APPRAISEITNOW GUIDE

Divorce Appraisal Checklist for Attorneys: Valuation Dates, Value Standards and Remote Approval

This divorce appraisal checklist shows family-law counsel what to set before ordering an appraisal of household contents, vehicles or equipment: the valuation dates, the value standard, the side AppraiseItNow acts for and the attorney's confirmation that a remote appraisal is acceptable.

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Educational material, not an appraisal.

Key Takeaways

Here is what family-law counsel needs to know before ordering a divorce appraisal:

- **What counsel provides:** For a divorce appraisal, AppraiseItNow needs the valuation dates and standard as counsel sets them and which side it acts for, and the attorney confirms that a remote appraisal is acceptable.
- **Who sets the valuation date:** State law and the court set the valuation date and standard in a divorce, because no federal rule governs how property is valued.
- **How the effective date works:** The effective date in AppraiseItNow's divorce appraisals is the date counsel sets.
- **Whether inspection is in person:** USPAP does not require an in-person inspection in every assignment. The appraiser decides the scope of work, and the report describes that scope.

A divorce appraisal checklist gives family-law attorneys and paralegals one place to confirm every instruction AppraiseItNow needs before valuing household contents, vehicles or equipment. The checklist covers the valuation dates, the value standard, the side AppraiseItNow acts for and the attorney's remote confirmation. This guide walks through the checklist itself, how state law drives the valuation date, how the effective date follows counsel's instruction, how to state the value standard and how remote appraisals work.

The Divorce Appraisal Checklist for Counsel

The divorce appraisal checklist below covers 6 instructions counsel settles at the start of the engagement. For a divorce appraisal, AppraiseItNow needs the valuation dates and standard as counsel sets them and which side it acts for, and the attorney confirms that a remote appraisal is acceptable. The remaining items are practical steps that keep the file clean and the report tied to the issues in the case:

1. **Set the Valuation Date or Dates**
    - The valuation date controls the report, because AppraiseItNow sets the effective date for a divorce at the date counsel sets.
    - Write each date as a calendar date, such as "March 3, 2026," rather than a description such as "the date of filing," so no one has to reconstruct it later. When counsel wants values at more than one date, list every date.
2. **Name the Value Standard**
    - State law and the court set the standard, so the standard comes from counsel and not from the appraiser.

- Quote the exact term used in the order, stipulation or governing authority, so the report and the case use the same words.

3. **Identify Which Side AppraiseItNow Acts For**
   - A clear answer about who AppraiseItNow is working for keeps instructions and questions routed to the right counsel.
   - Give the party's name, the counsel of record and the case caption in the first email.
4. **Confirm That a Remote Appraisal Is Acceptable**
   - The attorney confirms that a remote appraisal is acceptable, which allows the work to proceed through AppraiseItNow's online appraisal service.
   - As good practice, counsel can put the confirmation in the engagement email or letter so it sits in the file alongside the other instructions.
5. **Define the Property in Scope**
   - AppraiseItNow does not appraise real estate. Keep the list to household contents, vehicles and equipment.
   - List vehicles by year, make, model and VIN, list equipment by make, model and serial number, and flag any item whose classification is disputed so the appraisal list matches the issues in the case.
6. **Collect the Paperwork the Client Holds**
   - Titles, receipts, certificates and service records identify each item precisely and document its history.
   - Ask the client early, because records stored in the other spouse's possession or in a storage unit take time to retrieve.

Pro tip: Put all 6 items in a single engagement email with numbered answers. One document with the date, standard, side, remote confirmation, property list and records list is easier to cite later than a thread of separate messages.

Who Sets the Valuation Date in a Divorce?

Divorce valuation in the United States is a state-law question. No federal rule sets how property is valued in a divorce; state law and the court set the valuation date and standard. For example, New York lets the court choose any date from the filing of the case to trial; California values assets as near the trial as practicable unless the court orders otherwise.

The New York provision appears in N.Y. Domestic Relations Law § 236(B)(4)(b). The California provision appears in California Family Code § 2552. Counsel in other states checks the controlling statute and case law in that jurisdiction before setting the date.

The table below compares the 2 approaches as described above:

State	Who Chooses the Date	Range or Target
New York	The court	Any date from the filing of the case to trial
California	The statute sets the default; the court can order otherwise	As near the trial as practicable

The practical consequence for counsel is timing. A New York matter needs the court's chosen date, or counsel's instruction on which date to use, before the appraisal starts. A California matter ties the value to the trial, so counsel watches the trial calendar and tells AppraiseItNow when the date counsel has set changes.

How Does the Effective Date Follow the Date Counsel Sets?

The effective date of a divorce appraisal is the date counsel sets. AppraiseItNow sets the effective date by purpose: for insurance coverage and personal use, the report date; for estate and probate, the date of death; for a donation, the contribution date, or the report date for a future gift signed no more than 60 days before it; for a gift, the date of the gift; for an insurance claim, the date of loss; for a divorce, the date counsel sets; for an IRA conversion, the conversion date.

