

## Edwards Central Appraisal District

### Public Relations Plan

#### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Edwards Central Appraisal District is to courteously and efficiently serve the citizens, property owners and taxing units of Edwards County by timely producing an accurate, complete and equitable Appraisal Roll & Tax Roll.

We expect excellence in the services we provide and recognize that excellence can be achieved through individual and team effort on the part of well-trained and motivated personnel. We are also committed to creating and maintaining a work environment that provides and supports innovation and change as essential to effective performance in a constantly changing society.

We are also committed to earning and keeping the public's trust and confidence in the work we perform, striving to provide quality services and demonstrating a professional attitude.

#### **IAAO Standard**

IAAO's Standard on Public Relations is the basis for the Appraisal District's Public Relation Plan.

"The International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) is the internationally recognized leader and preeminent source for innovation, education, and research in property appraisal, assessment administration, and property tax policy." <http://www.iaao.org>

All policies and plan development were patterned after the IAAO Standard on Public Relations as published.

#### **Public Relations Officer**

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#### **Public Relations Plan**

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In order to provide quality public relations, it is important to understand the public's current image of the ECAD office. We will accomplish this by listening to what the public is saying and observing its actions and reactions. Listening involves observing the economic, social, and political environments, identifying possible problems or opportunities, interpreting public opinion, and evaluating the program. All issues that affect assessment functions must be clearly defined and given full attention.

ECAD does extensive research, testing, and implementing of a public feedback mechanism. Feedback is obtained from holding entity meetings or advisory committees, budget visits with the taxing entities, online surveys, and presentations at seminars and conferences.

ECAD will conduct at least one entity meeting each year with the eighteen taxing entities. At these public meetings ECAD will discuss its plans of operation for the coming year as well as reporting on the past years' activities. New technologies and programs will be introduced and discussed with the entities to ensure they are aware of how to utilize the programs. Also discussed will be any concerns or issues from the entities and how ECAD could address those through its operations. ECAD will also conduct entity visits to discuss its proposed budget each year. Any entity wishing to meet with ECAD management staff will be visited. In these meetings with the entity's management personnel, City Managers, Finance Officers, Tax Assessor/Collectors, Superintendents, Business Officers, County Administrators, or any other personnel from the entity that they deem to be in attendance, ECAD will present how the proposed budget was developed, funds and resources requested, and the budget allocation for each taxing entity. Elected officials from the governing body can also be in attendance and are encouraged to attend. Also discussed will be any other issues the entity wishes to be addressed. ECAD will conduct annually at least one Public Hearing on the Proposed Budget and once every two years on the Reappraisal Plan.

The Chief Appraiser will avail themselves to speaking at public entity city council meetings, school board meetings, county commissioner meetings, city special committee meetings, service club meetings, education institutions, and other special meeting groups.

ECAD shall address all media inquiries to the Chief Appraiser by providing requests for open records under the Public Information Act, information meetings for news stories both print and radio, and personal interviews by the media personnel.

ECAD has made itself open to all inquiries and complaints in a professional manner and will act quickly to address those issues. When faced with criticism, the following actions will be followed:

- Respond quickly, honestly, and openly
- Identify key constituencies and pay special attention to their views
- Involve all staff from top management down
- Prepare and preserve complete written documentation of the criticism and the solutions proposed or adopted.

Direct communication with the taxing entities and the general public will always be used to explain the role of ECAD's operations and the services and activities it provides. Possible communication topics are special tax exemption programs, the reappraisal process, the annual budget, the protest appeals process, the online programs for public use, the relationship between the tax rate and the reassessment process, and the business personal property rendition process. ECAD will make use of available media to communicate with constituents through:

- Newspapers.
- Brochures designed to provide general information or to address specific issues.
- Posting
- ECAD website will provide convenient access to information and records.

The public relations program will be reviewed and evaluated each year to determine its results and effectiveness. Adjustments will be made as necessary; segments that have outlived their usefulness or are ineffective will be discontinued.

