

CHOOSING A LISTING AGENT





HOMESELLERSUSA SELLER GUIDES

How to choose a listing agent

The agent you hire shapes your price, your timeline and how much of the work lands on you. Here is how to find candidates, what to ask them, how commission and the listing agreement work since the 2024 NAR settlement, and the red flags to watch for.

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Before you read

This guide is general information, not legal, tax or financial advice. Contracts, local rules and costs vary, so check the details for your home with your agent, title company or attorney.

HomeSellersUSA connects homeowners with licensed local agents and cash buyers. We are not a real estate broker and don't value homes.

Choosing a listing agent is a hiring decision. You are picking someone to price your home, market it, handle buyers and negotiate on your behalf, usually for a fee that comes out of your sale. It is worth interviewing more than one person and reading the agreement before you sign it.

1 Where to find candidates

Aim for two or three agents to interview. Good places to start:

- **Recent sales near you.** Look at which agents' names appear on "sold" signs and online listings of homes like yours in your neighborhood over the last year or so.
- **People you trust.** Ask neighbors, friends and coworkers who sold recently whether they would hire the same agent again, and why.
- **Agents who work your area and price range.** An agent who mainly sells condos downtown may not be the best fit for a rural house, and the reverse.
- **A free market report.** HomeSellersUSA can put you in touch with one licensed local agent for a free market report on your home. It is a low-pressure way to meet an agent and see how they think about your price, with no obligation to list. See how it works.

Whoever you find, check their license before you go further. More on that below.

2 What to ask in the interview

A good interview is a conversation, not a sales pitch. These questions tend to separate agents quickly.

Recent local sales

- How many homes like mine have you sold nearby in the past year, and can you show me a few?
- What were the list prices, the final sale prices and how long did they take?
- Can I talk to two or three recent sellers?

Pricing approach

- What price range would you suggest, and **which comparable sales** support it?
- How did you adjust for differences like size, condition and lot?

NAR describes comparable sales, or comps, as similar properties that recently sold in the same area, used to build a comparative market analysis (CMA) that also looks at homes under contract and currently for sale (NAR). A strong agent walks you through the comps and explains the reasoning, rather than naming a number and moving on.

Marketing plan

- Where will my home appear: the local MLS, listing websites, social media, the brokerage's site, open houses?
- Who takes the photos, and are video, floor plans or staging advice included?
- What will you do if we have few showings in the first couple of weeks?

Communication

- How often will I hear from you, and how (call, text, email)?
- Who will I actually deal with day to day, you or a team member or assistant?
- How do you pass on showing feedback and offers?

The fee and the terms

- What is your commission, and what exactly does it include?
- How long is the listing agreement, and how can I end it if things are not working?

Take notes and compare the answers side by side afterward. The agent who suggests the most optimistic price is not automatically the best choice.

3 How commission works, and that it is negotiable

Agent pay is a matter of agreement between you and the brokerage. NAR's consumer guide says it plainly: **agent compensation is fully negotiable and not set by law** (NAR). Pay may be a percentage of the sale price, a flat fee or another structure, and different agents offer different levels of service for different prices.

It is reasonable to ask an agent to explain their fee, what services come with it and whether there is any flexibility. It is also reasonable to compare what you would actually net, not just the fee: a lower fee with a weaker sale price may leave you with less. Our net proceeds calculator helps you compare scenarios, and the Texas closing costs guide shows how the fee fits among the other costs for one state.

4 What changed with the 2024 NAR settlement

The National Association of REALTORS settlement changed some long-standing practices starting **August 17, 2024** (NAR). The parts that matter most to sellers:

- **Offers of compensation are not on the MLS.** Your agent cannot include an offer of compensation to a buyer's agent on a Multiple Listing Service (NAR). Offers can still be communicated in other ways, such as flyers, signs, brokerage websites, social media, or a phone call or email (NAR).
- **Offering to pay a buyer's agent is your choice.** You can choose to offer, or authorize your agent to offer, compensation to a buyer's agent, as a flat fee or by letting your agent share part of their compensation (NAR). Seller concessions, such as help with a buyer's closing costs, are a separate thing.
- **Buyers sign written agreements.** Buyers working with an agent are asked to enter a written buyer agreement before touring a home with them, in person or virtually, and that agreement must state the agent's compensation (NAR). Buyers can still ask the seller to cover some or all of it as part of an offer.
- **Written disclosure to you.** Your listing broker must disclose in writing, in advance, any payment or agreement to pay another broker (NAR).

