

Fannin Central Appraisal District Public Relations Plan

General guidelines to promote public relations

Supersedes PR Plan dated 2014

1/1/18

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Public Relations Plan

Introduction

The purpose of the Public Relations Plan is to promote effective communication between the Fannin Central Appraisal District (District) and the public. The goal of this plan is to establish and maintain good public relations by providing accurate and timely information to our public on key property tax matters.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Fannin Central Appraisal District is twofold. First, to discover, list and appraise property as accurately, ethically and impartially as possible in order to estimate the market value of all property within the boundaries of the district for ad valorem tax purposes; Second, to assist Taxing Units in assessment functions, to collect and disburse property tax revenue in accordance with the collections contracts in order to fund the various services provided by the taxing units. The district must make sure each property owner is given the same consideration, information, and assistance. This will be done by administering the laws under the property tax system and operating under the standards of:

- The Property Tax Assistance Division of the Texas State Comptroller's Office
- The International Association of Assessing Officers
- The Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice
- Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation
- All other applicable Laws and Regulations

General Public Relations Policy

Property owners have a right to know what occurs in their appraisal district and what the impact of our actions are regarding property taxes. To that end, the District is committed to:

- Providing openness and honesty to the general public and taxing units
- Providing information to the public timely
- Promoting an effective working relationship with the news media
- Providing taxpayers and taxing units superior customer service with respect, compassion and dignity
- Explaining the Texas property tax process through educational outreach venues
- Providing a qualified, knowledgeable and productive workforce
- Accuracy and attention to detail in all aspects of the appraisal and collections processes
- Conduct ourselves without the appearance of favoritism, undue influence or impropriety, so as to preserve public confidence and trust;

Our pledge is to serve the public with the highest ethical standards, diligence, accuracy and professionalism.

Public Relations Officer

The Chief Appraiser is the Public Relations Officer and the official spokesperson for the District. The Chief Appraiser will coordinate interviews, provide written responses to newspapers, reports, magazines and/or other related public relations venues. The Chief Appraiser will also approve or disapprove the content to be posted on the website, coordinate special events such as speaking engagements, public appearances, annual reports, and release of information to the media.

Public Relations Guidelines

All communications with the public should be positive, courteous and educational.

Listening: This is perhaps the most important aspect of each encounter with the public. Any individual who visits, phones or corresponds with the Appraisal District should be given our undivided attention. Staff members should clarify the concern with the individual to ensure we fully understand the concern being raised.

Issues Management and Action Planning: At times, a simple explanation of a process is sufficient. Other times, detailed research must be conducted to address a specific issue. In all cases, the public is entitled to be informed of their rights and remedies. The district staff is expected to remain in a constant state of overall improvement and strive for excellence in service. Each staff member should formulate a basic plan to approach and resolve possible difficult scenarios that might arise in our day to day operations and interactions with the public we serve. This preparation can make a difference by defusing a potentially adverse reaction.

Crisis Plan: Should interactions with the public become contentious and potentially hostile, staff members are trained to remain calm and attempt to diffuse the situation. If the encounter becomes dangerous, staff members may summon law enforcement personnel via 911 or other methods available. Any and all instances of this nature will be well documented and management informed immediately.

Another aspect of crisis planning involves our interactions with other agencies. Should a crisis arise from a disaster, the Public Relations Officer will work directly with the agency(s) involved. There is no all-inclusive list of potential crises. Flexibility and adaptability are key requirements. The public will look to the governing bodies for answers in addressing crisis situations. The District will work with the affected governing bodies to ensure they and the public are well informed.

Criticism: Criticism may come when interacting with the public. It may be the very thing that initiates our interaction or may come at the end of a process. Criticism with basis can serve to identify a shortfall and result in enhancements to the affected process. Criticism without basis may stem from misinformation or a lack of understanding. Regardless of its form, criticism will come and must be dealt with by following the guidelines already mentioned.

Communication

Communication is a critical part of our business. Keeping our public informed is paramount to providing good service.

Key opportunities: Opportunities to inform the public of their rights, responsibilities, available exemptions, possible special appraisals, tax rates and collection practices, public services funded by property taxes, appraisal practices and available remedies present themselves on a daily basis. Taxpayer foot traffic to the District, appraisers working in the field and other venues create opportunities to educate or inform. Examples of effective communication would be making sure the public is informed of calendar deadlines, the annual cycle of the events in the life of the Appraisal District and the impact those events have on the public. Other areas of assistance would be informing the public of rules for disclosure and confidentiality of information. The District maintains a robust website which serves as a fantastic resource to the public. There is a dedicated public terminal in our customer service/exemptions department where the visiting public can access information as well. Outreach efforts include speaking engagements at local Lions Club, Kiwanis, Rotary and Master Naturalists. The district also hosts periodic meetings with taxing entities, real-estate professionals and title companies and conducts "town hall" type briefings to the general public at various locations. Lastly, articles and required notices are published in the newspaper of record for the county as well as other available media (if deemed necessary) in an effort to keep the public informed of important property tax matters.

Public Review and Evaluation

The effectiveness of our public relations encounters is measured via the comment cards. These cards are prominently displayed at each station and provide the public an opportunity to express their comments regarding the service they received from the staff. This very useful tool helps identify our strengths and weaknesses in four areas of primary concern (Respectfulness, Informing, Honesty and Professionalism). This feedback identifies areas of needed improvement and opportunities to recognize exemplary service provided by our employees. Feedback is also solicited from attendees of our public speaking engagements and entity meetings. Our standard is excellence and anything short of that is taken seriously.