The effective date and the report date are 2 different dates. An appraisal's effective date is the date the value applies to. It can be current, past (a date of death or donation) or future, and the report states both the effective date and the report date.

Example (hypothetical): In a hypothetical New York matter, the court chooses the filing date of March 3, 2026 as the valuation date, and counsel sends that date to AppraiseItNow. The report states March 3, 2026 as the effective date and states its own, later report date separately.

Example (hypothetical): In a hypothetical California matter, counsel sets a valuation date near the scheduled trial. The trial moves, and counsel sets a new date and sends it to AppraiseItNow before relying on the report.

Watch out: A report's effective date follows the date counsel set at the time of the instruction. When the court picks a different date after the appraisal is ordered, counsel tells AppraiseItNow the new date instead of assuming the existing report covers it.

How Should Counsel State the Value Standard?

The value standard is the definition of value the appraiser applies, and in a divorce state law and the court set it. Counsel states the standard by its exact name and, where the order or agreement defines it, includes that definition word for word. The simplest instruction is to quote the exact

term and definition used in the order or stipulation, so the appraiser applies the same wording the court will read.

Household contents, vehicles and equipment each raise practical questions counsel answers in the same instruction. Counsel says whether every item on the list is valued under the same standard, or whether a stipulation treats a category differently. Counsel also notes any item the parties have already agreed on, so the property list reflects only what remains in dispute.

A short instruction block keeps the standard consistent with the date and the side. The following format works for most engagement emails:

- **Valuation date or dates:** Each date written as a calendar date, with the source (court order, stipulation or counsel's election).
- **Value standard:** The exact term, plus the definition if the order or agreement supplies one.
- **Side:** The party AppraiseItNow acts for, with the counsel of record.
- **Remote confirmation:** A one-line statement from the attorney that a remote appraisal is acceptable.

Can a Divorce Appraisal Be Done Remotely?

A remote divorce appraisal proceeds once the attorney confirms that a remote appraisal is acceptable. Under the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP, 2024 edition), USPAP does not require an in-person inspection in every assignment. The appraiser decides the scope of work, including how much inspection credible results need, and the report describes that scope.

The attorney's confirmation matters because counsel knows the case. Counsel knows whether the other side has raised inspection as an issue, whether a stipulation addresses how property is examined and whether the client has access to every item. Counsel can record the confirmation in the file as its own good practice.

The report's scope description gives counsel a clear account of how the property was examined. When opposing counsel asks how the appraiser saw the items, the answer sits in the report itself rather than in a later email.

An in-person appraisal works differently from a remote one. On an in-person appraisal, the appraiser identifies and photographs everything at the visit; the client still provides the address and the paperwork they hold, such as titles, receipts, certificates and records.

Practical Photo and Record Steps for a Remote Appraisal

A well-organized photo set makes a remote appraisal easier to review. The client follows these steps for each category of property:

- **Household contents:** Photograph each room from 2 opposite corners, then photograph each item on the list straight on, plus close-ups of maker's marks, signatures, labels and any damage.
- **Vehicles:** Photograph all 4 corners, the interior front and rear, the odometer with the ignition on, the VIN plate and any damage or aftermarket equipment.
- **Equipment:** Photograph the data plate or serial number, the hour meter, every attachment and the overall unit from each side.
- **Records:** Scan or photograph titles, registrations, purchase receipts, certificates and service records, and name each file after the item it supports.

Good light solves most photo problems. Daylight from a window, or a bright overhead light with the flash off, shows color and condition more accurately than a flash at close range. A ruler or tape measure in the frame records size without a separate note.

Key takeaway: The attorney's confirmation and the client's photo set work together. Counsel confirms the remote approach, the client supplies clear photos and records and the report describes the scope the appraiser chose.

Send a Complete Instruction Before the Appraisal Begins

Divorce appraisals are part of AppraiseItNow's caseload. Of the 1,226 appraisals AppraiseItNow opened between November 8, 2025 and November 8, 2026, 521 were for charitable donations, 175 for insurance (102 claims and 73 coverage), 144 for estates (61 probate, 46 estate tax and 37 estate settlement), 50 for divorce and 15 for Roth IRA conversions.

Clients request an appraisal from AppraiseItNow online and receive a fixed-fee quote before any work begins; AppraiseItNow does not bill hourly. Sending the full checklist with the request, including the valuation dates, the value standard, the side and the attorney's remote confirmation, gives our appraisers the instructions they need from the start.

A complete divorce appraisal checklist covers what AppraiseItNow needs: the valuation dates, the standard, the side and the attorney's remote confirmation. When counsel has those ready, request an appraisal for your divorce matter.

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