

# Public Relations Plan

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09/17/2025



ZAPATA COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT

**Table of Contents**

Introduction..... 2  
    Zapata County Appraisal District Mission Statement ..... 3  
    Purpose..... 3  
    Goals ..... 3  
    Definition of Customer ..... 3  
Public Inquiries ..... 4  
    Periodic Policy Evaluation..... 4  
    Timely Response..... 4  
Media Communications and Crisis Response..... 4  
    Newspaper..... 4  
    Television..... 5  
Courtesy Information ..... 5  
    Mail Outs ..... 5  
    Courthouse Postings..... 5  
    Available Flyers ..... 5  
Public Appearances..... 5  
Taxing Entity Communications ..... 6  
Public Feedback Mechanisms..... 6  
Public Relations Timeline..... 6

# ZAPATA COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT

## **Introduction**

This plan is based on the IAAO Standard on Public Relations and is to be used in conjunction with that standard to fit the needs of the Zapata County Appraisal District.

## **Zapata County Appraisal District Mission Statement**

The mission of the Zapata County Appraisal District is to appraise all real and business personal property within Zapata County. The district appraises property in accordance with the Texas Property Tax Code and the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP). Zapata County Appraisal District is responsible for the fair market appraisal of properties within the following taxing entities: Zapata County, Zapata County Independent School District, Siesta Shores Water District, and Zapata County Water.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this plan is to provide a written document to support the public relations program of the Zapata County Appraisal District. Zapata County Appraisal District serves Zapata County, Texas, and aims to provide the public with an open line of communication to increase public knowledge and transparency within CAD.

## **Goals**

One of the goals of this document is to provide the CAD with policies to follow when dealing with the public, and a mechanism to ensure that the CAD's Public Relations program is being implemented as intended.

Another goal of the document, as well as the CAD's Public Relations program, is to increase transparency and the availability of information, thereby increasing taxpayer confidence in the CAD. It is the CAD's goal that all communications with the public are informative, clear, accurate, and consistent.

## **Definition of Customer**

The Zapata County Appraisal District has multiple customer groups with different needs. Many people find, at one time or another, that they need to contact the Zapata County Appraisal District for a variety of reasons, and the CAD's PR plan is designed to accommodate the needs of all of them. Below are some examples of CAD customers.

- Property Owners/Taxpayers
- Population of Zapata County
- Taxing Entities
- Other Appraisal Districts
- The Property Tax Assistance Division and the State of Texas
- Property Tax Consultants

## ZAPATA COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT

- Real Estate and Oil and Gas Lawyers, Land Men

### **Public Inquiries**

CAD Staff are to be courteous to taxpayers and all members of the public at all times, and answer inquiries with the utmost respect and accuracy.

### **Periodic Policy Evaluation**

Periodically, the Chief Appraiser and other staff will review the current public relations and customer service policies and actions to assess their sufficiency. This may occur bi-annually, annually, immediately following any incident that might induce public fallout, and when any key staff member leaves the CAD.

The review should include a time for CAD staff to provide feedback and voice their concerns and suggestions. After the review is complete, the designated person will compile the suggestions into new policies to be implemented by all CAD staff.

### **Timely Response**

It is the policy of Zapata County Appraisal District to respond as quickly as possible to public inquiries. Telephone calls and e-mails should be returned as promptly as feasible for each staff member. It is imperative that each staff member read e-mails, listen to phone messages, and respond professionally and promptly. It is unacceptable for telephone calls and e-mails to go unanswered for more than 2 business days. We all get busy, but as public servants, it is our duty to be responsive to public inquiries. Not only is it a good policy, but it will help the CAD to increase goodwill and confidence in the Property Tax System and local government.

