BUYER GUIDE · ARIZONA

Strategic Home Buying

How to get financially ready, find the right home, write a strong offer, and close with confidence, guided by a broker who also brings over 25 years of mortgage experience to the table.

By Brian Patrick Ramsey, GRI, CRS, ABR®, CSSN, Designated Broker, Equity Star Realty

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01 Why strategy matters & why work with me

Buying a home is one of the biggest financial decisions you'll make. The right preparation, the right offer, and careful follow-through from contract to closing protect your money, your time, and your peace of mind.

Why work with me

I'm Brian Patrick Ramsey, Designated Broker of Equity Star Realty. For over 25 years I've worked in both real estate and mortgage lending, so I look at your purchase from both sides of the table: finding a home that fits your life, and making sure the financing behind your offer holds together all the way to closing.

Your advocate

As your buyer's broker, I represent you, not the seller. I explain every contract and disclosure before you sign and negotiate price, repairs, and terms on your behalf.

Dual expertise

As both a real estate broker and a mortgage professional, I understand loan programs, underwriting, and appraisals, so your offer is built on financing that works.

Proven across market cycles

Over $1 billion in combined real estate and mortgage production across changing market cycles.

Local market knowledge

I help you understand values, competition, and what today's market conditions mean for your offer, across the Valley and beyond.

Professional designations: Graduate, REALTOR® Institute (GRI); Certified Residential Specialist (CRS); Accredited Buyer's Representative (ABR®); and Certified Short Sale Negotiator (CSSN). The ABR® is focused specifically on representing home buyers.

My commitment is a smooth, well-informed purchase: open communication, a no-pressure approach, and a home you're proud of.

02 Getting financially ready: the mortgage edge

The strongest buyers start with their financing, not with the listings.

My three-step path from qualified to closing

Because I'm both your real estate broker and a mortgage broker, I do the heavy lifting on your financing before we tour, build your search around it, and then finalize your loan once you're under contract.

Step 1: Pre-qualification, before we tour

As your loan officer, I run a tri-merge credit report, verify your income and the source of your down payment, and run an automated underwriting approval for your maximum loan amount. That defines your "3 C's":

- **Credit:** your middle score on the tri-merged credit report
- **Capacity:** your debt-to-income ratio
- **Collateral:** at this stage, the maximum loan-to-value you qualify for

Step 2: Your custom home search and tours

Next, I switch to my real estate broker hat and build your custom home search around those qualification parameters. Every home we tour is one you already qualify for, so you can shop with confidence.

Step 3: Pre-approval, once your offer is accepted

With an accepted contract, we open escrow with the title and escrow company and you wire your earnest money. I then prepare your loan with the actual property address and run the automated approval with every purchase detail defined. Once you're pre-approved, I send your loan disclosures for you to review and sign.

Remember that the maximum you qualify for isn't necessarily your comfort zone. We'll focus on a monthly payment that fits your budget, including taxes, insurance, and any HOA dues.

One advisor for both sides of the deal

I can serve as both your real estate broker and your mortgage broker on the same purchase, for any loan type, including FHA. With one advisor coordinating your search, offer, loan, appraisal, and closing date, nothing falls through the cracks between agent and lender. I provide all required disclosures of this dual role, and you're always free to choose your own lender.

Loan options to explore with your lender

- **Conventional loans**, with low-down-payment options for qualified buyers.
- **FHA loans**, with flexible credit guidelines.
- **VA loans** for eligible veterans, service members, and eligible surviving spouses.
- **USDA loans** for properties in eligible rural areas.
- **Renovation loans**, such as FHA 203(k), for homes that need work.
- **Down payment assistance programs** available in Arizona and locally for buyers who qualify.

Program rules, eligibility, and costs change, so we'll review your current options with a licensed loan officer.

Costs to plan for

- **Earnest money**, the deposit that shows the seller you're serious. It's held in escrow and credited back to you at closing.
- **Inspection and appraisal fees**, often paid upfront.
- **Down payment and closing costs**: lender fees, title and escrow, prepaid taxes and insurance, and any HOA transfer fees.
- **Reserves** for moving costs and the first repairs or upgrades.

