



PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION (PCS)

CFS/PFM CHECKLIST

MARINE CORPS FINANCIAL READINESS

Moving often means adjusting to change and starting new routines. This is especially true for your finances and cash flow. This checklist, supplemented with information and referrals from a Personal Financial Manager at the Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) staff, can help you to prepare for the main financial considerations of a PCS and make sound financial decisions.

HANDOUTS

- ✓ Spending Plan Worksheet
- ✓ Understanding Credit
- ✓ Military Consumer Protection
- ✓ Servicemembers Civil Relief Act
- ✓ Sources of Help for Military Consumers
- ✓ Estimated Travel Costs for a PCS



BASIC FINANCE

- ☐ Update your personal spending plan using the *Spending Plan Worksheet* Handout. A good spending plan helps you manage your money, plan for your financial goals, and prepare for emergencies. Here are four steps financial experts suggest to get started.

Counselor: *Inform counselees that you can provide a **Spending Plan Worksheet** Handout as well as more detailed templates with features that can help them understand their financial situation and reduce excessive debt.*

Step 1: Understand your current situation.

In this step, it's important to understand what's REALLY going on with your money today. Start tracking all your income and spending for the next 30 days. How you do the tracking is up to you, but what's important is you do it.

Step 2: Know where your money should go.

Financial experts offer these general guidelines when budgeting your money:

- Try to save and/or invest 10% – 15% of pretax pay.
- Strive to keep transportation expenses including car payments, insurance, gas and maintenance to 15% – 20% of pretax pay.
- Limit housing expenses, including mortgage or rent payment, taxes, utilities, and maintenance to your Basic Allowance for Housing or 25% of pretax pay.



Step 3: Create a plan.

Build a plan for setting aside money and putting limits on how much you'll spend each month per category.

- Prioritize your financial goals.
- Establish an emergency fund. Financial experts suggest you should keep at least three to six months of living expenses in reserve. If you do not have that much saved, consider setting aside a little each paycheck to help get you there.

Counselor: *Share with counselees the concepts of paying yourself first, automating savings, and keeping their emergency fund in a separate account. Suggest they make it effortless by setting up an automatic transfer through their bank or an allotment, time permitting.*

Step 4: Make adjustments.

Update your spending plan as your life changes. Monitor your plan until you have fully adjusted your finances to reflect your new situation.

- ☐ Identify changes in pay, expenses and taxes from your current duty station to your next duty station.
 - Budgeting to live on one income is a great way to reduce financial-related stress during a PCS. The second income, once re-established, can be used to save for goals and quality-of-life improvements. Using this strategy can reduce a long-term debt and reduce stress if there is a pay issue during the move.
 - Potential changes to income could include an increase or decrease in pay, to include: Cost of Living Allowance (COLA), Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), Special and Incentive Pay, and spousal income. Visit www.defensetravel.dod.millsitelallcalc.cfm to calculate expected changes to your pay.
 - Potential changes to your expenses at your next duty station may include an increase or decrease in: housing, transportation, insurance, child care, food, fuel and utilities. It's important to establish a spending plan so you can identify and adjust to these changes.
 - Your tax liability could change depending on where you are relocated. Speak to a tax professional to discuss your specific situation.
- ☐ Notify your financial institutions and creditors of your upcoming move. Consider setting up automatic bill pay to avoid missed or late payments. Confirm all transactions have cleared your bank or credit union account, if you plan to switch financial institutions at your next duty station.
- ☐ Check each of your three major credit reports for free at annualcreditreport.com. Marines can request free credit monitoring services from the nationwide credit reporting agencies: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. Review the *Understanding Credit* Handout for more information.

Counselor: Remind counselees that a Personal Financial Manager/Educator (PFM/E), can provide a free copy of their credit report, help them interpret their reports and discuss what they need to do to improve their scores.