ECAD will review emerging issues, such as the mailing of notices of appraised value and the protest appeals process, and anticipate and prepare appropriate responses in advance to minimize adverse public reaction. For example, the impact of a future reappraisal program can be predicted by statistical analysis, and appropriate data can be developed to address any public reaction. With proper planning, many problems can be avoided. For this plan to be effective, an action timetable has been developed that defines tasks and establishes priorities for resolving the issues. ECAD has established a Master Calendar of all Events related to the operation and activities of the Appraisal District. This is a master timetable of what is expected. The Chief Appraiser's approval of a course of action is critical to the staff's acceptance and effective implementation of any plan. Any communication with the public, whether written, oral, or graphic (e.g., video or images) will be made simple, direct, and in plain language avoiding professional jargon and acronyms.

ECAD has a written Disaster Plan for handling crises and coordinating with other governmental agencies in case there is some unforeseen disaster that affects the ECAD office facility. The plan defines roles within ECAD and all personnel should know their roles. The Chief Appraiser will coordinate interaction with the public via our website ([www.edwardscad.org](http://www.edwardscad.org)), the news media in a crisis and be certain that all information released is accurate and precise.

### **Public Relations Procedures**

Employee demeanor in serving the public is important to maintaining good public relations for the District. Every public contact will be viewed as an opportunity to improve the organization's image. All procedural manuals will include a section detailing with how staff communicates with the public is critical for the District's public relations program. Procedures focus on effective communication of content. Information on the following subjects is included in the public relations manual:

- Professional standards adopted
- Important dates and deadlines
- Rules for disclosure of different types of information and confidentiality of data
- Any established records retention policy
- Identification of who is authorized (and who is not) to communicate as an official spokesperson
- Code of conduct for online behavior
- Protocols and authorization for posting information to online media such as Websites, social media sites, social media sites, and community forums

- Policy regarding appropriate online use of the assessing jurisdiction's name and identity
- Suggestions for responding to irate taxpayers
- Guidelines for assessment hearings and appeals
- Staff appearance and attire
- Identification badges, nameplates, and vehicle identification
- Telephone and e-mail etiquette
- Guidelines for the style and structure of letters and e-mail
- Methods for recording actions.

### **Public Records Public**

Access to assessment records is crucial to good public relations. Measures are taken to ensure a climate of openness and transparency. ECAD has adopted a Records Management Plan which addresses how all records are to be maintained and the record retention period on each of the public records. ECAD has an active Public Records Policy which outlines how Open Records requests are handled under the Public Information Act. The policy highlights the statutes and policies under the Public Information Act and the Texas Property Tax Code as it relates to open records requests, public disclosure, and confidentiality, including an awareness of compliance timelines. The Public Records Policy sets a standard operating procedure for information requests and how they are handled. The Chief Appraiser for ECAD has been assigned the role of custodian of records to ensure a timely response to open records requests by ECAD Board of Director Policy. A program for providing information via paper reports or electronic media has been developed and available file formats for data files are provided to the general public. All open records requests will be handled and address in accordance with the requirements of the law.

### **Printed Information**

Printed informational brochures have been prepared by ECAD to address many aspects of the operations of the Appraisal District. Brochures or flyers include topics concerning exemptions, the appeals process, the appraisal process, appointment of agent and other tax consultant forms, etc. Other printed documents include the Annual Budget, Management Plan, Annual Report, and the Reappraisal Plan.

### **Correspondence**

Written and electronic correspondence will follow specific guidelines:

- Answer letters and e-mail promptly and acknowledge those that cannot be responded to
- State information clearly using common words and phrases
- Respond to all relevant questions
- Convey a professional image and correspond positively

- Retain a copy of all correspondence for future reference.

### **Appraisal Notices**

Appraisal notices should contain:

- Name and address of the taxing jurisdiction
- Purpose of the notice • Tax year
- Owner's or taxpayer's name
- Mailing address • Account identification number
- Legal description • Effective date of the assessment
- Property address
- Exemptions
- Total appraised value
- Taxable value if different from appraised value
- Prior assessment • New assessment
- Net change in assessment
- Appeal rights, hearing procedures (informal and formal), and dates
- Date of notice

References to truth in taxation or other statutes will be included.

