

AmeriCU Credit Union Reduces Home Equity Turn Times by Up to 75% with FirstClose

AmeriCU set out to modernize a home equity process that once operated like a first mortgage, resulting in inconsistent timelines that could stretch 30–60 days.

In 2021, the credit union established a dedicated home equity department and expanded its use of FirstClose to support both home equity loans and lines of credit. Leveraging FirstClose's integration with MeridianLink created a unified workflow that reduced manual steps, improved accuracy and strengthened the member experience. Today, AmeriCU averages less than two weeks from application to clear to close, a reduction of roughly 75 percent from its previous longest turn times. Timelines continue to shrink beyond the initial two-week period achieved early on through this change with FirstClose. To further enhance convenience, AmeriCU offers flexible closing options, including mobile notaries and remote online notarization, to meet the needs of members across its expanding footprint.

Client Overview

AmeriCU was founded 75 years ago as Griffiss Air Force Base Federal Credit Union with only \$65 in deposits and a mission to serve civilian employees of the then-Air Force Base, along with military personnel and their families. Today, the organization has grown into a cooperative serving a 24-county region across Central and Upstate New York. Despite its growth, AmeriCU remains grounded in its military heritage and the credit union principle of people helping people. Its mission of helping members live life, dream big and achieve financial success guides the way the organization approaches every product, including home equity lending.

“Our foundation has always been about helping people,” said Marianne Reeves-Drok, manager of home equity loan operations at AmeriCU. “That philosophy carries through to how we support members using their home’s equity to achieve important goals.”

Opportunity

Prior to 2021, AmeriCU's home equity loans were processed through the mortgage department and followed the same workflow as first mortgages. This structure required multiple system touchpoints, making the process more complex than a typical home equity product demands.

“One of the key areas we identified for improvement before we separated home equity out was turn time,” Reeves-Drok said. Blended mortgage and home equity workflows contributed to these extended timelines. Ordering flood certifications, title work, and other services required manual data entry in several provider portals, which increased processing time. With turn times commonly falling between 30 and 60 days, the experience did not match member expectations. AmeriCU recognized the importance of a workflow tailored specifically for home equity lending, supported by integrated technology that could reduce manual steps and enhance consistency.

Solution

AmeriCU launched its dedicated home equity department in April 2021 and expanded its use of FirstClose to include home equity loans, in addition to home equity lines of credit. The goal was to create a single, unified ordering path for all settlement services.

“Having everything automatically populate when ordering services and then populate back into MeridianLink was a big benefit,” Reeves-Drok said.

Integrating FirstClose with MeridianLink ensured that borrower and property information transferred automatically between systems. This eliminated the need for repeated data entry and provided staff with a consistent workflow, regardless of loan type.

AmeriCU also added:

- Remote Online Notarization
- Mobile notary services
- Multiple title provider options accessible through FirstClose

These tools were particularly important as AmeriCU expanded lending into new states, including Florida, and as the organization sought to support members whose schedules or locations limited branch access.

With FirstClose embedded into its LOS, AmeriCU moved from fragmented processes to a cohesive and fully aligned home equity workflow.

Results

Turn Times Reduced to Under Two Weeks

After restructuring its process and formalizing FirstClose’s role in the workflow, AmeriCU reduced turn times to less than two weeks, an improvement from the previous 30- to 60-day timelines.

“We’ve been able to be consistent and get our average to under two weeks,” Reeves-Drok said.

The improved predictability has become a core part of the member experience. Rather than managing workflow bottlenecks or delays associated with multiple systems, staff now rely on a standardized process that moves files smoothly from application to clear to close.

The improvement is especially meaningful for borrowers who need timely access to equity, whether for renovations, debt consolidation or large purchases. Faster funding helps members move forward with projects and responsibilities without disruption.

Greater Efficiency

By using FirstClose and MeridianLink together, AmeriCU reduced the amount of manual data entry required throughout the process. Instead of typing borrower names, addresses and loan details into multiple provider portals, staff can initiate services directly within their workflow and rely on the LOS to populate required fields.

This streamlined data movement not only saves time but also improves the accuracy of loan files, reducing the need for corrections and reorders. The consistent workflow also simplifies training for new staff, who no longer need to learn multiple ordering systems or reconcile data across different platforms.



“FirstClose has truly become a trusted partner for us, they help us deliver the kind of experience our members expect, and that is the most important part of what we do.”

Marianne Reeves-Drok

Manager of Home Equity Loan Operations at AmeriCU

Improved Member Experience and Accessibility

AmeriCU's adoption of remote online notarization and mobile notary services has significantly expanded access for members across its broad geographic footprint. Members juggling work schedules, military deployments or relocations can complete closings at their convenience.

"We can serve them where they are, no matter where they are," Reeves-Drok said.

These capabilities are essential as AmeriCU continues to grow and expand its home equity lending offerings into new markets outside New York. Members in Florida or other locations can receive the same level of service as those near an AmeriCU financial center.

Flexible closing options also support military families whose household members may be deployed or living apart. The ability to complete a loan remotely ensures that families have access to funds when they need them most.

Capacity to Support Growth

AmeriCU has experienced steady growth in home equity production since establishing its dedicated department in 2021. Production doubled from 2021 to 2022 and has continued to rise through 2024 and 2025.

"We are gradually growing in our production," Reeves-Drok said. "It is allowing us to grow."

Despite this increased volume, AmeriCU has not needed to add additional home equity staff for the past 2-years. The integrated workflow minimizes manual touchpoints and keeps workloads manageable, even during periods of high demand. Staff can focus on member communication and file review rather than data entry or system navigation. The improved process also contributes to stronger member referrals and word-of-mouth activity, further supporting growth without requiring significant operational expansion.

About FirstClose

Headquartered in Austin, Texas, FirstClose, Inc. is a leading fintech provider of data and workflow solutions for mortgage and home equity lenders nationwide. The company's mission is to increase profitability and reduce costs for mortgage lenders through systems and provider relationships that enable lenders to serve borrowers more effectively, reduce closing costs, and shorten closing times.

For more information, visit [firstclose.com](https://www.firstclose.com).



AmeriCU's transformation of its home equity operations has positioned the credit union to deliver faster, more consistent and more accessible lending experiences for members across its growing footprint. By expanding its use of FirstClose and integrating the platform into MeridianLink, AmeriCU has built a scalable workflow that supports both operational efficiency and meaningful member service.

"FirstClose has truly become a trusted partner for us," said Marianne Reeves-Drok, manager of home equity loan operations at AmeriCU. "They help us deliver the kind of experience our members expect, and that is the most important part of what we do."