollar amount and a start date. After four weeks, check the actual saving. Keep what works and adjust what does not.

WORKSHEET 4 / CHOOSE AND TRACK

My savings plan

Use the gap from page 10 and the weekly transfer from page 6.

A Remaining gap	
B Planned weekly cash saving	
C Weeks needed = A ÷ B, rounded up	
Target date and assumptions	

If B is zero or negative, there is no timeline yet. Change the target or weekly position first. This simple estimate excludes future KiwiSaver, growth and interest. Update confirmed balances at each review instead of counting the same saving twice.

Change 1: action, weekly saving, one-off cost and start date

Change 2: action, weekly saving, one-off cost and start date

My progress checks

Review 1: date / cash saved / updated gap	
Review 2: date / cash saved / updated gap	
Review 3: date / cash saved / updated gap	

If a month goes wrong, I will

Keep transfers affordable. If you must pull money back for ordinary bills, lower the transfer or fix the missing budget item. Progress includes finding a plan you can repeat.

07 / TEST LIFE AFTER BUYING

Could we live with the payments

Rent and mortgage payments are only part of the comparison.

Ask a lender for repayments on the loan you would actually need, including any fees added. Then add rates, home insurance, repairs and shared charges. Keep food, travel, children and personal costs in the picture.

A payment example

On a $540,000 loan over 30 years, monthly principal-and-interest payments are about $3,238 at 6% or $3,962 at 8%. That is roughly $747 or $914 a week when annualised. The higher-rate case needs about $167 more each week.

Calculated using monthly repayments, a constant annual rate and no fees. These are illustration rates, not current offers or a bank stress test. Actual weekly repayment schedules can differ.

Try the future budget now

If the full owner budget would cost $180 more a week than renting, try saving that extra $180 for several pay cycles. Keep paying current bills. Do not force the test with an overdraft. A difficult test is useful information; it is a reason to change the plan.

Plan for a harder year

What if a fixed rate ends, hours drop, parental leave starts or a large repair arrives? Re-run the budget with higher payments and lower income. Ask the lender what payment rise to test.

Read the mortgage terms. Ask about fixed and floating rates, extra repayments, early repayment costs and cashback repayment conditions. Compare the whole offer, including fees. [8]

WORKSHEET 5 / TWO SCENARIOS

My owner budget

All figures are weekly. Use quotes for a real property where possible.

Home price / deposit / loan before fees	
Fees added to loan / total loan	
Loan term / payment rate / date quoted	

A Household take-home income	
B Mortgage payment	
Council rates	
House and contents insurance	
Repairs and maintenance saving	
Body corporate, society fees or ground rent	
Other living costs from page 6, excluding rent	
C All spending above, including B	
D Room left = A minus C	

Check what shared fees cover so you do not count the same building insurance twice. Add known special levies or planned works. Allow for mortgage insurance separately from house insurance.

A harder scenario

Higher mortgage payment / lower income	
Room left after those changes	
Emergency money kept / essential weekly costs	

Emergency money ÷ essential weekly costs = weeks covered. If the harder case does not work, lower the price, save more or revisit timing before committing.

08 / CHOOSE FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

A home that works for you

The price matters. So does the life around it.

Think beyond the bedroom count

Visit at different times. Try the commute. Check sunlight, damp smells, noise, heating, ventilation, storage and room sizes. Picture the pram, the bike and the washing on a wet day. Ask what parking, outdoor space and access you actually own or share.

Know what you are buying

Title type	What to ask your lawyer
Freehold	What restrictions, shared access or service costs apply?
Unit title	What do the body corporate fees cover? What repairs, funds or special levies are planned?
Cross lease	Does the flats plan match the buildings? Whose consent is needed for changes?
Leasehold	What is the ground rent, when can it rise and when does the lease end?

A title describes your legal ownership. Different titles bring different duties and limits. Freehold does not automatically mean there are no shared charges. [9]

Check the building and the land

Ask your lawyer which records to review. A LIM is a council report about the land and property. A building inspection checks physical condition; it does not replace legal checks. Ask about flood, slip and other hazard information, and confirm insurance terms before you commit. [10, 11]

The seller's agent works for the seller. Use your own lawyer, inspector and finance support to check the decision.

WORKSHEET 6 / COMPARE TWO HOMES

Which home fits our life

Give each a score from 1 to 5. A serious problem matters more than a total score.

Home A address

Home B address

Compare travel time and cost; warmth, light and noise; storage and usable space; outdoor space, parking and access. Record an A score and B score for each.

A / B: price and weekly owner cost

A / B: travel, warmth, space and access scores

Our three must-haves

What would make us walk away

A / B: title and yearly shared fees

Checks still needed, who will do them and by when

09 / BUYING A NEW HOME

Buying before it is finished

Off the plans means signing for a home that is not complete.

A drawing cannot tell you everything about the finished home. Ask for the full written specification, the agreement and the exact plan you are buying. Have your own lawyer review them before you sign. [12]

Ask the developer

What is included in the price? What are the room sizes and storage? What heating, glazing, appliances, landscaping and parking are included? What can change, and what rights do I have if it changes? What shared fees will apply?

Ask your lawyer

Where is my deposit held, and when can it be released? What happens if the developer fails? What is the completion date? What happens after a delay? A sunset clause deals with an end date and rights under the contract; ask who can use it and how. [12]

Ask the lender

Will finance still be available at completion? When will approval expire? What if my income changes or the final valuation is lower than the price? What would I need to pay myself?