### **Forms and Questionnaires ECAD**

Maintains a file of forms which are used in the daily operations of the District. These forms include but not limited to:

- Appeal/ARB forms
- Exemption applications
- Business Personal Property forms
- Residential forms
- Commercial forms
- Sales questionnaires
- Taxpayer Assistance forms
- Online agreements for electronic delivery of notices

All forms can be obtained at the ECAD office or website ([www.edwardscad.org](http://www.edwardscad.org))

### **Local Annual Reports**

ECAD produces an annual report of its activities over the past year. Those activities include but not limited to:

- Entities served
- Total number of parcels and total value
- Uses and types of property
- Exemption data
- Appeal data and taxpayer assistance data
- State Comptroller property value study results and MAPS review results
- Financial data
- Taxpayer Assistance data.

### **Public Service Announcements**

Public service announcements will be posted on the Edwards County Courthouse and Annex buildings along with posted on the ECAD website ([www.edwardscad.org](http://www.edwardscad.org)).

### **Contacts with other Public Officials**

ECAD will professionally coordinate with other agencies and officials at all levels of government. An effective working relationship with these officials is crucial. ECAD will maintain good relations with other public officials, legislators, and other affected policymakers. ECAD maintains an extensive data base of all local public officials including Mayors, City Managers and key City staff members, School District Board Presidents and School Trustees, Superintendents and key School personnel, County Judge and County Commissioners, key County personnel, and Tax Assessor Collectors and other locally elected officials. ACAD sends out a copy of its BOD Agendas and minutes from the previous BOD meeting to all of these officials to keep them informed of the operations and activities of ACAD. BOD Agendas are also posted on ACAD website.

### **Appeals Process**

Taxpayers will be made aware of the rules and procedures for appealing their property values to the Appraisal Review Board (ARB) of Edwards County. The ARB has a set of Procedures that will be mailed to property owners who protest their property value, posted inside every ARB hearing room, and is listed online on the ECAD website under "Protest Process." ECAD will also mail to all property owners who receive a Notice of Appraised Value an information sheet on the Appeals Process and what is needed for a Formal and Informal Hearing either with the Appraisal Review Board of Edwards County or an

appraiser with ECAD. The Property Taxpayer Remedies produced by the State Comptroller, Property Tax Assistance Division, will also be mailed. The Presentation of Appeals Procedures are attached and made a part of this plan.

### **Public Education**

The public needs to know the purpose of the appraisal district and its operations. Taxpayers need to know how property is appraised for value purposes and what type of exemptions they may qualify for under the Property Tax Code. ECAD will take the appropriate steps through information brochures and website Frequently Asked Questions to inform and educate the taxpayer about the appraisal process, the information available for review, exemptions, procedures for filing an appeal, and filing deadlines through its constant outreach programs and through ECAD's website where these processes are explained through print and video. (To be developed) Information videos on ECAD Functions, Protest Process, How to Appraise Property, and a Tutorial on the Use of ECAD Online Programs are made available on ECAD website for the general public.

### **Internet**

ECAD will continue to expand its website data to allow all property owners the accessibility to property data, processes and programs, and information through its Frequently Asked Questions and online videos (to be developed). Additional data beyond the requirements by law is on the ECAD website to allow the property owner public data without having to request that data. ECAD has made available information videos for the general public's use as well on many different topics to help inform and educate the public.

### **Local Jurisdiction Website Content**

Local jurisdiction Websites include information found in the annual report and a host of additional data such as:

- Office hours, locations, and contact information
- Property information, including ownership, property characteristics, sales history, and valuation
- News releases in Recent Headlines
- Mission statement or strategic plan
- Job openings
- An explanation of the appeals process
- An explanation of the appraisal process
- Exemptions
- Appraisal cycle and calendar timetable
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (under development)
- Maps

- A parcel's tax history
- Taxpayer forms
- A Website map
- Links to other relevant state and local Websites.

The ECAD's extensive Public Relations Program is a vital and integral part of the operations of the Appraisal District. Good public relations and good customer service is the trademark of a successful organization and ECAD strives to define public relations with respect to the appraisal profession and to outline the standards for a well-planned and well-executed communications program. Public access to the Edwards Central Appraisal District is crucial to good public relations.

**Appraisal Calendar --- see ECAD Website ([www.edwardscad.org](http://www.edwardscad.org)) for detailed Calendar**

#### **Media Outlet Contacts**

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