



## **PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAN**

### **GOAL:**

The Hays Central Appraisal district (HCAD) seeks to inform its constituents by engaging in a pro-active communications program. These include property owners, civic and professional organizations, lending institutions, developers, attorneys, real estate appraisers and brokers, governmental agencies and policy makers, tax representatives and the media. This program recognizes that one of the most effective and quickest ways to communicate appraisal district policies and activities to citizens is by working in partnership with the news media.

### **POLICY:**

The appraisal district recognizes that residents, businesses, taxing units and other customers have a right to know what is occurring in their appraisal district; that District management and employees have an obligation to see that taxpayers are kept systematically and adequately informed; and that HCAD ultimately benefits from ensuring that taxpayers get all information, good or bad, directly from the district itself. To this end, the appraisal district affirms the following:

Hays CAD shall maintain an effective two-way communication system between the appraisal district and its various constituencies which ensures:

- Dissemination of accurate, timely information about HCAD policies, procedures, and services
- Explanation of decisions and actions taken by HCAD
- Minimization of rumors and misinformation
- An effective working relationship with the news media

### **COMMUNICATION TOOLS:**

#### Customer Service:

The district will maintain a customer service division with specifically trained staff to answer general inquiries and assist taxpayers who visit the appraisal district office. The customer service division will also assist taxpayers via phone and email. At the appraisal district office the customer service division will provide public access terminals that will allow taxpayers to inspect district records.

#### Public Interest Materials:

The district shall create letters, brochures, flyers, handouts and other materials to provide general information to the public describing the function of the district, district policy and procedures and other matters of interest to the public.

### Press Releases:

Most proactive media contact is initiated through the Chief Appraiser. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories and personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage. Departments seeking publicity for events or activities should submit a request to the Chief Appraiser as soon as possible to ensure the best media coverage of their activities. Departments should not initiate news media contacts before notifying the Chief Appraiser. The district will regularly review the Appraisal District Public Information Packet published by the Comptrollers Property Tax Assistance Division and implement the recommendations as necessary.

### Speaking Engagements and Public Outreach Meetings:

The district will work in conjunction with government agencies to provide information to constituents on matters related to property appraisal. This may include attending hearings, meetings or other events scheduled by the governmental body. The district will also participate in meetings with neighborhood associations, professional and other organizations.

### Internet:

HCAD recognizes the internet as an effective way of informing the residents, businesses, taxing units and other customers of the appraisal district. A well designed website can help the appraisal district create a favorable image, overcome misconceptions and prejudices, foster goodwill with the taxpayers, promote appraisal district products and services, proactively detect and deal with issues, educate the public on appraisal policies and procedures, and provide transparency in an efficient and cost effective manner. To leverage this valuable resource, relevant appraisal and property tax information shall be available on the districts website ([www.hayscad.com](http://www.hayscad.com)) in a content driven manner so that information can be quickly accessed, retrieved, and reviewed.

### Media Inquiries:

Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by HCAD and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate. Because the media often works on tight deadlines, it is important that all departments respond as soon as possible when the Chief Appraiser requests department information or a spokesperson for the media. Specific guidelines for responding to media requests follow.

### Review Process:

The Chief Appraiser shall establish a communications review process to review and evaluate organization wide communication efforts and implement improvements where indicated. This review process can include departmental performance statistics, customer service surveys, peer review and direct observations.

## **SPECIFIC PLAN ACTIONS:**

In general the district will follow the timeline below; however, the district must remain flexible and react to changes and constituent needs as they arise; therefore, the timeline can and should be altered to respond to individual and special circumstances, and additional customer service and public relation needs as they are identified.

January – December

- The chief appraiser may attend legislative committee hearings, commissioner's court, city council, school board, and other governmental body meetings, and meetings of professional groups, neighborhood associations and other constituent groups, as invited, to provide information and testimony on matters related to property appraisal.

January - February

- Review and development of public information brochures and other materials related to property exemptions, renditions and special appraisals.
- Publish notice in local newspapers about the availability of Electronic Communications.
- Publish notice in local newspapers about requirements and availability of applications for deferrals, homestead exemptions, renditions and agricultural appraisals.

February – March

- The district shall conduct Open Meeting and Public Information training for district staff. Training may include training videos and other materials developed by Attorney General’s Office as well as internally developed materials.
- The district shall conduct Customer Service training for district staff. Training may include external training courses and internally developed training material.

March – April

- Review and development of public information materials related to appraisal procedures, notices and protests.

April

- Prepare press release for notices of appraised values and protest process.

May

- Publish notice in local newspapers about taxpayer protests and appeal procedures.

June – July

- The chief appraiser shall provide updates to staff, Appraisal Review Board chairperson, and chief financial officers of taxing units on the district’s certification efforts.

August - September

- Provide public notice of hearings for reappraisal plan and annual budget.

October – December

- Review, update and development of website content, specifically sections explaining appraisal district policy and procedures, to include but not limited to frequently asked questions, appraisal information, forms, and property information.

## **PERSONNEL POLICIES RELATED TO PUBLIC RELATIONS:**

### Organizational Environment:

Hays CAD shall develop and maintain an organizational environment where all appraisal district staff members are aware that they share the responsibility for communication of appraisal district policies, programs and activities to residents, businesses, taxing unit officials and other members of the community. Responsibility for cultivating this environment and conveying these responsibilities shall rest with the Chief Appraiser, Deputy Chief Appraiser and appraisal district management team.

### Appraisal District Spokespersons:

The Chief Appraiser is the appraisal district’s media relations officer and principal spokesperson. When and as delegated by the Chief Appraiser, authorized spokespersons are:

- Deputy Chief Appraiser
- Hays CAD Attorney

### Media Inquiries:

The Chief Appraiser is responsible for the appraisal districts media relations and any media inquiries received by other appraisal district staff should be referred immediately to the Chief Appraiser. An appropriate response to the media would be, "I'm sorry I don't have the full information regarding that issue. I will give your request to the Chief Appraiser (or other authorized spokesperson) who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available." Please obtain the reporter's name, phone number (cell too if "in the field"), topic of story and deadline.

### Sensitive or Controversial Issues:

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the Chief Appraiser and the employee's Department Supervisor.

### Litigation and Personnel Issues:

Generally, the business conducted by the Appraisal district is public, and therefore, is public information. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation and certain personnel-related information are exceptions.

Inquiries regarding pending litigation or exposure to litigation should be referred to the appraisal district's Senior Litigation Attorney and the Chief Appraiser. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be referred to the Human Resources Department and the Chief Appraiser.

### Personal Points of View:

It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal points of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with the appraisal district's official policy. Therefore, appraisal district employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official appraisal district stationary. If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as an appraisal district employee in any personal letter or email to the editor, he or she must include language which states the views set forth in the letter do not represent the views of the appraisal district, but rather, are the employee's personally held opinions. Similar disclaimers must be given if an employee addresses a public meeting, participates in a radio talk show, or is interviewed for a radio or television program unless the employee is officially representing the appraisal district. Employees who are representing the appraisal district in any of the above formats must identify themselves as an official spokesperson for the appraisal district.

### General or Routine Issues:

#### Broadcast media:

Calls from broadcast media (TV and radio) should always be referred immediately to the Chief Appraiser.

#### Local print media:

Calls from local print media regarding most departmental issues and programs may be handled by each department's Supervisor. The Chief Appraiser should be informed of these media requests---including the reporter and topic---either before or immediately following these interviews.