



BUDGETING MADE EASY



Consolidated Credit
5701 West Sunrise Boulevard
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33313
1-800-210-3481
www.ConsolidatedCredit.org

Congratulations on taking this important step to a brighter financial future. Consolidated Credit has been helping Americans across the country solve their credit and debt problems for over 20 years.

*Our Educational Team has created over forty publications to help you improve your personal finances; and many available in Spanish. By logging on to **www.ConsolidatedCredit.org** you can access all of our publications free of charge. We have the tools to help you become debt free, use your money wisely, plan for the future, and build wealth. The topics Consolidated Credit addresses range from identity theft and building a better credit rating to how to buy a home and pay for college. On our web site you will also find interactive credit courses, a “Best of the Web” debt calculator, a personalized budgeting tool, and much more.*

*We are dedicated to personal financial literacy and providing a debt-free life for Americans. If you are overburdened by high interest rate credit card debt, then I invite you to speak with one of our certified counselors free of charge by calling **1-800-210-3481** for free professional advice. We also have partnership programs available where groups, businesses and communities can hold financial workshops and received money management guides and workbooks like the one you are reading now. Please call **1-800-210-3481** if you would like to discuss pursuing a personal financial literacy program.*

Sincerely,



Gary S. Herman
President
Consolidated Credit

Budgeting Can Be Easy

Learn how to successfully manage your money and avoid credit problems. This guide will give you money management techniques that can put you in control of your money and help you plan for a successful financial future.

We've created this guide with two purposes in mind:

- To help you create a successful budget and use it.
- To give you proven strategies for avoiding too much debt.

Making the most of your money can be tough, but without a budget, it is impossible.

Budgeting can be easy if you have the right tools and guidelines. Remember, now is a great time to learn how to create and live within a budget. The more you put off the budgeting process the longer you will be in financial chaos. If you don't learn to manage your money now, the headaches your debts create may stay with you for a long time.

At Consolidated Credit we help many individuals and families who are in debt. We want to help you avoid problems and become financially successful.

Credit Card “Come-On’s”

As a freshman in college, all the different credit card companies that were soliciting their cards lured me in. At first I figured one credit card was good enough for me. I didn’t have a real full-time job, but I made a few dollars working as a tour guide.

The offers just kept coming in. Before I knew it, I had at least 6 cards under my belt and a burden of debt on my shoulders. Now as a mother of a one-and-a-half year old, my credit card debt has affected me greatly.

I’m unable to get a decent apartment or rent a house because of my credit. I’m unable to get loans. The harassment, threats of lawsuits, constant letters and bills have really taken a toll on my life. If I could change the past, I would.

I still have the credit card debt I created when I was a student and it will take me years to pay it off because of my current obligations. I hope I can help someone else with my story because getting yourself into a whole lot of credit card debt is just not worth years of headaches and rejection.

*Now she is a Consolidated Credit client
and on her way to being debt free.*

Managing Debt

You can’t achieve financial freedom without budgeting. Why? Because people who can account for their money are in control of it. You can’t run a business successfully without a business plan, and you can’t successfully run your household without a budget.

Start this process by writing down your fixed monthly expenses like rent, car payments, and insurance. Then make a list of your flexible expenses like groceries, utilities, gasoline, and medical expenses. Finally, list discretionary expenses such as clothes, entertainment, etc. Make sure you don’t leave anything out; don’t forget your morning cup of coffee or your newspaper! The key is to include everything you spend money on. Look back over your check stubs or bank statement to see where you’ve been spending money.

Use these suggested percentages for spending and see how your spending compares.