- ☐ Consider the pros and cons of changing state residency. The Military Spouses Residency Relief Act (MSRRA) gives the spouse of an active duty Service member the option not to change state residency when relocating to a new state due to a PCS. Changing may not be the best option for a spouse because it may impact state income tax, personal property taxes, car registration, and voter registration.
- ☐ Under MSRRA, if your spouse plans to work in the new location and not change residency, they should file their IRS Form W4 with their employer.



CONSUMER PROTECTION

- ☐ Review the *Military Consumer Protection* and *Servicemembers Civil Relief Act* Handouts for additional information on identity theft, Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA), and Military Lending Act (MLA).

Counselor: Remind counselees the Legal Assistance Office (on base) can assist by reviewing contracts to help counselees from falling prey to predatory lenders and fraudsters.

- ☐ Protect yourself from misleading consumer practices and know basic procedures for handling a consumer complaint or dispute. Review the *Sources of Help for Military Consumers* Handout.
- ☐ Analyze your housing and transportation needs and be sure to prepare your finances for any major purchases related to your PCS.






COMPENSATION, BENEFITS, AND ENTITLEMENTS

- ☐ Speak with your Installation Personnel Administration Centers (IPAC), Information, Referral, and Relocation (IR&R) staff, and local Transportation Office (TO) or Distribution Management Office (DMO) or the most up-to-date information on travel pay and allowances specific to your situation.

- ☐ Typical Travel Pay and Allowances

Allowance	Purpose
Mileage reimbursement	Offset driving costs
Per diem	Cover hotel and meals
Dislocation allowance	Cover expenses not otherwise reimbursed
Cost Of Living Adjustment (COLA)	Allowance designed to help offset higher prices in the highest cost locations
Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA)	Offset overseas housing costs when on-base or government housing is not available
Move-In Housing Allowance (MIHA)	Available only Outside of the Continental United States (OCONUS) to help cover costs of miscellaneous expenses like appliances, lease taxes, one-time rent related expenses or security expenses.
Temporary Lodging Expense (TLE)	Partially pay members for lodging/meal expenses incurred by a member/dependent(s) while occupying temporary lodging in the Continental United States (CONUS).
Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA)	Partially pay members for higher than normal expenses incurred by a member or dependent while occupying temporary lodging OCONUS.

- ❑ Use the Government Travel Charge Card (GTCC) during your PCS to cover authorized expenses. Remember, your GTCC is for official travel-related expenses **ONLY** and misuse can subject you to administrative or disciplinary action. You will be responsible to pay any overages on the GTCC that are not covered by reimbursement, so it is important to develop an estimated cost of what is reimbursable. For questions, contact your Command Agency Program Coordinators (APC).

Dependent Travel 	Authorized Expenses 	Unauthorized Expenses 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marines traveling concurrently with their dependents can choose to use the GTCC for all PCS expenses for the family. • Marines with dependents traveling separately (non-concurrently) cannot use the GTCC for both sets of travel. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In this case, the GTCC may only be used by the Marine for their personal travel expenses. - Dependents traveling separately cannot use the GTCC for any part of their travel expenses. <p><i>* A travel advance must be requested for non-concurrent dependent travel via the existing process</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary Lodging Expense (TLE) at the old or new Permanent Duty Station (PDS). • Fuel for a Privately Owned Vehicle (POV), when POV is the authorized mode of transportation. • Rental car and fuel when a rental is authorized on orders. • Lodging and meals en route. • Dislocation Allowance (DLA) related expenses normally used to establish a household such as deposits and cleaning. • Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) withdrawals. ATM fees are not a separately reimbursable expense. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical expenses • Personal expenses that are not part of your authorized moving expenses. • Commercial airfare for PCS Travel. • Personally Procured Moves (PPM), formally known as a Do-It-Yourself (DITY) move. • Personal travel arrangements incurred during leave in conjunction with orders. • Other expenses not authorized by the Joint Travel Regulation (JTR). <p><i>* The GTCC cannot be combined with an electronic funds transfer/direct deposit (EFT/IDD) travel advance (e.g. advanced DLA and per diem)</i></p>
<p>Cards will be put in a MISSION CRITICAL status</p> <p>The number of days, date-range authorized, and the spending limits vary!</p> <p>For more details and specifics concerning your personal PCS situation, contact your IPAC and Local Reporting Units as soon as possible after receiving your orders.</p>		

- ❑ Advance pay is intended to enable a member to have sufficient money in hand to execute a PCS. With sufficient justification, you may request up to three months of Basic Pay. In some cases, allowances may also be paid.

