CASH IRL

Crypto 101

How it works. Where it helps. What can go wrong.

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A little about me

Zoë Nawar

7+ years across crypto, fintech and technology

Most recently
Web3 Partnerships & Strategy Lead at The Giving Block

My work has included helping nonprofits, donors and partners make sense of crypto and use it in practice.

Today is general education, not a recommendation to buy or individualized financial, tax or legal advice.

What’s the last thing you heard about crypto?

A headline, a question, a success story, a scam...

A few words in the chat are enough.

Please keep personal financial details out of the chat.

What cryptocurrency is

Digital assets whose ownership and transfers are recorded using a blockchain or similar network.

The asset

bitcoin (BTC)

The network

Bitcoin

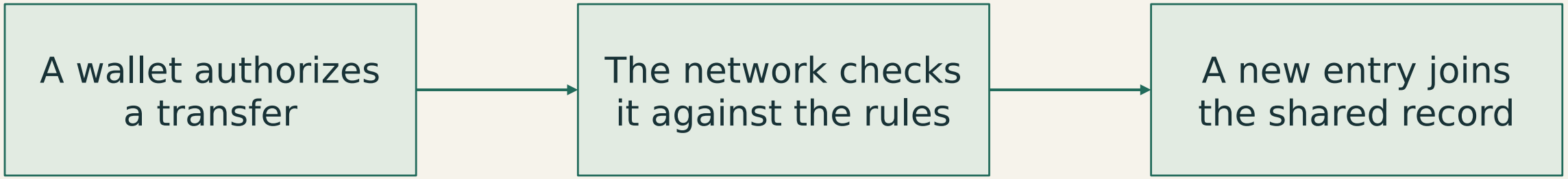
The access tool

A wallet or service

Digital bank balances also exist. The recordkeeping and control arrangements differ.

A blockchain is a shared record

A simplified transfer on a public blockchain



The record can be hard to alter. An outside promise can still be false.

Mechanics: Bitcoin.org and Ethereum.org. Different networks use different rules.

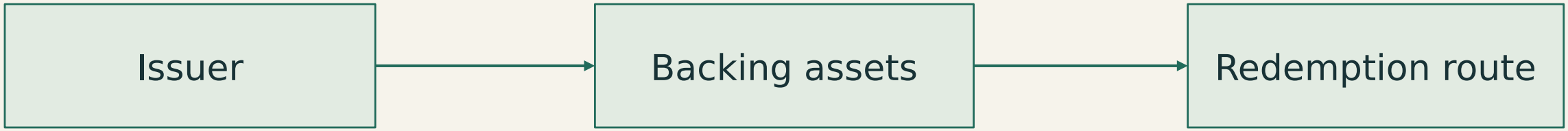
The main categories

Asset / category	What it does	A key distinction
Bitcoin (BTC)	Transfers a scarce digital asset	No company promises to redeem it for dollars
Ether (ETH)	Pays for activity on Ethereum	Ethereum is the network ETH is its native asset
Dollar stablecoins	Aim to track the U.S. dollar	Backing and redemption arrangements differ
Other tokens / NFTs	May represent access, voting or a collectible	Rights and risks depend on the specific asset

Examples explain categories. They are not recommendations.

Stablecoins: a target, with conditions

1 token aims for US$1



Who is responsible?

What supports the value?

Can you turn it into cash?

The peg can break. Access can be restricted. Terms matter.

Diagram describes an issuer-backed model. Other stablecoin designs work differently.

Wallets, addresses and keys

The assets stay on the network.
The wallet helps you control access.

Address

A destination for receiving transfers

Private key

Authorizes activity from an account

Recovery phrase

A powerful backup used by many wallets

Never share private keys or recovery phrases with someone offering help.

Who controls access?