Protect your approval

Do

- Keep paying every bill on time
- Keep your job steady, or talk to your lender before any change
- Keep documents handy for your lender
- Ask your lender before moving or depositing money

Don't

- Open or close credit accounts
- Make large purchases, such as a car or furniture
- Co-sign loans for anyone
- Make undocumented cash deposits or change banks

03 Defining your needs & wants

Before we tour, we'll sort out what matters most so your search stays focused. Separate the must-haves from the nice-to-haves.

The home

Property type (single-family, condo, or townhome), bedrooms and bathrooms, single-level or two-story, garage, pool, yard, home office, and accessibility features.

The location

Commute, nearby parks, shopping, dining, and the places you visit most. Also consider lot size, views, and street traffic.

Condition

Move-in ready, light updating, or a renovation project. Older homes and fixer-uppers can offer value if your budget and timeline allow.

Ongoing costs

HOA dues and rules, utility costs, and maintenance for features like pools and desert landscaping.

> I describe homes and their features, not the people who live in an area. For neighborhood information, I'll point you to public sources so you can research and decide for yourself.

04 Searching & touring

Before we tour

Under current industry rules, you'll sign a written buyer agreement with your broker before touring homes. It spells out the services I provide and how I'm paid. Compensation is negotiable, and it may be paid by you, requested from the seller as part of your offer, or a combination. I'll walk you through it before you sign.

Your custom search

- I set up a custom MLS search that matches your criteria and the qualification parameters from your pre-qualification, and I adjust it as your priorities sharpen. Ask me about home search access.
- I schedule tours with the listing brokers around your calendar.
- After each tour, we compare notes: what you loved, what you didn't, and how it ranks.

Touring tips

- Take photos and notes. Homes blur together after a few showings.
- Look past the decor at the condition of the roof, windows, flooring, HVAC, water heater, and pool equipment, and watch for water stains.
- Check natural light, noise, storage, and parking.
- Revisit your favorite at a different time of day.

Read more: Three conversations to have before you tour homes (https://ramseydualbroker.com/blogs/three-conversations-before-you-tour-homes).

05 Writing a strong offer

A strong offer isn't only about price. Clean terms and solid financing often win.

Building your offer

- **Price** based on recent comparable sales, days on market, and competing listings.
- **Earnest money** that shows the seller you're committed.
- **Financing strength**: your pre-qualification letter for the offer price. It's backed by verified credit, income, and assets plus an automated underwriting approval, so the listing agent knows your financing is real.
- **Timelines**: an inspection period and closing date that protect you while staying attractive to the seller.
- **Concessions**: requests for seller help with closing costs, a rate buy-down, repairs, a home warranty, or your broker's compensation.

Price cut or seller-paid buy-down?

Asking the seller to pay for a rate buy-down can lower your monthly payment more than an equal price reduction, but not always. Lenders also limit how much sellers can contribute, depending on the loan. I run the comparison for your situation before we write the offer. Read more: Seller-paid rate buy-downs vs. price cuts (https://ramseydualbroker.com/blogs/seller-paid-rate-buy-downs-vs-price-cuts).

Negotiating

The seller may accept, counter, or decline. I negotiate every offer and counteroffer on your behalf, keep you informed if other offers come in, and help you decide when to hold firm, when to adjust, and when to move on.

06 Inspections, BINSR & appraisal

Your inspection period

Your contract gives you an inspection period to investigate the home. I'll give you several inspector options and coordinate access.

- **General home inspection** covering structure, roof, plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and appliances.
- **Termite (wood-destroying insect) inspection**, common in Arizona.
- **Specialty inspections** as needed: pool and spa, roof, HVAC, sewer line, septic, well, or mold.

The BINSR

In Arizona, repair requests go on the Buyer's Inspection Notice and Seller's Response (BINSR). I review the reports with you, prepare your BINSR, and deliver it before the inspection period ends. Then I negotiate repairs, credits, or other remedies, and verify completed repairs with contractor receipts.

The appraisal: the mortgage edge

- I follow the appraisal with your lender until it's complete and clear of any conditions.
- If it comes in below the contract price, I explain your options. Those can include renegotiating the price, covering the difference, or using your contract's appraisal protections, and I can provide comparable sales for the appraiser's review.