### **Media Communications and Crisis Response**

The Zapata County Appraisal District will respond to all media inquiries, even if “no comment” is the only response. It is the policy of the CAD not to comment on sensational stories lacking concrete factual information that is relevant to the CAD and to taxpayers. The CAD will have several prepared statements to address the following crisis events to prevent CAD unpreparedness and the absence of someone to make a statement:

- a. Common natural disasters that may affect the area (e.g., wildfire, hurricane, drought)
- b. Sudden, unexpected departure of the Chief Appraiser or Board Member; expected departure of the Chief Appraiser. Tax rate increase
- c. Rendition request/filing deadline
- d. Tax Bills due

### **Newspaper**

Newspaper submissions will be sent in at various times of year by the CAD to inform taxpayers of impending filing deadlines and other information. The CAD will submit a notice

## ZAPATA COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT

that rendition filings are due between January 1 and February 28. Examples of past filings will be on file.

### **Television**

If television appearance requests are made, it is up to CAD's discretion whether to accept them, depending on the nature of the news item. As previously stated, it is the policy of the CAD to refrain from comment on stories of a sensational or negative nature. The CAD may find it in the best interests of CAD public relations to speak to television media if the story will be informative and educational. All statements will be fact-based, and opinions and speculation are to be excluded from media communications.

### **Courtesy Information**

#### **Mail Outs**

The CAD may mail out public information documents at certain times of year to remind taxpayers of their duties, rights, and remedies. These mail-outs will be proofread to ensure error-free, accurate communication.

#### **Courthouse Postings**

Zapata County Appraisal District will post announcements for CAD Board of Directors meetings 72 hours before each meeting. The agenda will also be posted. Procedure for posting agendas can be found in the Board of Directors Manual, Page 10, Section 1.3.5.

#### **Available Flyers**

The CAD will make available in its office and the county tax office [IF APPLICABLE] various flyers for taxpayers to take and to bring to public events. These flyers will contain relevant information for taxpayers about the CAD, the Board of Directors, and the appraisal process.

### **Public Appearances**

The Chief Appraiser will make public appearances at county functions such as county commissioner meetings and school board meetings. The Chief Appraiser may also make appearances at meetings of local organizations in Zapata County, such as the Zapata County Commissioners Court, to discuss taxpayer and county finance issues. Public appearances are a way for taxpayers, taxing entities, and the county population to get to know the Chief Appraiser and become familiar and comfortable with the property taxation process. At each public appearance where the Chief Appraiser delivers a speech, it would be ideal to have a question-and-answer session following the speech to give the public a chance to respond.

## **Taxing Entity Communications**

In addition to attending taxing entity meetings, it is recommended that the Chief Appraiser check in with the CAD contact at Taxing Entities to ensure open communication and accessibility. A phone call, e-mail, or brief meeting would suffice.

## **Public Feedback Mechanisms**

In addition to routine inquiries and opportunities for taxpayers to contact the CAD, the CAD will provide confidential comment cards that taxpayers may complete to provide feedback. The categories for these mechanisms will include the timeliness of CAD responses to inquiries and satisfaction with issue resolution.

## **Public Relations Timeline**

- **December through January-** The chief appraiser shall attend commissioner's court, other governmental bodies, and special district meetings. Review and development of public information on brochures and other materials related to property exemptions, renditions, and special appraisal. Documents will be updated if changes are made to the legal opinion on legislative meaning and/or to new legislation. Publish notice in local newspaper about requirements and availability of applications, renditions and agricultural appraisals.
- **February through March** – The chief appraiser shall attend the Zapata County School District Board of Directors meeting as well as commissioners court.
- **March through April** – Review and development of public information materials related to appraisal procedures, notices and protest, and evidence production. Documents will be updated if changes are made to the legal opinion on legislative meaning and/or to new legislation.
- **April through May** – Publish notice in local newspaper about requirements and availability of applications for deferral, homestead exemptions, renditions and agricultural appraisals. Submit to all taxing entities preliminary estimated values. Prepare press release for notices of appraised values and protest process. Publish notice in local newspaper about taxpayer protest and procedures.
- **June through July** – The chief shall provide updates and final certification on values for the upcoming tax year.
- **July through August** – Strategic planning sessions, evaluations, review, planning and implementation of customer service and communication recommendations.
- **September through October** – Provide public notice of hearings for reappraisal plan and annual budget.

## ZAPATA COUNTY APPRAISAL DISTRICT

- **November through December** – Review, update, and develop public information materials explaining appraisal district policy and procedures, tax information, district statistics, and property information.