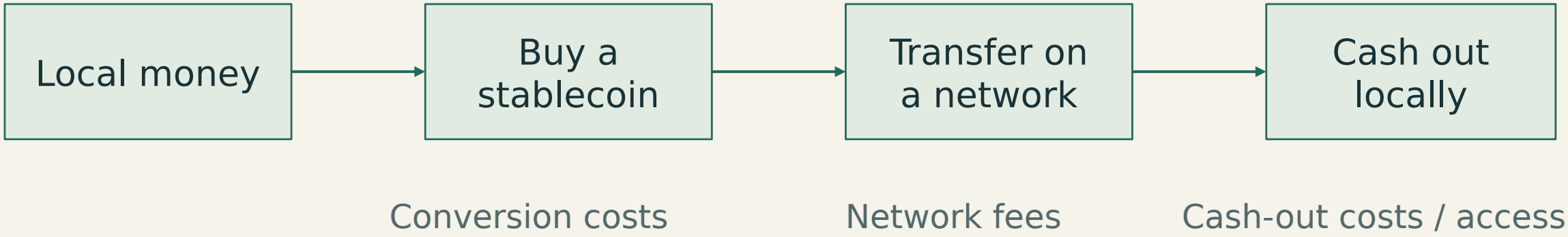
	Exchange account	Self-custody wallet	Spot crypto fund share
Control	Provider manages keys	You manage access	Fund holds assets You hold shares
Use	Buy, sell and possibly withdraw crypto	Send crypto and interact with apps	Price exposure through a brokerage account
Main tradeoff	Depend on the provider and withdrawal terms	Handle security and recovery yourself	Fees and fund risks No spendable crypto

Price risk remains in all three arrangements.

Source: SEC Investor.gov custody and Bitcoin/Ether ETP bulletins. “ETF” is common shorthand.

Sending money across borders

Example: someone wants a family member to receive $200



Compare the amount received, total time and options if something goes wrong.

Illustrative process, not a fee quote. Local rules and provider availability vary.

Uses beyond price speculation

Use	A concrete example	What to check
Payments / donations	A donor sends crypto A service pays the nonprofit dollars	Costs, timing and what the recipient needs
Digital ownership	An NFT identifies a particular token or collectible	Copyright and access are separate questions
Applications	A program swaps tokens or manages collateral	Code, permissions and people with control

A useful application does not establish a good investment.

Examples simplify real mechanisms. No project or token is endorsed.

Apps, smart contracts and staking

Smart contract

A program on a blockchain
that runs specified rules

Example: a token swap
with conditions written in code

Staking

Putting assets at stake
to help validate a network

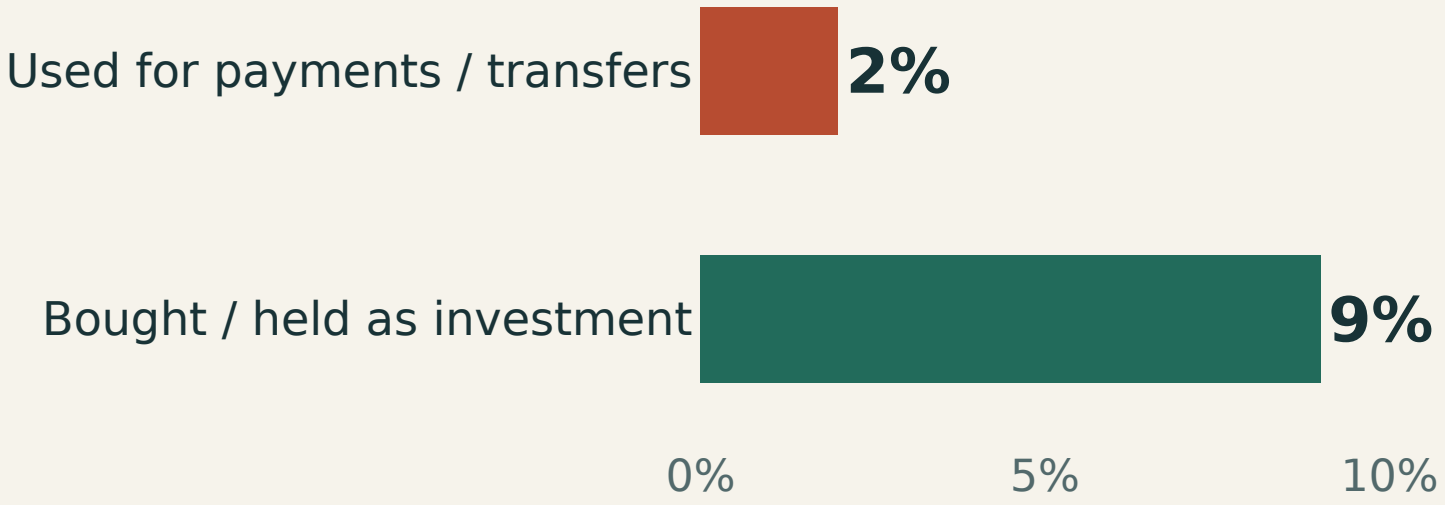
Rewards can come with penalties,
price risk and service risk

For any “yield”: where does the money come from, and what can fail?

