



United Way
of Frederick County



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

DIVISION OF CITIZENS SERVICES

Department of Housing & Community Development

United Way of Frederick County Prosperity Savings Account Homebuyer Program

Policies, Procedures and Plan Agreement

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Each account holder must initial every section of this manual to acknowledge they have read and understand the policies and procedures associated with a United Way of Frederick County Prosperity Savings Account.

Mission & Vision

The mission of United Way of Frederick County is to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities around Frederick to advance the common good. United Way is committed to helping people of limited economic means achieve economic independence and greater integration in their communities. United Way of Frederick County believes asset development is an important strategy to help working families enter the economic mainstream and become more vital community members.

The vision of United Way's matched savings program is to make it possible for working individuals and families to build the financial assets they need to achieve their goals. The goal is to improve financial stability throughout Frederick County and enable families with modest means to become economically independent and to prevent poverty in the community in the future. United Way is not only investing in the economic independence of families, United Way is also investing in the future of Frederick County.

Description of the Program

United Way established the Prosperity Savings Account Program in order to help working individuals and families become homeowners. The Program offer participants incentive savings matches, personal finance and money management education, peer and staff support, and individual counseling in order to make asset ownership obtainable. Program objectives include helping participants:

- Set realistic short and long term personal, financial, and asset goals.
- Design strategies to achieve their personal, financial and asset goals.
- Acquire financial skills and knowledge in order to make informed financial decisions.
- Develop or improve fiscal self-discipline, self-awareness and patterns of regular saving.
- Improve self-confidence and assertiveness, particularly with financial/consumer matters.

Financial education is a key component to the success of the Prosperity savers. Prosperity savers must complete six hours of approved financial education classes during the length of the program. This allows savers to better prepare themselves before purchasing an asset.

A community bank will serve as a partner financial institution for the Prosperity Savings Account Program and a depository for Prosperity savers' savings, for the purpose of supporting the program.

The Prosperity Savings Account Program management system is powered by a grant from Nymeo Federal Credit Union.

Account Structure

- Each account will be a joint account with the saver and United Way. Neither the saver nor United Way will have independent, direct ownership/withdraw privileges. A community Bank will allow withdrawals from the account with both the saver's and United Way's written consent.
- There is no limit to the number of qualified withdrawals, as long as the saver's deposits which qualify for a match do not exceed a grand total of \$2,200.
- Funds cannot be used for previous purchases, previous payments or debt of any kind.

Match Rate and Qualified Withdrawals

- savers can save a maximum of \$2,200.
- Frederick County Government will match this amount 4:1 with a no interest loan of \$8,800 for a home purchase that must only be paid back once the home is sold by the program graduate.
- The total savings amount (from the saver and the matched funds) for any household for a home is \$11,000.
- An Emergency Foreclosure Prevention Fund of \$3,400 provided by United Way of Frederick County for 3 years from home purchase.
- The minimum period before an eligible withdrawal is 3 months.

In no case will matched funds be used for any form of debt, or issued directly to savers; savers can only have their own deposited funds directly issued. Savers will be required to get signed approval from United Way in order to make a qualified withdrawal or to close the account.

The maximum that a saver can receive is \$11,000 for a home purchase.

Qualified Asset Purchases

- 1.) First-time Homeownership: Funds can be used for qualified acquisition costs for the participant's first home. This includes the costs of acquiring or constructing a newly acquired residence and typical settlement, financing, or other closing costs. "First home" means that the saver has not owned a home for the past three years *prior to applying for a Prosperity Savings Account (PSA)*. This qualified asset purchase is matched at a 4:1 savings rate. Funds cannot be used for previous payments/purchases, mortgage loans, credit cards, or other types of debt.

Budget Coach Program: This is a 12 month program which includes a 1-hour budget counseling session each month.

The following serves as a guide to successfully qualify for a mortgage. Collectively, this is known as the Housing Certification process.

1. Housing Class: Must complete a first-time home buyer workshop (available monthly on the Prosperity Center’s online calendar).
2. Minimum Credit Score: 620
- 3.a. Front-end Debt to Income Ratio (also referred to as housing ratio): 28 percent or lower

$$\frac{\text{Expected Housing Expenses}}{\text{Monthly Gross Earnings}} = \text{Front-end DTI}$$

- 3.b. Back-end Debt to Income Ratio: 36 percent or lower

$$\frac{\text{Monthly Debt Expenses}}{\text{Monthly Gross Earnings}} = \text{Back-end DTI}$$

The PSA Housing Certification will also consider if any of the following apply to the saver. These are not necessarily qualifiers or disqualifiers, but will be taken into consideration to determine if the applicant is a good candidate for the program:

- More than one “30-day late” on a credit report
- Bankruptcy or foreclosure discharged less than 36 months
- Outstanding judgements within the past 12 months
- Two or more rent payments 30 days late within the past 3 years
- Outstanding collection accounts with no payment arrangements
- Outstanding tax liens or delinquent federal debt with no payment arrangements
- Accounts converted to collections in the past 23 months
- If more or less than 20% will be used as a down payment on a house
- If there is a steady employment history, including at least two years with the same employer

Eligibility Guidelines

To be eligible for the Program, participants must:

- Be a current resident and living within one of the following counties:

MARYLAND

Frederick
Carroll
Howard
Montgomery
Washington

WEST VIRGINIA

Morgan
Berkeley
Jefferson

VIRGINIA

Loudoun

PENNSYLVANIA

Franklin
Adams

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Be currently employed, earning wages from full- or part-time work income
- Meet earned income eligibility.

Program Requirements

Account savers must commit to the following:

- Save in the program for a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 12 months.
- Complete a minimum of six hours of approved financial education prior to receiving matched funds. Approved financial education workshops and events can be found on the Prosperity Center's website www.prosperitycenter.org
- The saver must be able to personally attend the application interview and the account opening at the community bank.
- Provide an approved, accurate and complete annual household budget which includes their savings goal prior to application approval.
- Any additional requirements as outlined in this policy manual or deemed necessary by program staff.
- Agree to abide by the program's rules and responsibilities as described by the program staff and in the written materials.

Household Earned Income (To determine program *eligibility*)

When determining eligibility, gross income is used. This is determined by using last year's tax return. All applicants must document their income level and meet the following **household eligibility income** requirements to participate in the program:

In order to be Earned Income eligible, the applicant's household eligibility income must not exceed the income guidelines (ALICE survivability limit, based on the number of people in their household – see description below) or they need to be EITC-eligible or TANF-eligible. A household consists of anyone listed on the tax return. The most recent tax return will be used for verification.

Household Size	ALICE Survival Budget**	ALICE Survival Budget**
	Single-parent household Max Income	Two parent household Max Income
1	\$31,536	-
2	\$55,296	\$42,096
3	\$56,402	\$65,856
4	\$57,530	\$75,732
5	\$58,680	\$77,247
6	\$59,854	\$78,792
7	\$61,051	\$80,367
8	\$62,272	\$81,975

Household Eligibility Income includes:

- All Employment (Wages and Self-employment)
- Workers Compensation
- Unemployment
- Alimony
- Investment Income
- Retirement/Pension Income

Household Eligibility Income does not include:

- Child Support
- Social Security Benefits
- Other Benefits (TANF, Food Stamps, etc.)
- Section 8 Assistance
- If an employee pays for disability insurance

Enrollment and participation in the Prosperity Savings Account Program should not affect any public assistance participants may be receiving. Please ask if you have any concerns.

_____ Household Earned Income (To determine employment funds for deposit)

Prosperity Account savings dollars must be derived from household *earned* income, which includes employment earnings and self-employment earnings (earned income is defined by the U.S. Internal Revenue Code of 1986).

Generally speaking, Household Earned Income (money received for services rendered) includes:

- Wages, salaries, tips
- Net earnings from self-employment
- Work Study
- AmeriCorps stipend
- Tax refunds
- Foster care income from the State
- Disability Insurance Income (if the employer pays for the insurance – if the employee pays for insurance, it does not count as earned income)

All Prosperity Account savers must have a source of income during the savings period. Savers cannot open a savings account until they verify there is earned income in the household from a job or a business. An individual who receives only Social Security income (or any other benefit income) cannot be a Prosperity Account saver because benefit income is not considered ***earned*** income.

_____ Acceptable Earned Income Verification Documentation (for both eligibility and employment)

- Copies of paychecks or pay stubs from within the past 30 days
- Written statements from employers regarding employment within the past 30 days
- Letters or other documents from income sources, if dated within the last 30 days
- If self-employed, accounting and other business records showing net income
- Most recent tax return
- Capital gains
- Any assets drawn as withdrawals from a bank, the sale of property, a house or a car
- Tax refunds, gifts, loans, lump sum inheritances, one-time insurance payments, or compensation for injury
- Non-cash benefits such as employer paid or union paid portion of health insurance or other employee fringe benefits, food or housing received in lieu of wages, the value of food and fuel produced and consumed on farms, the imputed value of rent from owner-occupied non-farm or farm housing, and federal non-cash benefit Program such as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, school lunches, housing and other emergency assistance.
- Any portion of Social Security benefits deducted to pay Medicare premiums that will not be reimbursed.