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| Savings | 10% |
| Housing | 30% |
| Transportation | 17% |
| Utilities | 8% |
| Food | 13% |
| Clothing | 5% |
| Medical/Health | 5% |
| Personal | 2% |
| Entertainment | 5% |
| Debts | 5% |

Tips for Smart Credit Use

- Shop around for the best credit card interest rate. Consider using one card for balances that you'll pay in full and another card with a low interest rate for times when you need to carry a balance. A list of credit cards is available at www.cardtrak.com.
- Don't pay interest on items you don't really need, or for things that will be gone by the time you get your bill. Otherwise, it's like buying that item marked up instead of marked down!
- Read your credit card agreements and the correspondence you get from issuers. There may be important information in them. For example, credit card issuers can generally change your interest rate with only 45 days written notice – even on a card with a fixed rate.
- Always mail your payments for your credit cards at least 7 business days before the due date. Most credit card companies have steep late payment penalties. Also, your interest rate on new purchases as well as any current balance may be raised to a very high rate if you are late.
- If you pay your debts late, a late payment will likely to be reported to the major credit bureaus and will stay on your credit report for seven years. Your other credit card issuers may raise your interest rates if they see you are falling behind on other accounts.

- Call your issuers if you can't make a monthly payment on time. Ask them about alternative payment arrangements that won't damage your credit or raise your interest rate.
- Notify your credit card issuer 30 days before you move, and don't assume that just because you didn't get a bill you don't have to pay it. If a bill doesn't arrive, call your card issuer or lender immediately.
- Try to pay off your total balance each month. Just paying the minimum is a trap. For example, if the minimum required pay-off on \$1,000 credit card debt with an 18% interest rate, it will take you more than 8 years to repay. And you would have paid \$863 in interest alone!
- Aim to keep your debt payments at less than 10% of your income, after taxes. If you take home \$750 a month, spend no more than \$75 a month on credit.

The key to managing credit is to not to get trapped in the mindset of "I'll buy now and pay later." When you do borrow, you want to ask yourself how and when you'll repay the debt - and how much it will cost you. On the next page is a Borrowing Worksheet that we have created. Use this to keep track of your debt and create a repayment schedule.

** Use the Debt Calculator at www.ConsolidatedCredit.org to figure out how much money you are spending on interest.*

Borrowing Worksheet

On this worksheet list your current loans or the loans that you are thinking about taking out. Calculate the cost of the expected loan payments before you borrow and compare it to your income and outstanding obligations.

| Creditor Name | Interest Rate | Amount Owed | Monthly Payments | Loan Length | Cost of Interest |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ | | \$ |

Total Average Interest % _____

Total Amount \$ _____

Total Monthly Cost \$ _____

Total Time to Payoff _____

Total Spent on Interest \$ _____

Income

The first step to creating your budget is to list all sources of monthly income, including gifts, bonuses, tax refunds, cost of living increases, allowances, etc. To total your income, use the following Income Worksheet.

| Income Sources | Weekly/Bi-Weekly Income | Monthly Income |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Your Wages | \$ | \$ |
| Spouse's Wages | \$ | \$ |
| Part-Time Wages | \$ | \$ |
| Child Support | \$ | \$ |
| Alimony | \$ | \$ |
| Social Security Benefits | \$ | \$ |
| Veteran's Benefits | \$ | \$ |
| Other | \$ | \$ |
| Total | \$ | \$ |

TIP: Pay yourself first. Set up a savings account and transfer at least 5% of your income into the account and try to forget about it. The extra money will come in handy when you need it!

Expenses

The next step is to list your expenses. Expenses are separated into three categories: “fixed”, “flexible”, and “discretionary”.

Credit card debt is considered a fixed expense because it usually remains the same each month. Use the following form to list your monthly credit card debt. List all major credit cards, department store credit cards, gas credit cards and dining cards. When you are finished, total up the amount and transfer it to the appropriate column on the fixed expense worksheet on the next page.

Credit Card Debt Worksheet

| Creditor Name | Interest Rate | Balance Owed | Monthly Payment |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| | % | \$ | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ |
| | % | \$ | \$ |

Total Average Interest of All Cards: _____ %

Total Owed: \$ _____

Monthly Payments: \$ _____

Use this sheet to list your Fixed Expenses. These items cost the same each month, i.e. rent, loans, car payments, etc.

Fixed Expenses Worksheet

| Monthly Expenses | Current Payments |
|---|------------------|
| Mortgage/Rent | \$ |
| Real Estate Taxes | \$ |
| Homeowners Insurance | \$ |
| Car Loans/Lease Payments | \$ |
| Car Insurance | \$ |
| Student Loans | \$ |
| Alimony/Child Support | \$ |
| Medical Insurance | \$ |
| Credit Card Debt <small>(totaled from the credit card worksheet)</small> | \$ |
| Other | \$ |
| Total | \$ |

The next step is to list your Flexible Expenses. These expenses are ones where you control the amount of money you spend. Sometimes flexible expenses are items you need, like groceries, but you can control how much you spend on them by choosing less expensive items, shopping at discount stores, etc. Depending on your circumstances, a few of the items listed on the next page may fall into the Fixed Expenses category.