07 Escrow to closing

In Arizona, a title and escrow company handles the closing. Here's what happens after you're under contract.

1. **Open escrow and wire your earnest money** promptly after acceptance. Verify the wiring instructions first (see below).

2. **Pre-approval and loan disclosures.** I run your automated approval with the property address and all the purchase details, then send your loan disclosures to review and sign.
3. **Seller's Property Disclosure Statement (SPDS).** Review it carefully, and ask questions during your inspection period.
4. **HOA documents.** For homes in an HOA, review the CC&Rs, rules, budget, fees, and any pending assessments. See Condo vs. townhome in the Valley: look beyond the HOA fee (https://ramseydualbroker.com/blogs/condo-vs-townhome-valley-beyond-hoa-fee).
5. **Title commitment** showing ownership, liens, and easements, plus your title insurance.
6. **Homeowner's insurance.** Get quotes early; your lender needs proof before closing.
7. **Loan approval.** I request regular loan status updates from your loan officer so milestones stay on track.
8. **Final walk-through** to confirm the home's condition and any agreed repairs.
9. **Signing, funding, and recording.** You sign with escrow, the loan funds, the deed records, and you get the keys.

> **Protect yourself from wire fraud.** Before sending money, always confirm the wiring instructions by phone with your escrow officer at a number you already know. Never rely on emailed instructions alone.

08 What you can expect working with me

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This is my Buyer's Representation Level of Service, the standard every buyer I represent can expect from our first conversation through after closing. Here are the highlights by stage. The complete itemized list is in the appendix.

1. Discovery interview

- Learn your situation and explain the home-buying process
- **Discuss your pre-qualification, custom search, and pre-approval process with you**
- Define your preferences: location, price, size, type of home, and any accessibility needs

2. Search & tours

- **Obtain and review your pre-qualification letter**
- Review and sign the Buyer Broker Agreement and Representation disclosures
- Build a custom MLS search and refine it as needed
- Schedule showings with listing brokers
- Debrief each tour to rank your interest, likes, and dislikes

3. Offer & contract

- **Get an updated pre-qualification letter for your target price**
- Review offer strategy, contract forms, and addenda with you
- Prepare and submit your offer, and provide the seller's disclosures
- Negotiate all offers and counteroffers on your behalf
- Distribute the signed contract and connect you with escrow for earnest money

4. Inspections & BINSR

- Provide multiple inspector options and coordinate inspections
- Review reports with you, including septic, well, or mold when applicable
- Prepare and deliver your BINSR before the inspection period ends
- Negotiate remedies and verify repairs with contractor receipts

5. Tracking your loan

- **Coordinate timelines with your lender for documents, rate locks, submission, and underwriting**
- **Request regular loan status updates so milestones are met**
- Relay your final loan approval to the seller's side

6. Appraisal

- Help schedule the appraisal
- **Follow up with your lender until the appraisal is complete and clear of conditions**
- **Explain your options and negotiate remedies if the value differs from the price**
- **Provide comparable sales to the appraiser when appropriate**

7. Closing preparation

- Coordinate with the seller's broker, your lender, and the closing agent
- Schedule your final walk-through and confirm your title commitment
- **Review and verify the settlement statement with you**
- Confirm your home warranty, closing funds, and the handover of keys, remotes, codes, and manuals

8. After closing

- Help with any home warranty claims
- Answer follow-up questions and provide records from my files
- Check in periodically to make sure you're enjoying your home

Bold items are where my mortgage background gives you an edge.

In my clients' words

> *“He was always on time, responsive, and wanted what’s best for my situation.”*
>
> Channing Chasten, 5-star review

> *“Extremely quick to respond and highly communicative.”*
>
> Scott S, 5-star review

Read more reviews: ramseydualbroker.com/social-reviews (https://ramseydualbroker.com/social-reviews)

09 Buyer checklist

Print this page and check items off as you go.