Counselor: *Since this is an advance, it **MUST BE REPAID** over the next 12 months unless your commanding officer authorizes a longer repayment term (up to 24 months).*

- ❑ Consider weight limitations, since you must cover the cost of shipping items that exceed the DoD weight limits. Visit your TO or DMO for more information or call the Defense Personal Property System at (800) 462-2176 or visit www.dps.move.mil.

Counselor: *The counselees may want to consider a yard sale or online marketplace to sell non-essential household items. This provides two benefits – making extra money AND lowering the shipping weight. Another option is to donate the items to charity.*

- ❑ Prepare for the potential costs associated with transporting and/or storing your vehicles. Visit www.move.mil for information regarding your personal vehicle(s) and non-temporary storage. The government only pays for the shipment of ONE vehicle to overseas duty assignments and usually only pays what it would cost to drive one personally owned vehicle from station to station in the U.S. There may be exceptions, so check with your command and your TO or DMO regarding your specific situation.



PCS CONSIDERATIONS (Before Your PCS)

- ☐ A helpful resource to guide your PCS is the Plan My Move online tool available at <https://planmymove.militaryonesource.mil>.
- ☐ Attend a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) workshop provided by an IR&R specialist as required by MCO 1754.10.
- ☐ Visit <https://usmc-mccs.org/cycle/pcs/> for additional information and resources.
- ☐ Visit usps.com to update your address and consider using Hold Mail and forwarding services. It's recommended that you do this 30 days in advance. Prepare for possible housing-related expenses such as cleaning, maintenance, long-term storage, insurance, and house hunting at your next duty station.
- ☐ Prepare for potential costs associated with taking pets to your next duty station. These costs may include immunizations required for overseas travel (quarantine, airline crates, etc.).
- ☐ Obtain passports and visas, if appropriate. There will be costs associated with passports and visas when transferring overseas, which may be reimbursed with command approval. More information on passport fees and processing times (normally four to six weeks after application) is available on the State Department website <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports.html>.

Counselor: Note that passport rates vary based on whether the passport is new or being renewed. Passport applications for children under 16 require the presence of both parents, even if they are estranged.



PCS CONSIDERATIONS (During Your PCS)

- ☐ Estimate travel costs for your PCS move using the *Estimated Travel Costs for a PCS Handout* provided. Remember to keep all receipts so you can complete your travel claim immediately upon arrival. Also, any unreimbursed moving expenses may be eligible for a tax deduction. Be sure to consult with a tax professional.

Counselor: Remind counselees to budget an average of \$25 per 100 miles of driving for gas and maintenance. The government authorizes 350 miles of travel per day, so they will want to plan their number of overnight stays based on this distance. Multiply planned number of overnight stays by \$120 per night or more depending on the unique characteristics of their family. Estimate \$50 per person per day for meals.



PCS CONSIDERATIONS (After You Arrive)

- ☐ Check in with the Command APC and submit the travel voucher in Marine Online (MOL).
- ☐ Prepare for possible expenses once you arrive such as security deposits, lodging, child care, and vehicle registration costs.
- ☐ Child care can be a big expense, so seek out potential resources to help reduce costs:
 - Military OneSource: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil>
 - Command sponsors in your new location
 - MilitaryChildCare.com, www.militarychildcare.com: A DoD-sponsored organization matching military families with providers that includes both child development centers on base and certified care homes. Visit Military OneSource and the Military Spouse Employment partnership website for spouses needing help seeking new employment: <https://msejobs.militaryonesource.mil/msep/>.