Sources: Ethereum.org smart-contract and staking documentation.

Adoption is uneven

U.S. adults reporting crypto use in the prior year, 2025



People could select multiple answers. The bars overlap.

A separate institutional example

Visa expanded its stablecoin settlement program in 2026.

Sources: Federal Reserve, SHED 2025 (May 2026). Visa, April 29, 2026.

Why people buy and hold

Scarcity and control

A belief that an asset’s rules or independence have value

Expected growth in use

A view about a network, product or community

Speculation and social pressure

Hoping to sell at a higher price, or worrying about missing out

Inflation protection, diversification and future returns are uncertain.

These are motivations and theses, not established investment outcomes.

Volatility and market cycles

The supply schedule

New bitcoin issued per block halves every 210,000 blocks, roughly four years.

That does not schedule a price rise or a recovery.

The arithmetic of a loss

$1,000 — 50% loss

$500 — 100% gain needed to return to $1,000

A recovery is never guaranteed.

Hypothetical arithmetic, not a price forecast. Bitcoin.org supply rules, IMF research.

Where losses can happen

Layer	Examples
The asset	Falling price, weak project, few buyers when you need to sell
The service	Exchange failure, frozen withdrawals, dishonest operators
The technology	Lost keys, hacked accounts, faulty contracts or bridges
The transaction	Wrong destination, wrong network, scammer on the other end

Confirmed transfers usually have no built-in chargeback.

Legal and regulatory changes can affect access and obligations too.

Privacy, crime and access

Privacy	Public transactions may be linked to people.
Crime	Traceable transfers can still fund scams and illicit activity.
Access	An open network does not remove every financial barrier.

Sources: FTC, FATF July 2026 update, Federal Reserve and Pew research.

What would make you stop?

FICTIONAL MESSAGE

**“Your money is at risk.
Move it to our secure crypto wallet now.
Don’t discuss this with anyone.”**

How would you verify this without using the message’s link or number?

Habits that prevent expensive mistakes

01 Use a known, independent route to the real company.

02 Keep recovery phrases and private keys private.

03 Use strong account security and current software.

04 Check the address, asset, network and every approval.

05 Slow down when someone pressures you to act.

A hardware wallet reduces some risks. It cannot make a malicious approval safe.

If something goes wrong

Stop sending money

Contact the provider through verified support.
Contact your bank or credit union if it was involved.

Save messages and transaction details.
Report suspected fraud promptly.

ic3.gov

ReportFraud.ftc.gov

Recovery is uncertain. An offer to recover funds can itself be another scam.

Rules and consumer protections

Insurance	Crypto is not covered by FDIC deposit or NCUA share insurance.
New York	Check the exact company and activity in NYDFS records.
Federal taxes	Selling, swapping or spending can create tax obligations.
Stablecoin law	The 2025 GENIUS Act sets a payment-stablecoin framework.

Rules depend on the product. Authorization does not guarantee safety.

Sources: NCUA, FDIC, NYDFS, IRS and OCC. Research checked September 23, 2026.

Does crypto fit your financial life?

What problem would this solve for me?

Could I lose it without jeopardizing essentials?

Do I understand the asset and who controls access?

What are the fees, tax implications and exit options?

Learning without buying is a valid outcome.

Consider cash needs, expensive debt and alternatives before taking speculative risk.

Where to keep learning

Consumer protection	consumer.ftc.gov and Investor.gov
New York checks	dfs.ny.gov: Virtual Currency Businesses
How networks work	bitcoin.org and ethereum.org/learn
Tax questions	irs.gov/filing/digital-assets

Ask who wrote it, how current it is, and what they gain if you buy.

Optional deeper study: MIT OpenCourseWare’s Blockchain and Money (2018).

Questions & discussion

What feels clearer?
What still feels confusing?