Getting ready

- [ ] Check your credit and gather income, asset, and ID documents
- [ ] Get pre-qualified: credit, income, and down payment verified, plus an automated approval
- [ ] Set a comfortable monthly budget
- [ ] Ask about loan programs and down payment assistance
- [ ] List your must-haves and nice-to-haves
- [ ] Review and sign your buyer agreement

Searching & offering

- [ ] Set up your custom home search around your qualification parameters
- [ ] Tour homes and take notes and photos
- [ ] Get an updated pre-qualification letter for your offer price
- [ ] Decide on price, earnest money, timelines, and concessions
- [ ] Compare a price cut vs. a seller-paid buy-down

Under contract

- [ ] Open escrow and wire earnest money (verify instructions by phone)
- [ ] Review and sign your loan disclosures after pre-approval
- [ ] Review the SPDS and any HOA documents
- [ ] Schedule inspections early in the inspection period
- [ ] Submit your BINSR before the deadline
- [ ] Shop for homeowner's insurance
- [ ] Respond quickly to lender requests
- [ ] Avoid new credit, large purchases, and job changes

Closing

- [ ] Confirm wiring instructions by phone with escrow
- [ ] Review your settlement statement
- [ ] Complete the final walk-through
- [ ] Schedule utilities and movers
- [ ] Bring government-issued photo ID to signing
- [ ] Collect keys, remotes, codes, and manuals

10 Common buyer questions

What's the difference between pre-qualification and pre-approval?

In my process, pre-qualification comes first. Before we tour, I verify your credit with a tri-merge report, verify your income and down payment source, and run an automated approval for your maximum loan amount. Next, I build your custom home search around those parameters, so every home you tour is one you qualify for. Pre-approval comes last, after your offer is accepted: I run the automated approval again with the actual property and all the purchase details, then send your loan disclosures.

Can you be both my real estate agent and my loan officer?

Yes. I can act as both your real estate broker and your mortgage broker on the same purchase, for any loan type, including FHA. I provide the required disclosures of my dual role, and you're always free to choose your own lender.

Do I need a large down payment to buy a home?

Not always. Down payment requirements depend on the loan program, and some programs, such as VA loans for eligible borrowers, may not require one. Down payment assistance may also be available. A loan officer can show you what you qualify for.

How is the buyer's agent paid?

Your written buyer agreement sets out my compensation, which is negotiable. It may be paid by you, by the seller if you request it in your offer and the seller agrees, or by a combination of both.

Should I ask for a lower price or a seller-paid rate buy-down?

It depends on your loan, your monthly budget, and how long you plan to keep the loan. I'll compare both for your situation before we write the offer.

What happens if the appraisal comes in low?

You may be able to renegotiate the price, cover the difference, or use the appraisal protections in your contract. I'll walk you through each option and negotiate with the seller's broker for you.

How long does it take to close?

It depends on your loan type, the contract terms, and how quickly documents come together. Your lender and I will set a realistic closing date before we write the offer.

A Appendix: My complete Buyer's Representation Level of Service

The full itemized list of services I provide to my home buyer clients through the buying process. Some items apply only to certain properties, such as homes with a well or septic system.

Discovery interview

- Respond to prospective buyer(s) inquiries.
- Collect/Review buyer(s) personal information and explain the homebuying process.
- Discuss the pre-qualification, custom search, and pre-approval financial process with the buyer(s).
- Determine the buyer(s)' preferences in a home as well as the location, price, size, type of home, special needs, and ADA accommodations, etc.

Pre-contract: search & tours

- Obtain and review pre-qualification letter from lender.
- Review/Sign the Buyer Broker Agreement and Representation disclosures.
- Build a custom MLS portal search for properties that meet the buyer(s)' criteria and make modifications as necessary.
- Home tours: make appointments with seller(s)' listing broker to show the selected properties.
- Discuss/critique each home tour with home buyer(s) to grade level of interest, likes and dislikes.