Net Worth

- For this program, net worth is determined by taking the household's total assets (what everyone in the household owns) and then subtracting the household's total liabilities (what everyone in the household owes) to see if it has a value of more than \$15,000.
- The following are *not* included when determining net worth:
 - The applicant's primary residence (asset), and associated liabilities (all mortgage balances associated with primary residence).
 - One vehicle (asset), and associated liabilities (outstanding loan). The asset portion of the vehicle is calculated from the Trade-In Value.
- If a participant is eligible for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), they automatically meet the net worth *and* income guidelines and thus do not need to calculate the household income and net worth limits.

Household Budget

Prior to opening a Prosperity Savings Account, the applicant must provide an accurate annual household budget which includes their savings goal amount. A blank budget is available on The Prosperity Center's website (www.prosperitycenter.org), which includes the basic information that will be required. It is important this information is complete and accurate. If an applicant needs help creating their budget, they are encouraged to take a budgeting class or sign up for the My Budget Coach program to assist them with this process.

Application Review

An application review appointment will take place with a United Way representative once the application is complete and the required documentation has been gathered.

The purpose of the application review is to:

- Verify and review documentation and eligibility
- Review completed monthly household budget
- Identify any potential barriers to successfully completing the program and make appropriate recommendations

Application Approval

Once the application review appointment has taken place, the application is complete, the annual household budget has been reviewed, all documentation has been submitted, and all other requirements have been met, an approval/denial decision will be made. A United Way representative will communicate the final decision to the applicant.

If denied, the applicant will receive a letter detailing the reason(s) why, along with any suggestions which may offer additional and alternative financial stability resources.

If approved, the applicant will receive an approval packet – detailed with supporting documents and information for the next steps.

Opening Prosperity Savings Account Program at the Bank

The saver must open up their Prosperity Savings Account at the community bank location within 2 weeks of receiving their Approval Packet. The following procedures will be used if the saver fails to open the account within 2 weeks:

- 3rd week after approval: Phone call to saver reminding them to open the account.
- 4th week after approval: Phone call reminding saver to open the account.
- 6th week after approval: Termination of application. Saver will have to reapply for the Prosperity Savings Account Program.

Financial Education Training

Each saver is required to attend six hours of financial education classes, workshops, meetings, events, etc. prior to receiving their matched funds. If a saver has already participated in a qualifying class/program within 3 months of opening an account, it will count towards their required financial training hours. All savers must attend the following workshop:

Homebuyer workshop offered monthly by the Fredrick Community Action Agency.

Requesting Funds for Qualified Asset Purchase

As a general rule, savers should request qualified withdrawals a minimum of two weeks in advance of the date in which the funds are needed. Several steps are required *prior* to all qualified withdrawal requests:

1. *Save for Prosperity Savings Account Program's minimum time requirement* – participants must participate in the program at least 3 (three) consecutive months of saving before being eligible for a qualified withdrawal.
2. *Have sufficient funds in the account* – participants must have accumulated enough personal savings in their account so that, when combined with the match, they can successfully pay for the closing cost.
3. *Attend 6 hours of financial education classes, workshops, webinars, events, meetings, activities, etc.* – These can be found on the Prosperity Center's online calendar.
4. *Attend asset-specific training* – prior to submitting any qualified withdrawal request, all participants must have participated in the home buying workshop.
5. *Complete Qualified Asset Purchase Withdrawal form.*
6. *Qualify for financing* – for home purchases which require financing other than Prosperity Savings Account Program funds, participants must apply and receive approval for the loan or mortgage needed to make the asset purchase possible.
7. *Find or shop for the asset* – because qualified withdrawals must be in the form of vendor checks, participants must have specific purchase plans. In addition, participants

should use the timeframe afforded by the long-term saving process to make the most educated and wisest purchase choice possible.

8. *Complete and submit Qualified Asset Purchase Withdrawal form along with appropriate documentation to a Prosperity Savings Account Program representative – at least 10 (ten) business days before Prosperity Savings Account Program funds are required. If the request is approved, the Prosperity Savings Account Program representative will sign the form and the saver will give it to a community bank representative so the funds can be disbursed.*

Authorized Emergency Withdrawal

In order to be eligible for an emergency withdrawal, savers must have been enrolled in the program for at least six months. *After 6 months of saving, savers are allowed one opportunity within the program period to withdraw all or some of their savings from their account in case of an emergency. **Emergency withdrawals will not include matched funds.*** If an emergency withdrawal is made, a *NO MATCH – Emergency Authorized/Unauthorized Withdrawal* form must be used.

There is a minimum \$25 balance required to remain in the account when an emergency withdrawal is made.

Saver must review alternative strategies with program staff to attempt to resolve the problem without making a withdrawal.

Saver must develop a revised savings plan with program staff that will detail the saver's plan to repay the withdrawn funds within 12 months.