Check before handover

Ask for required completion documents, including the code compliance certificate where relevant. Arrange your own inspection, record defects and understand how and when they will be fixed. Confirm insurance, warranties and the date payments start.

Allow for delays. Keep a rent and moving plan if completion moves. A new home can still have defects or costs to maintain. A brochure is not the contract.

My three questions about a new build

10 / GET READY TO BUY

Your buying checklist

Do the checks before the commitment.

Before you make an offer

1. **Finance.** Confirm the price, loan, repayments, conditions and expiry dates with the lender.
2. **Legal review.** Give your lawyer the agreement and property records before you sign.
3. **Property checks.** Arrange inspections, title and council checks, and confirm insurance.
4. **Money timing.** Confirm the contract deposit, KiwiSaver deadline and settlement funds. [5, 10]

Understand the conditions

Conditions can give time for checks such as finance, a building inspection or a LIM. Ask your lawyer to write conditions that fit you, explain the deadlines and tell you how they are met. Do not assume a verbal promise changes a signed agreement. [5]

At an auction

A winning auction bid is usually unconditional. Finish your checks and confirm finance before bidding. Set a firm limit. If the checks are not complete, pause. Ask your lawyer to explain the auction terms. [10]

Before settlement and moving

Settlement is when the price is paid and ownership changes. Arrange insurance from the required date, complete the pre-settlement inspection and confirm funds with your lawyer. Coordinate rent notice and moving dates; a delay can cost money. [13]

Pause if something does not add up. Missing documents, unclear fees or pressure to sign are reasons to get an answer. You can like a home and still need time to check it.

WORKSHEET 7 / TAKE TO YOUR ADVISER

My one-page buying brief

Update this before your lender or lawyer meeting. Keep it private.

Names / meeting date	
Target area, home type and price	
Deposit funds / buying costs / gap	
Weekly income / spending / savings	
Debts, limits and repayments	
KiwiSaver amount / provider / timing	
Family support type / terms / evidence	
Comfortable weekly owner cost	
Likely changes to work or household	

Bring what the lender asks for

Usually: ID, proof of address, income and employment evidence, bank and debt statements, deposit evidence and a spending breakdown. For self-employment or irregular pay, ask what extra records it needs. Share records through a secure channel. [2]

My three questions, with the answers and next actions

Pre-approval expiry / conditions / review date	

WORKSHEET 8 / KEEP MOVING

My next 30 days

Choose small actions that answer the biggest questions.

When	Useful action
Week 1	Complete the budget and find your true weekly saving amount.
Week 2	Ask your KiwiSaver provider for the eligible amount and timing.
Week 3	Speak to a lender. Check deposit options and repayments.
Week 4	Update your gap and timeline. Choose the next action.

My first action and the date I will do it

My second action and the date I will do it

My third action and the date I will do it

My review date

You are ready for the next step when

You can explain your deposit gap. Your weekly plan works. You know which funds are confirmed. You have tested ownership costs. You have a clear list of checks for the home you want.

A first home is a starting place. Choose enough space, a workable location and payments that leave room for living. A sensible next step is progress, even when that step is to wait and strengthen the plan.

REFERENCE / PLAIN ENGLISH

Words you may hear

Use this page when a conversation gets technical.

Word	What it means
Principal	The loan amount you still owe, before future interest.
Equity	The home's value minus debt secured against it. Value can fall.
LVR	Loan-to-value ratio: loan ÷ property value × 100. A $540,000 loan on a $600,000 value is 90%.
Serviceability	A lender's check of whether you can afford repayments.
Fixed rate	An interest rate set for an agreed period, not usually the whole loan.
Floating rate	An interest rate that can change.
Unconditional	The purchase is no longer subject to outstanding conditions. You are committed under the agreement.
LIM	Land Information Memorandum: a council report about a property.
Body corporate	The group of unit title owners. It manages shared property and charges fees.
Special levy	An extra body corporate charge, often for work outside the normal budget.
CCC	Code compliance certificate: council confirmation that building work complies with the building consent.
Settlement	The agreed process and date for paying the balance and transferring ownership.

For legal terms and property-specific duties, ask your lawyer. Settled's glossary has more detail. [14]

REFERENCE / HELP AND SOURCES

Get the right help

Checked 16 October 2026. Recheck current rules before you apply or sign.

Start Living develops starter homes. For project information and enquiries: www.startliving.co.nz | admin@startliving.co.nz | 021 657 376.

Independent help: Sorted has free money tools. Settled explains buying. MoneyTalks offers free, confidential money guidance and connections to financial mentors: moneytalks.co.nz. Ask a mortgage adviser how they are paid, which lenders they compare and whether you pay a fee. [2, 8, 10]

[1] Kāinga Ora | First Home Loan

[2] Kāinga Ora | First Home Loan brochure, May 2026

[3] Inland Revenue | Getting my KiwiSaver savings for my first home

[4] Kāinga Ora | KiwiSaver first-home withdrawal and home ownership

[5] REA Settled | Sale and purchase agreement when buying

[6] NZ Government | Financial help for first-home buyers

[7] Kāinga Ora | First Home Partner application status

[8] Sorted | Home-buying guides and mortgage tools

[9] REA Settled | Understanding types of ownership

[10] REA Settled | First home buyers

[11] REA Settled | Understanding natural hazards

[12] REA Settled | Considering your property options

[13] REA Settled | Planning for settlement day when buying

[14] REA Settled | Glossary

Source titles are clickable. On paper, visit the organisation's website and search the title. The worksheets and worked examples are original learning tools, not eligibility assessments. Keep completed copies safe; they contain personal money information.