

Department of Revenue Property Tax Division

Annual Revaluation Project Report

Best Practices in Public Relations as Assessors Transition to Annual Revaluation



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The purpose for this review is to identify and describe the “best practice” methodologies employed by county assessors in conducting public relations to promote the transition to annual revaluation. These practices are actions or processes that positively impact the assessor’s communication of change in revaluation practices to various stakeholders. The objective of a best practice report is to provide improvement ideas to enhance the effectiveness of similar programs in other counties. Each county is encouraged to review the report to determine if any of these practices can be adopted to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their own programs. Best practice reports provide additional tools that counties can use to improve assessment administration.

Best practice is a management idea that asserts there is a technique, method, process, activity, incentive, or reward that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, process, etc. The idea is that, with proper processes, checks, and testing, a project or task can be rolled out and completed with fewer problems and/or unforeseen complications.

We want to share with you the benefits of a public relations (PR) program. It is a proven fact that strong PR increases transparency in government practices, and this may lead to a higher credibility factor for the organization. Oftentimes, PR is a buzzword in marketing and advertisement, and sometimes the benefits are not understood. A PR program can reach a large audience without the expensive cost associated with the traditional paid advertisement process. The best practices included in this report are effective, efficient, and economical methods of disseminating information to a large audience. PR can be used to build support from other county officials and departments, taxing districts, and property owners. In addition, it can stimulate awareness on assessment and taxation topics of public interest and other news items without requiring large expenditures. It can strengthen your office’s public image and how the general public perceives your product. Developing PR material also has internal benefits because the assessor may choose to involve their staff in drafting PR material with information specific to their county.

It is important that the reasoning behind the change is clear. Once stakeholders begin to understand the process, then they begin to see how the change may or may not impact them. Each group of stakeholders may identify different advantages or challenges, but increased understanding will usually promote greater acceptability by most people. A PR program should incorporate print, video media, e-mail, newsletters, brochures, community relations such as town hall meetings, guest speaking at service club gatherings or fairs, speeches, and any other forms of communication that will promote your message.

Our research on the most effective methods to disseminate information to stakeholders indicates that dissemination should not be a one-time event; instead, it should be a strategic and ongoing process. We believe that engaging a range of stakeholders, internal and external, will ease the acceptance of the message and will facilitate general acceptance of the project, in this case annual valuation. In the process of conducting our research into effective methods of transition to annual revaluation, we discovered the value of publicity. When harnessed correctly, publicity can build credibility and increase understanding, which is the key to winning the support and acceptance of stakeholders. We reviewed the different PR tools used by counties that have most recently transitioned from a multi-year revaluation cycle to an annual revaluation cycle. We reviewed the effectiveness associated with each individual technique and determined that public service announcements, press releases, newspaper articles, and outreach programs are the most effective.

The best practice PR processes and actions identified through the reviews include:

- ◆ Press releases (most effective method)
- ◆ Newspaper articles (most common)
- ◆ Public service announcements (excellent tool to promote and inform stakeholders of the outreach program)
- ◆ Outreach programs (best Q&A format)

We are confident that the best practices we have identified will assist the assessment community and provide additional tools that can be utilized to ease the transition for cyclical counties as they prepare for annual revaluation.

Subject area:
Press Release

Best practice: In the process of conducting our reviews, we found that the most effective PR method is a press release. The strengths of this method are the ability to time the release of the information and to effectively communicate the cause and effect of the proposed change. A press release is used to concisely highlight an event or program by a sponsoring organization.

Best practice defined: Counties should develop their own in-house press release explaining the potential or future change in revaluation cycles. The release should include an overview of the process, a timeline (effective assessment year), and an explanation of the effect of this change to property owners. In addition, the release may include an explanation of how stakeholders will experience positive benefits.

How used: A press release is an effective method to promote an idea in a positive manner. It should answer the question, “Why should anyone care?” The notification of converting from a multi-year revaluation cycle to an annual revaluation cycle is most successful when the benefits of this conversion are framed in a manner identifying the positive gains stakeholders will realize. Provide examples of how your proposal will fulfill stakeholder’s needs or desires. Use real life

examples to identify the issues your proposal will solve by linking your press release to current events.

Why best practice: A press release specific to each county promotes efficiency, accuracy, and continuity in transitioning from multi-year revaluation to annual revaluation. The information provided in a press release is specific and appeals to stakeholders. A press release explains why stakeholders should care and how the proposed transition will benefit them. A clearly written press release includes relevant information that meets the needs of the stakeholders. This ensures your proposal will get serious consideration and acceptance by stakeholders.

