

Getting Your Financial House in Order

At the beginning of a new year, many consumers resolve to get their finances in order, but can quickly become overwhelmed trying to figure out where to start. OCABR advises that you start by asking yourself these questions: How do I place my finances into a budget? Should I establish a savings plan now or pay off my credit cards first? Is the credit card I have right for me? Where do I get started? The good news is that there is a lot of great information out there. You just need to take a little time and do your homework.

The Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation offers these basic tips to help you get your financial house in order:

- Establish a budget. Take a look at where your money has been going in past months. Identify spending habits and spot any problem areas and frequent unnecessary spending.
- Put money aside for a rainy day. After evaluating your cash flow, decide how much you can save. It's always a good idea to save for emergency or maybe you want to save for a big ticket item like a down payment on a house. Some banks will let you do automatic saving plans for any amount you choose; see what options your bank has.
- Find tools online that can help with you budget. Microsoft has a free personal budgeting spreadsheet available [here](#), while apps such as Mint make keeping track of your purchases easy and allow you to manage your money from your smartphone.



Creating and sticking to a budget is key to your financial security.

Managing your credit and debt obligations is another significant aspect to proper financial health.

- **Get the facts:** Check that your listed basic information (name, address, credit accounts, etc.) on your credit report is correct. Fix inaccuracies with the relevant creditors or financial institutions.
- **Identify your current interest rates:** Consider transferring debt off a high-interest card to one with a lower interest rate.
- **Change your behavior:** Identify problem areas and make a plan for improvement. Create a payment plan to reduce your balances. Set small goals and larger milestones for improving your credit, so you can monitor the change.
- **Keep up to date:** Make sure to continually check your credit and credit report information.

You may consider hiring a financial planner, but be careful as these services may be pricey. If you do decide to enlist this additional help, shop around. Check the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards' [website](#) to verify if a financial planner is certified by them. The organization also has resources to help you find a certified financial planner for you [here](#).

Keeping these tips in your mind will make it easier to budget this year. We encourage you to remember them when managing your money – your wallet will thank you!