Emergency withdrawals will only be approved when, in the judgment of the program staff, the funds are necessary to:

- Prevent *eviction* of a saver or saver's family from their residence
- Prevent *foreclosure* on a saver's primary residence
- Pay for *critical health care services* for a saver or a saver's family member
- Pay for *critical living expenses*, such as food supplies or utility expenses, following a saver's loss of employment

Unauthorized Emergency Withdrawals

The following criteria apply to *unauthorized* emergency withdrawals:

- Account has been open for less than 6 months
- Request does not meet qualifications to be considered for an emergency withdrawal
- Request does not meet the requirements for a qualified asset purchase

Saver will forfeit any match for unauthorized withdrawals. The saver must make arrangements with United Way for the withdrawal of funds from the participating financial institution by completing the *NO MATCH Emergency Authorized/Unauthorized Withdrawal* form. The program representative will then provide a copy of the signed form for the saver to give to Frederick County Bank and the funds in the account will be returned to the saver without a match. The account will then be closed.

Alternatives to Emergency Withdrawals

In the event the saver's request to make an emergency withdrawal is not approved, the saver may choose to:

- Make do without the emergency withdrawal and continue participation in the program
- Withdraw from the program, receive a full refund of all Prosperity savings deposits and interest and forfeit all matching money

Those who have withdrawn from the program may submit a request to re-apply immediately, or at their convenience. Applicants will be required to requalify for the program and there is no guarantee that space will be available in the program.

Emergency Foreclosure Prevention Fund

When a program participant completes the matched savings program (and saves up to the maximum of \$2,200) they will receive \$8,800 from the County Government for a total of \$11,000 towards closing. United Way's contribution of \$3,400 will be available as an emergency foreclosure prevention fund for the program participant to request assistance from, assuming they have satisfied all financial education program requirements, or to be reinvested in the program after 3 years from home purchase.

Emergency foreclosure prevention fund payments will only be approved when, in the judgment of the program staff, the funds are necessary to prevent missing a mortgage payment and foreclosure on a saver's primary residence and therefore protect the loss of any gained/future equity in the property.

Voluntary Early Withdrawal from Program

Life circumstances such as unemployment, medical emergency, change of marital status, etc. may require a saver to voluntarily withdraw from the program. All withdrawals require savers to notify a program representative at least two weeks before the planned withdrawal date by completing a *NO MATCH – Emergency Authorized/Unauthorized Withdrawal* form. The program representative will then provide a copy of the signed form for the saver to give to the financial institution and the funds in the account will be returned to the saver without a match.

Completion of Program

When a saver purchases their home, withdraws from the program, or the program term ends, they must complete the appropriate withdrawal forms and both parties must agree to close the account. Both the saver and a United Way representative will be required to sign these forms. At that point, a copy of the signed forms will be provided to the saver to give to the bank. If there are any funds left in the account, they will be withdrawn and returned to the account holder and the account will be closed. Once that has taken place, the saver and everyone in the household is no longer eligible to apply or reapply for a Prosperity Savings Account.

Termination

Reasons a saver can be terminated:

- False, inaccurate financial information (for example, if the household exceeds income and asset requirements, if an applicant is unemployed, etc.)
- Failing to fulfill the financial education training minimum of at least six hours of approved classes, workshops, meetings, events, etc. prior to receiving matched funds
- Failing to meet any additional requirements as defined by the policy.

If a saver is terminated, a letter will be sent to the saver announcing his/her termination from the program, along with the specific reasons for the account termination. At that time, the saver will have forfeited any rights to the matching money as a result of termination.

_____ **In the Event of Death**

In the event of my death, I understand that if I designate another eligible individual as the beneficiary, that person will receive both my savings and earned match, provided he or she satisfies all project requirements. If I designate someone who is not eligible for an account, the beneficiary will receive only my savings, and my earned match will be used to match other account holders.

Accordingly, I designate the following beneficiary:

Full Name: _____

Street Address, City, State, Zip: _____

Phone 1: _____ - _____ - _____

Phone 1: _____ - _____ - _____

Email: _____

Relationship to account holder(s): _____

_____ **Policy and Procedure Changes**

United Way reserves the rights to make changes to these policies and procedures. The savings match ratio will not change.

_____ **Additional Requirements (If applicable)**

Account Holder Information:

Full Name: _____

Street Address, City, State, Zip: _____

Phone 1: _____ - _____ - _____

Phone 1: _____ - _____ - _____

Email: _____

Signatures:

I have read and understood the entire Prosperity Savings Account Program Policies and Procedures manual. I agree to the terms and conditions of this program.

Prosperity Savings Account Program owner signature:

Printed Name: _____

Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Prosperity Savings Account Program co-owner signature:

Printed Name: _____

Date: ____ / ____ / _____

United Way Representative signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: ____ / ____ / _____