Procedural Manuals

Each department develops procedures for their specific processes. Those procedures are available for public inspection upon request. The District's Reappraisal Plan and supporting reports are posted on the web-site and can also be inspected upon request.

The Property Tax Calendar (deadlines important to taxpayers)

This valuable resource is found on the District website www.fannincad.org. The calendar outlines all significant dates regarding property tax matters as outlined by the Texas State Comptroller Office www.window.state.tx.us.

Public Records

Most records, with limited exceptions, held at the District are available to the public. Requests to view, inspect or obtain these records are handled according to the Public Information Act. Requests for public information must be made in writing and submitted to the Public Information Officer.

Record Retention

The Fannin Central Appraisal District follows the guidelines and practices of the Texas State Library (www.tsl.state.tx.us) for document retention policies. The District has implemented records retention practices based on those guidelines. The Texas State Library guidelines and records may be inspected after submission of a written public information request.

Written Correspondence Guidelines

1. Answer letters and emails promptly and acknowledge those that cannot be responded to immediately;
2. State information clearly using layman's terms;
3. Respond to all relevant questions;
4. Convey professionalism;
5. Add a personal touch when appropriate;
6. Make sure your correspondence is positive in nature. Even written communications can convey a negative tone. It is a good policy to have another colleague to review your work;
7. Always retain a copy of all correspondence for future reference;
8. When appropriate, use proper Tax Code references to help validate what you are trying to convey. Often times this is very helpful for the taxpayer to understand the laws and directives for their particular inquiry.

Media Sources

Fannin County Leader

2501 N. Center St.

Bonham, TX 75418

(903)583-3280

(903)583-3945 fax

KXII

P.O. Box 1175

Sherman, TX 75091

(903)892-6397

(903)892-4623 fax

KFYN Radio

506 N. Main

Bonham, TX
75418

(903)583-3151

Guidelines for Press Releases

A news release is a communication tool used to promote activities, communicate policies, inform the public of deadlines and other tax related information, etc.

Recommendations for a press release are as follows:

- Article needs to be timely, informative or significant to the public;
- Contact information should be available;
- It should be short and concise;
- The release should always be proof read for accuracy;
- The most important facts should be provided first, followed by the details;
- All staff should be given a copy of press releases and kept informed of the nature of the communication for fielding questions and calls;
- Those identified in the article should be told before the release of information to keep good lines of communication open.

Educating the public

Public services are funded by the tax dollars collected and disbursed by the District. We can help taxpayers understand how the appraisal and assessment processes work to establish a tax base and ensure the tax burden is equitably distributed according to the assessed value of the properties in the county. Helping the taxpayers understand how the tax rates apply to the value of their property is important. It benefits the taxpayer and the District to have educated participants that understand their part in the fundamentals of property taxation.

Internet

The internet is a very useful tool to communicate to the general public. Most everyone knows how to navigate the internet and this media allows the public to access public information anytime on any property in Fannin County. The information on this website equips the public with the standard processes of the property tax system. The District will continue to enhance the website as new processes and information evolve.

Summary

The goal of the Fannin Central Appraisal District as it relates to public relations is to be very transparent in all that we do. The website provides invaluable aid in accomplishing this goal. Keeping the public informed is paramount to the success of the District. Effective communication results in enhanced credibility of the District and reduces the level of uncertainty and misinformation regarding District operations. Many resources and opportunities are available to foster good public relations and should be utilized to the maximum extent possible as allowed in the budget. The Public Relations Plan timeline outlines the various events and estimated timeframes for conducting those events. The timeline is listed on the following page.

Key Public Relations Events Timeline	
Month	Event
January - December	The Chief Appraiser shall attend legislative committee hearings, commissioners court, city council, school board and other governmental body meetings, and meetings of professional groups, economic development groups or other organized gatherings as invited to provide information and or testimony on matters related to property tax policy and property tax administration
January	Publish Required Mailings Public Notice Business Personal Property Rendition requirements Homestead Application requirements Agricultural/Wildlife Special Appraisal requirements Notification of availability of applications Deadlines for filing Electronic Communications Availability Notice Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
February	Delinquent Taxpayer Notification to Taxing Units (via e-mail) Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
March	Send Notice of Delinquency to Delinquent Tax Payers Speak at Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions Club or Master Naturalists meeting as invited Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
April	Deliver Preliminary Values to Taxing Units Attend "Town Hall" Meetings regarding Reappraisal Areas as invited Speak at Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions Club or Master Naturalists meeting as invited Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Conduct Customer Service Training staff members Prepare press releases for notices of appraised value and protest process Publish notice in paper about requirements and availability of applications for deferrals, homestead exemptions, renditions and agricultural appraisals Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited

Key Public Relations Events Timeline	
Month	Event
May	Attend "Town Hall" Meetings in 2018 as invited Speak at Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions Club or Master Naturalists meeting as invited Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
June	Brief Taxing Units Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
July	Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
August	Publish Truth in Taxation required notices Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
September	Publish Truth in Taxation required notices Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
October	Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
November	Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited
December	Board of Director Meeting Generally 3 rd Tuesday @ 12:00 See Posted Agenda Coffee Club—Chief Appraiser meets at Brookshires Grocery Store Bonham Area Chamber Breakfast generally 1 st Friday each month Submit other articles and attend other venues as needed or invited