In practice, ask each agent how they handle buyer's agent compensation in your market, what they recommend and why, and how it would appear in your listing agreement. Local practice and state rules vary.

5 Read the listing agreement before you sign

The listing agreement is the contract between you and the brokerage. Forms differ by state and by company, so read yours line by line and ask about anything unclear.

Type of agreement. NAR describes several kinds (NAR):

- **Exclusive right to sell:** one agent, and you owe the agreed compensation no matter who sells the home.
- **Exclusive agency:** one agent, but you keep the right to sell the home yourself without paying that agent.
- **Limited service:** one agent who provides a set menu of services, such as putting your home on the MLS.
- **Non-exclusive (open):** you may work with more than one agent and pay the one who sells.

Other terms to check:

- **Length.** How long the agreement runs, with a clear end date. Shorter terms keep the agent motivated to perform; you can always extend.
- **Cancellation.** Whether you can end the agreement early, how, and whether any fee applies.

- **Protection or "tail" period.** Whether you would still owe a fee if you sell, after the agreement ends, to a buyer who saw the home while it was listed, and for how long.
- **Compensation.** The amount or rate, when it is earned, and how any buyer's agent compensation is handled.
- **What is included.** Photos, marketing, open houses, staging and any extra charges, such as administrative or transaction fees.
- **List price and price changes.** Who decides, and how changes are agreed.

If something you discussed in the interview is not in writing, ask for it to be added. You can also have a real estate attorney review the agreement before you sign.

6 Check the agent's license

Every state licenses real estate agents and brokers, and each state's regulator offers a free online lookup. It usually shows whether the license is active, the sponsoring brokerage and, in many states, any public disciplinary action.

Each of our state pages names that state's real estate regulator and links to its license lookup, for example New York. Search the agent's full name and confirm the license is active and matches the brokerage on their business card.

7 Red flags

Walk away or slow down if you see these

- **A price far above the others with no comps to back it.** Some agents suggest a high number to win the listing, then push for price cuts once it is signed. Ask to see the comparable sales behind every suggested price.
- **Pressure to sign today,** or to sign a long agreement with no way out.
- **Vague answers** about marketing, commission or who will actually handle your sale.
- **Fees or terms that change** between the conversation and the paperwork.
- **A license that is inactive** or does not match the brokerage they say they work for.

A good agent will give you time to think, answer questions in writing and let you read the agreement at your own pace.

8 Your next step

Start by getting a feel for your price and the local market. You can ask for a free market report from one licensed local agent, which is also a chance to interview them with the questions above. If speed or certainty matters more than price, you can ask for a cash offer from one local buyer as well and compare the two in our cash offer vs listing guide. There is no obligation to go ahead with either.

Questions sellers ask

Is real estate commission negotiable?

Yes. NAR's consumer guide says agent compensation is fully negotiable and not set by law (NAR). Ask each agent what their fee includes and compare what you would net, not just the rate.

Do I have to pay the buyer's agent?

Not automatically. Since August 17, 2024, it is your choice whether to offer, or authorize your agent to offer, compensation to a buyer's agent, and such offers cannot appear on the MLS (NAR). Buyers may still ask for it in their offer, so discuss the local practice with your agent.

How many agents should I interview?

Two or three is common. That is usually enough to compare pricing opinions, marketing plans, fees and communication styles without dragging the decision out.

How do I check if an agent is licensed?

Use your state regulator's free license lookup. Each of our state pages links to it. Confirm the license is active and matches the agent's brokerage.

Should I pick the agent who suggests the most optimistic price?

Not on that basis alone. Ask every agent to show the comparable sales behind their suggested price (NAR). A price that is well above the others with no support can lead to price cuts later.

Sources

1. NAR: <https://www.nar.realtor/the-facts/consumer-guide-what-goes-into-pricing-your-home>
2. NAR: <https://www.nar.realtor/the-facts/consumer-guide-listing-agreements>
3. NAR: <https://www.nar.realtor/the-facts>
4. NAR: <https://www.nar.realtor/the-facts/home-sellers-what-the-nar-settlement-means>
5. NAR: <https://www.nar.realtor/the-facts/consumer-guide-offers-of-compensation>
6. NAR: <https://www.nar.realtor/the-facts/consumer-guide-written-buyer-agreements>

Last reviewed September 30, 2026. Rules and costs change; check the current figures before you rely on them.



Thinking of selling? Ask one licensed local agent for a free market report, or one local cash buyer for an offer. Free to ask, no obligation.

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More free guides and your state's seller rules at homesellersusa.com/guides