

## 5 Practical Practices to Get a Handle on Your Finances in 2019



If getting control of your budget is one of your goals for 2019, it's not too late to get started. Year after year, money tops popular New Year's resolutions lists alongside dieting, relationships and exercise. Even though it's now spring, there's still time to double down on those pesky to-dos! While telling yourself you're going to start sticking to a budget and building up your savings account is easy enough, figuring out exactly how to accomplish your goals can be a bit of a challenge.

To help you get a start on tackling this, we've put together a quick list of 5 best practices that are simple and practical, which you can use to take control of your financial wellbeing at any time of year.

### **1. Use the Right Personal Financial Management Tool (PFM)**

Whether you're looking for robust and comprehensive budgeting software to create a financial HQ on your computer or prefer to work with a lightweight habit-building app, the options out there are numerous. The most important thing to keep in mind as you shop around is to consider what you are looking to accomplish and how you will be using the program to keep your money in check.



Reading Cooperative Bank (RCB) is thrilled to be offering one such tool: [Money Minder](#). Robust and easy-to-use, the system enables you to access information on your accounts and work with visual representations of your financial wellbeing at the drop of a hat. You can set up your budget, add savings goals, keep tabs on your cash flow, take advantage of features that allow you to visually track your financial progress, and even sync with accounts from 17,000 institutions worldwide.

**Bonus Tip:**

Many PFMs can easily adapt to your lifestyle with mobile-friendly options so that you can have the flexibility to manage a budget at home or on-the-go.

## **2. Set Your Schedule**

Finding the right PFM is an important step, but where do you go from there? Setting up a system for remembering when those expenses are coming out of your pocket is important in order to stay on top of your budget.

Grab a calendar – either the one off the wall or the app on your phone – and mark down important financial dates for each month. Make sure you’re keeping track of due dates for regular expenses like:

- Rent/mortgage payment
- Car
- Credit cards
- Grocery shopping
- Cable/streaming service
- Phone plan

You can even take it a step further and jot down when you're planning to check your bank account and balance the checkbook. The more structure you build for yourself the easier it will be to stay on task.

**Bonus Tip:**

Color coding or highlighting your notations is a great way to make them stand out so they're easy to see at a glance.

### **3. Pay Yourself First**

While you want to make sure the landlord, creditors and doctors all get the money they're owed, there's one payee you should be thinking of before all the rest: YOU.

Make sure that you are putting money into your savings account each month. This should be separate from any money that's intended for specific purchases, cash for emergencies or a vacation fund. An easy way to make sure you don't forget is to include your own account as one of the "expenses" to be settled.

You may not be able to put the same amount away each time, but make sure that, regardless of how much it is, your very first payment of the month goes into your own pocket.

**Bonus Tip:**

Whatever way you list out the accounts that need to be reconciled monthly – in a spreadsheet, a PFM workbook, or on a slip of paper – put your name right at the top. That way, you never lose sight of your most important priority.

### **4. Get a Head Start**

You may not know everything that will be happening in the coming year, but if you have a major expense planned in the coming months, then start saving up for it now. Think about your family trip this summer or the shopping you'll be doing for the holidays and establish a strategy that will ensure the money is there when you need it.

Also consider the unforeseen expenses that can catch you by surprise. In an emergency, you may find the sudden need of funds to pay for hospital expenses, property repairs, etc. [More than half of Americans would have trouble finding a \\$400 loan in a pinch without borrowing or selling an asset.](#) Saving up now saves you later on.

There are a number of ways you can work with the bank to lay your funds aside. Depending on the time frame and situation you're trying to plan for, you could consider one of the following:

- [Green Online Savings & Statement Savings Account](#)
- [Christmas Savings Account](#)
- [Vacation Savings Account](#)
- [Certificate of Deposit \(CD\)](#)

- [Money Market Account](#)
- [Individual Retirement Account \(IRA\)](#)

**Bonus Tip:**

The trick to saving up for a specific event or purchase is to think about how long you have before you'll be needing those funds. Even if you're planning for something more than a year away, check into the longevities that come with different offers – RCB offers both short-term Christmas and Vacation Savings Accounts as well as a 3-Year Variable Account for CDs.

## 5. Keep Track of the “Little” Expenses

The hardest expenses to keep track of in any budget are the miscellaneous purchases you may not necessarily think of as you live your life.

You might spend \$5 on a latte, throw in another dollar to tip the barista, be charged \$40 to fill up your gas tank, and then take the \$4 deal on a car wash that came with your purchase.

You've spent \$50 before you've even made it to work!

Think of all the ways we “simplify” our lives that ultimately end up costing us – automatic renewal for a subscription, a button to have a package of paper towels shipped to your door, auto-pay for everything from bills to credit cards, and so on. Remember that convenience costs.

**Bonus Tip:**

Use your PFM tool to track everyday and ancillary expenses. Money Minder helps you fit such purchases into your budget so that you can keep your spending under control.

When you go to balance your budget, keep these expenses in mind and it'll be easier to spot purchasing trends that might be trimmed down or more carefully timed so you can get a handle on your finances.

You might even be able to add a little more to that vacation fund this month!

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At Reading Cooperative Bank, we pride ourselves on being a community, not an institution. Customer-owned for more than a century, we focus on putting people before profits.

Ask us about how you can get started with [Money Minder](#). After that, you'll be able to select accounts, set your financial goals, and start saving!

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