Flexible Expenses Worksheet

| Monthly Expenses | Current Payment | Adjusted to Balance Income |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Telephone Bill | \$ | \$ |
| Electric/Gas/Oil/ Fuel Bill | \$ | \$ |
| Cable Television Bill | \$ | \$ |
| Groceries | \$ | \$ |
| Household Supplies | \$ | \$ |
| School Supplies | \$ | \$ |
| Clothes | \$ | \$ |
| Dry Cleaning/Laundry | \$ | \$ |
| Savings (5% is your starting goal) | \$ | \$ |
| Other | \$ | \$ |
| Total | \$ | \$ |



The next step is to list all of the other expenses not listed in the previous categories. We call these Discretionary Expenses. They are items that are not necessary for survival. If your expense to income ratio is out of balance and you are spending more money than you earn, items from this category should be eliminated or cut back.

Discretionary Expenses Worksheet

| Monthly Expenses | Current Payment | Adjusted to Balance Income |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Recreation | \$ | \$ |
| Movies/Plays | \$ | \$ |
| Dining Out | \$ | \$ |
| Sporting Events | \$ | \$ |
| Magazines/Newspapers | \$ | \$ |
| Barber/Beauty Salon | \$ | \$ |
| Hobbies | \$ | \$ |
| Charity/Dues | \$ | \$ |
| Other | \$ | \$ |
| Total | \$ | \$ |

Where Do You Stand...

Now that you have compiled your income and expenses it is time to do the grand totals! All expenses are totaled and then subtracted from the total income figure for the month.

Next, divide total expenses by the frequency of income or the number of paychecks the household receives each month. This will tell you how much money to set aside each paycheck. If the expense total is greater than the income total, you are off track financially.

You must begin to prioritize expenses. Keep track of when you use credit cards. Then ask yourself if you want to borrow every month for these expenses. Each month, enough savings should be set aside to cover fixed and some flexible expenses. This reserve method will save you from living paycheck to paycheck. Review the spending-plan each income period to start. At the end of each month, compare actual expenses against what you budgeted. As time passes, you may want to only perform this comparison on a quarterly basis.

** If you are headed for a debt disaster visit:*

*www.ConsolidatedCredit.org or call 1-800-210-3481
for free professional advice from a certified counselor.*

End of the Month Budget Analyzer

After the second month of using your budget, utilize this sheet to compare what you've actually spent and the amount you've budgeted. This will give you a clear picture of how realistic the amounts you budgeted are for each item and will allow you to be more accurate when doing your next monthly budget. Make enough copies so you can try this exercise each month until the end of the year.

| Expenses | Budgeted | Actual |
|-------------------------------|----------|--------|
| Mortgage/Rent | | |
| Electricity/Gas/Oil | | |
| Telephone | | |
| Car Payment | | |
| Insurance | | |
| Gas | | |
| Parking/Tolls | | |
| Bus/Train | | |
| Groceries | | |
| Supplies | | |
| Self Care | | |
| Toiletries | | |
| Clothing/Accessories | | |
| Dry Cleaning | | |
| Medical/ Dental | | |
| Spiritual/Tithing | | |
| Therapy/ Financial Counseling | | |
| Pets | | |
| Movies | | |
| Video Rentals | | |
| Concerts/Sporting Events | | |
| Dining Out/Take Out | | |
| Savings/Emergency Fund | | |
| Stock/Mutual Funds | | |
| Gifts | | |
| Periodicals/Magazines | | |
| Dues/Donations | | |
| Total | | |

One Family's Story

We were the typical family living paycheck to paycheck, no savings and plenty of the month left after the money ran out. Paying bills was a nightmare, and going to the store was even worse. Money was in short supply and long on demand.