Offer & contract

- Obtain and review an updated pre-qualification letter from the buyer(s)' lender for the target purchase price.
- Discuss offer strategies, contract forms, addenda, and miscellaneous forms with buyer(s).
- Create an offer to purchase based on buyer(s) instructions and all related addenda for buyer(s) signatures.
- Provide seller(s)' disclosure forms to buyer(s) when available.
- Submit offer to purchase signed by buyer(s) to seller(s)' broker and confirm receipt.
- Provide buyer(s) a copy of all forms used in making the offer.
- Negotiate all offers on buyer(s)' behalf through ongoing communication with the seller(s)' broker.
- Inform buyer(s) of additional offers to purchase that have been submitted to the seller(s)' broker.
- Prepare and convey any counteroffers, acceptance, or amendments to seller(s)' broker.
- Verify final offer is signed by all parties ("contract"), and that all necessary documents are attached.
- Deliver fully signed and initialed contract to buyer.
- Distribute signed contracts to all involved parties.
- Provide instructions/connect the buyer(s) with escrow to deliver earnest money deposit as soon as possible.
- Confirm the Seller(s) broker has changed the status of the listing from Active to UCB, CCBS or Pending in the MLS.

Home & termite inspections

- Provide buyer(s) with multiple home inspection companies and other specialty inspection companies based on the area of concern.
- Coordinate buyer(s)' professional home and specialty inspections with seller(s)' broker.
- Review home and specialty inspection reports with buyer and consider areas of concern that need to be addressed.
- Confirm the septic system, well, or mold inspections have been ordered, if applicable.
- Receive, review, and provide septic system, well, or mold reports with buyer(s) and note any possible impact on sale.
- Create a BINSR form (Buyer's Inspection Notice and Seller's Response) for any repairs/concerns the buyer(s) request the seller(s) to address.
- Deliver buyer(s) signed BINSR to the sellers' broker prior to the expiration of the inspection period agreed to in the Purchase Contract.
- Negotiate remedies to the BINSR items of concern when necessary.
- Verify seller(s)' compliance with all inspection repair requirements through paid receipt of third-party contractors when applicable.

Tracking the loan process

- Coordinate with the lender on expected time frames for loan document collections, rate locks, loan submission and underwriter turn times.
- Request periodic LSUs (Loan Status Updates) from the Loan Officer working on the buyer(s) loan file to assure milestones are being met.
- Relay final approval of buyer(s)' loan application to seller(s).

Appraisal

- Assist in scheduling the appraisal with seller(s) or seller(s)' broker when applicable.
- Follow up with the lender on appraisal until completed and confirm the report is clear of any "subject to" requirements.
- Discuss buyer(s) options if appraisal report is different than the contract/purchase price.
- Negotiate remedies with the seller(s) broker in the event the appraisal report is different than the contract/purchase price.
- When appropriate, provide comparable sales used in market pricing to appraiser.
- Prepare and convey additional addenda when appropriate to solidify remedies agreed to by the buyer(s) and seller(s).

Closing preparation

- Coordinate closing process with seller(s)' broker, lender, and closing agent.
- Update closing forms and files.
- Verify all parties have all forms and information needed to close the sale.
- Assist in obtaining power of attorney or trust documents, as required.

- Work with seller(s)' broker in scheduling and conducting buyer(s)' final walk-through prior to closing.
- Confirm buyer(s) has received title insurance commitment.
- Confirm location, date, and time where closing will be held and notify all parties.
- Confirm with closing agent that all tax, HOA, utility, and other applicable pro-rations have been resolved.
- Request final closing figures from closing agent.
- Review and verify closing figures on settlement statement with buyer(s).
- Forward verified closing figures to seller(s)' broker and confirm seller(s)' broker has received and reviewed closing figures.
- Confirm the buyers' homeowners warranty policy has been ordered and invoiced at closing, when applicable.
- Confirm collected funds from buyer(s) are available for closing.
- Explain the homestead confirmation on your title company buyer forms, which the title company submits when your deed is recorded.
- Verify with the seller(s)' broker the location of all keys (house, mailbox, and HOA/community), garage-door openers, HOA/security/gate access codes, pool equipment, and appliance manuals.

After closing

- Assist with filing any claims with the homeowner's warranty company.
- Respond to any follow-up calls and provide any additional information required from office files.
- Follow up with buyer periodically to check in and confirm they are enjoying their home.

Ready to start your home search?

Get a no-pressure consultation on your financing, your budget, and a plan built around your goals and timeline.

Call or text Brian Patrick Ramsey

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