Subject area:
Newspaper Article

Best practice: Our research revealed that the most common PR tool used by assessors is the newspaper article. Unlike a press release, a newspaper article presents the assessor an opportunity to provide stakeholders with more details about the conversion process. A newspaper article consists of facts developed by a journalist and published in the news media. A press release is sent to the news media in order to encourage them to develop articles on the subject matter.

Best practice defined: A newspaper article is an effective method of announcing a range of news items in greater detail and can reach a much larger audience. A newspaper article will also help stakeholders make an informed judgment based on relevant information. Stakeholders may view a news article as a more independent assessment of a change by the assessor. Ideally, the press release and the news article would convey a similar general message.

How used: A newspaper article is an effective PR tool if done properly. It is an effective method of communicating the finer details of the proposed annual revaluation plan to stakeholders. A newspaper article provides a platform to inform stakeholders of the benefits associated with annual revaluation. It provides exposure and credibility to your concept. A newspaper article makes the information provided to a journalist “newsworthy.” It provides the assessor a means to gauge how stakeholders will receive the proposal.

Why best practice: It is critical to develop relationships with the news media in the same way it is a good idea to develop professional relationships with people in the community and civic groups. Newspaper coverage gives your organization better stakeholder attention.

Subject area:
Public Service Announcement

Best practice: A Public Service Announcement (PSA) is a free community service offered by radio and television stations for publicizing an event or service beneficial to the community.

Best practice defined: A PSA is an effective means of reaching a large audience in a relatively inexpensive manner, and it provides information that benefits the intended audience.

How used: PSAs are short announcements prepared by the assessor to inform the public of upcoming events of community interest. A PSA is an effective method to inform the stakeholders of outreach programs where stakeholders are able to interact with their elected officials by asking them questions. Assessors should capitalize on the free airtime that most radio and television stations provide to meet the Federal Communications Commissions public service requirements. The Department has developed a 30-second PSA that is available to assessors upon request. Assessors can request the template from RC Cavazos at (425) 356-4848 or rc@dor.wa.gov.

Why best practice: PSAs are effective tools that assessors can use to create greater awareness of important community issues because of the number of people who listen to radio and watch television. PSAs are messages aired by radio and television stations at no cost to the sponsoring organization.

Subject area:
Outreach Program

Best practice: An outreach program provides the best question and answer forum and provides face-to-face interaction.

Best practice defined: An outreach program provides a unique opportunity for the assessor and stakeholders to personally discuss the benefits associated with an annual revaluation program.

How used: An outreach program is an effective and efficient method for the assessor to directly convey in an open forum the benefits associated with annual revaluation. The most effective outreach program includes a comprehensive method to educate residents and businesses on the impact annual revaluation will make on the community. There are various methods that can be used for outreach purposes, such as:

- Speaking at various community or civic clubs and functions.
- Customizing a PowerPoint presentation for use with various stakeholder groups. Assessors can use the PowerPoint presentation when speaking to various stakeholders, either in a public forum or scheduled meetings at various community sites.
- Providing informational brochures and/or pamphlets whenever possible.

- Making general information available on the county's website.
- Providing a link to the Department's website where stakeholders can access information regarding the annual revaluation process.
- Posting informational material on bulletin boards in libraries.

An outreach program will assist in stimulating awareness of the issues surrounding the transitional period. Through presentations and a question and answer format, the assessor is able to provide answers directly to stakeholders. This format provides the assessor the opportunity to correct any misinformation that stakeholders may have regarding the facts of an annual revaluation plan.

Outreach tools available for you to use:

- Several assessors are willing to share the PowerPoint presentations they have developed and used in their respective counties to inform stakeholders about annual revaluation. Franklin County Assessor Steve Marks and Snohomish County Assessor Cindy Portmann developed presentations to fit their respective counties and found them very useful for increasing awareness about the benefits of annual revaluation.
- The Department has developed a PowerPoint template accentuating the beneficial gains stakeholders will realize under an annual revaluation plan. Assessors can request the template from RC Cavazos at (425) 356-4848 or rc@dor.wa.gov.
- We can also provide a list of talking points that can assist assessors in introducing the annual revaluation concept to stakeholders.
- We have developed an informational brochure that explains the benefits of converting to annual revaluation for the assessors to distribute to stakeholders.
- Our website includes a section with frequently asked questions pertaining to property tax. Several questions and answers discuss the differences between revaluing property on a multi-year cycle versus an annual cycle. Although some counties include information about their revaluation cycle on their county website, other counties use their website to provide a link to the Department of Revenue site.
<http://dor.wa.gov/content/QuestionsAndAnswers/article.aspx?id=10139&cNode=6X2N1G>

Why best practice: Public outreach is an effective and economical method for the assessor to educate the stakeholders by providing the facts regarding the impact an annual revaluation plan will have on the community.