We use to go into a panic and blame each other if something unexpected happened, but now we have a little extra for those emergencies because we now know how to live on a budget.

With Consolidated Credit's help, being able to pay all of our bills on time became a reality! Actually being able to make a deposit into our savings account became a routine! The biggest thrill is seeing the credit card balances go down and knowing there is light at the end of the tunnel. Knowing that in a few years these huge debts that loomed over our heads like rain clouds would disperse and that we would be on our way to financial independence was wonderful.

However, the most important thing Consolidated has given us is our self-respect and pride back. Life becomes less stressful and you can enjoy your children and participate in their lives instead of worrying about money and always telling them "No we can't afford it." So in essence, Consolidated Credit's Debt Management Program also allowed our kids to have happier childhood memories.

Credit Tips To Live By

1. Always remember that credit is a loan. It's real money that you must repay.
2. Go slowly. Get one card with a low limit and use it responsibly before you even consider getting another.
3. Shop around for the best deal. Study your card agreement closely, and always read the fine print flyers enclosed with every bill. Credit card offers vary substantially, and the issuer usually can change the terms at will with 15 days notice.
4. Try to pay off your total balance each month. Just paying the minimum is a trap: If you pay off a \$1,000 debt with an 18 percent interest rate and just send in the minimum each month, it will take more than 8 years to repay.
5. Always pay on time. A single slip-up may place a black mark on your credit record -- and can cause your issuer to jack up your interest rate to the maximum.
6. Set a budget, follow it faithfully and watch how much you're paying on credit. A good rule of thumb is to keep your debt payments less than 15 percent of your net income after taxes. So if you take home \$2,000 a month, spend no more than \$300 a month on credit.
7. Keep in touch with your issuer by notifying the company promptly when you move. In the event you must be late on a payment, call them before it's late. They want your business for life, so they may be willing to make alternate payment arrangements that won't leave a mark on your credit rating.
8. At the first sign of credit danger, such as using one card to pay off another, make the card harder to use. Only carry it when you plan to use it, otherwise, lock it up in an inaccessible place.

One Move Can Make All The Difference

My husband Anthony, our three kids and I set out to fulfill a dream, to move to sunny Florida. We had visited many times while still living in Kentucky. We loved the weather and the people, but most of all we came for the opportunities that Orlando could offer our children.

In Kentucky, Anthony worked at a power plant making a good salary. I could be a stay-at-home mom and still live comfortably. When we moved, he went from making \$21 an hour to \$7 an hour. Our house payment went from \$307 to \$800 monthly. The cost of living was more than we anticipated and his salary was less than we expected. I had to go to work to help ends meet.

It took five years for the salary to finally catch up to what Anthony was making before we left Kentucky. In those five years we literally lived off of credit cards. We had excellent credit so we had lots of opportunities to get more credit, and we took advantage, \$45,000 worth of “advantage”.

We finally came to the realization that if we didn't do something we would never get out of debt. We absolutely refused to take out a loan. We are firm believers that you could not borrow your way out of debt. Then we found out about Debt Management through Consolidated.



That was three years ago. Wow! What more can you say when you look at the balances on your credit cards getting considerably lower each month. We had a mortgage rate of 9.35% (because we were considered high risk) and Consolidated has helped us get one for 6.5%. We were treated with dignity, consideration and

professionalism. I am so thankful for Consolidated. There are many different reasons why people find themselves in debt, and with so many debt reduction companies promising so many different things it is hard to know whom to trust. We trust Consolidated, not because we are naturally trusting people but because Consolidated has earned that trust, month after month, year after year.

One client's story...

Since joining the Consolidated Credit program, I've changed many of my spending habits in order to stay within a well-defined budget. I've also embarked on a financial lifestyle change that will prove as beneficial to me in the future.

Before joining Consolidated Credit, I didn't really have a budget because I had so many lines of credit and became comfortable just using credit cards to dine out regularly and charge all sorts of items that I didn't really need, such as extra clothes, electronics and unnecessary housewares.

When it came time to pay the monthly bills, I made the mistake of transferring balances back and forth in an attempt to avoid having to pay off balances right away. I just told myself, "Oh, I'll pay that account off next month," but months turned into years and my debt grew even more.

When my minimum payments began to rise, I started to feel trapped and started researching debt management options. I was excited to learn about Consolidated Credit and was relieved to have finally found a reputable program that could help me dig myself out of the mess I created. The staff members were so helpful in getting me started, which helped alleviate some of the stress that had built up over the past few months.

Before being a client of Consolidated Credit, I had become the poster child of typical American consumerism and created a lifestyle based on the "buy now, pay later" mantra.

But now, I'm so much more mindful of where my money is going and always weigh the pros and cons of each and every purchase. I'm now a regular coupon-clipper, whereas before, I used credit cards to buy things full price. I also read weekly grocery store ads online to take advantage of discounts on regularly consumed items.

I've also cancelled all magazine subscriptions and other monthly services that are not necessities. I rely heavily on frugal-living blogs and the Consolidated Credit newsletters for new ideas on how to save money, be creative and stay within my budget when it comes to things like food, gifts, house repairs and more.

Although I still have a few years to go before my debt is paid off, I'm confident that I've made the right choice in choosing Consolidated Credit to reach my goals. I'm thankful to have learned so many new techniques to help me better manage my finances and create a sense of pride in the purchases I make. This new knowledge will continue to help me, even after I'm debt-free.

- T.M. Colorado Springs, CO



About Consolidated Credit

Consolidated Credit is a consumer oriented, public education organization. We are an industry leader in providing credit counseling and debt management services throughout the United States.

Our mission is to assist individuals and families end financial crises and help them solve money management problems through education, motivation, and professional counseling.

We are dedicated to empowering consumers through educational programs that will influence them to refrain from overspending and abusing credit cards, as well as to encourage them to save and invest. We sponsor local free seminars that are also available to any group or organization that requests our educational services.

Our professionally trained counselors have assisted thousands of families across the United States. Regardless of whether your financial problems are due to the purchase of a new home, birth of a child, major illness, or any other circumstance, we can help.

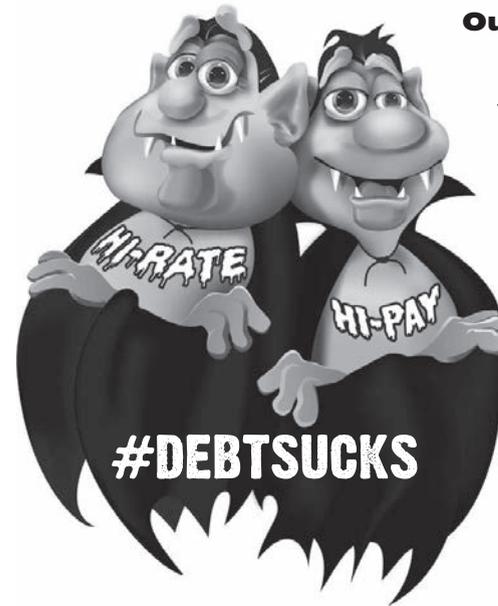
Our organization is funded primarily through voluntary contributions from participating creditors. Our programs are designed to save our clients money and liquidate debts at an excellent rate.

Consolidated Credit is a member of the Better Business Bureau, the National Association of Credit Union, United Way of Broward County and Financial Counseling Association of America.

Now you can find FREEDOM FROM DEBT!

Consolidated Credit, a nationally recognized organization, will provide you with professional financial education, counseling and resources.

In addition, you can benefit from customized Debt Management Programs, which incorporate a bill consolidation plan to help you regain your financial freedom.



**Our professionally trained
Certified Public
Accountants
will negotiate directly
with
your creditors to:**

- Reduce or even eliminate interest rates!
- Eliminate late charges and over-limit fees.
- Consolidate debts into one lower payment.
- Help you pay off debt faster.
- Rebuild your credit rating.
- Save you thousands of dollars.
- Get you on a plan to be debt free!

Call today, and take your first step toward financial freedom!

1-800-210-3481

or visit www.ConsolidatedCredit.org



5701 West Sunrise Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33313

You can be **debt free**



There is help waiting for you now.

- Reduce or eliminate interest charges.
- Consolidate credit card bills into one lower monthly payment.
- Pay off your debt in half the time.
 - Save thousands of dollars.



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