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Valuing Personal Property, Equipment and Vehicles in a Divorce: Agreed Values, a Single Neutral Appraisal and Separate Appraisals Compared (2026)

AppraiseItNow Inc.

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Educational material, not an appraisal.

Scope of this comparison of divorce valuation approaches for personal property, equipment and vehicles

This study, published by AppraiseItNow Inc. in 2026, compares three ways of putting a value on the movable property that spouses divide in a divorce:

- the values the spouses agree on between themselves
- a single neutral appraisal that both sides use
- separate appraisals, one prepared for each side

The comparison explains how a list of household goods, cars, trucks, boats, tools or business equipment becomes a set of numbers in a settlement, and what each way of producing those numbers does and does not provide.

AppraiseItNow is a tech-enabled appraisal company headquartered in New York City that prepares USPAP-compliant appraisals of personal property, fine art, machinery and equipment, vehicles, boats, inventory and closely held businesses for clients in all 50 states, remotely and in person (www.appraiseitnow.com). Divorce is one of the purposes for which its appraisals are prepared. 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.

Property inside and outside this comparison

The comparison covers tangible movable property. Typical items include:

- furniture, furnishings, jewelry, fine art and other household contents
- passenger vehicles, pickup trucks, motorcycles and other motorized vehicles
- boats and their engines
- machinery, tools and equipment, whether kept in a home workshop or used in a spouse's trade
- business inventory held by a spouse's sole proprietorship

The marital residence and any other land or buildings fall outside the comparison. AppraiseItNow does not appraise real estate. Valuing an ownership interest in a closely held business is a separate assignment with its own methods, and this study addresses it only where business equipment or inventory must be valued as items.

Why the valuation date and standard come from state law

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 the state's equitable distribution statute (N.Y. Domestic Relations Law § 236(B)(4)(b)). The California provision appears in the Family Code's section on valuing community property (Cal. Fam. Code § 2552).

For all three approaches compared here, the valuation date and the standard of value are inputs that counsel determines, not choices the spouses or an appraiser make on their own. A valuation built on the wrong date or the wrong definition of value can be accurate on its own terms and still fail to answer the question the case asks.

Terms used in this comparison

- **Agreed value:** a figure the spouses accept for an item or group of items without an appraisal report supporting that figure.
- **Neutral appraisal:** one appraisal, prepared by one appraiser, that both spouses use as the source of values. In practice the appraiser is retained jointly or with the consent of both sides.
- **Separate appraisals:** two appraisals of the same property, each prepared for one spouse's side.
- **Valuation date:** the date as of which property is valued for the divorce, set under state law and by the court.
- **Standard of value:** the definition of value the appraisal measures, such as a market-based value defined in a particular way. Counsel identifies the applicable standard.
- **Effective date:** 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 (USPAP, 2024 edition). In a divorce appraisal the effective date is the valuation date counsel provides.
- **Scope of work:** the type and extent of research, inspection and analysis in an appraisal assignment.

Criteria for comparing agreed values, a neutral appraisal and separate appraisals in a divorce

Each approach is measured against the same seven criteria. Each criterion receives its own subsection in the criterion-by-criterion comparison.

1. **Credibility and documented support.** Whether the value rests on identified evidence and stated reasoning that a third party can review.

2. **Alignment with the valuation date and standard.** Whether the approach reliably produces values as of the date, and under the definition, that state law and the court require.
3. **Neutrality and perceived fairness.** Whether each spouse can accept that the number was not shaped to favor the other.
4. **Cost structure and effort.** How many engagements, reports and rounds of preparation the approach involves. This study compares structure only and states no prices.
5. **Exposure to later dispute.** How likely the values are to be reopened, contested or argued over before the settlement is final.
6. **Access to property and information.** What each approach needs in terms of physical access, photographs and records, especially when one spouse holds the property.
7. **Handling of mixed asset classes.** How well the approach copes with a marital estate that combines household goods, vehicles, boats and equipment.

The criteria are weighted equally in the summary table. In a given case, counsel may weight them differently. A case with a cooperative couple and modest household contents raises different priorities from a case where one spouse operates a contracting business with a yard full of equipment.

How agreed values, a single neutral appraisal and separate appraisals work

Values the spouses agree between themselves

Under this approach the spouses, often with counsel, build a list of property and attach a figure to each line. The figures may come from memory, from what an item cost, from asking prices seen in listings, or from simple negotiation ("the truck is worth about what the boat is worth, so one spouse keeps each"). No report is prepared, and no one states a method or an effective date.

The approach relies entirely on cooperation and on the spouses' own knowledge of the property. Its strengths are speed of agreement and the absence of a third party. Its weaknesses show up when cooperation fails, when one spouse knows far more about a category of property than the other, or when an agreed figure is later questioned and nothing documents how it was reached.

Hypothetical: a couple lists a sedan, a riding mower, a set of dining furniture and a collection of power tools. One spouse used the tools daily and estimates their worth well below what the other believes they are worth. Each figure on the list is a compromise, and the agreement records the totals but not the reasoning. If the agreement is challenged later, neither spouse can show how the tool figure was derived.

A single neutral appraisal

Under this approach one appraiser values the property for both sides. Counsel for both spouses usually agree on the appraiser, the list of property, the valuation date, the standard of value and how information will be shared. The appraiser prepares one report, and both sides work from it.

The approach concentrates the effort in one engagement and gives both spouses the same numbers. It depends on both sides accepting the appraiser at the outset and providing equal access to the property and to the records about it. Disagreement does not disappear. It shifts from the numbers themselves to the inputs, such as whether a particular item is included, what condition it is in, or which date applies.

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. Whatever the engagement structure, putting the valuation dates, the standard and the item list in writing at the start makes the report's inputs clear to everyone who will read it.

Hypothetical: a couple jointly retains one appraiser for two vehicles, a fishing boat and the contents of the home. Counsel provide the valuation date and standard, both spouses supply photographs of the items in their possession, and the report values each item as of that date. The spouses then negotiate who keeps what, using a single set of figures.

Separate appraisals for each side

Under this approach each spouse retains an appraiser. Each appraiser prepares a report for that spouse's side. The two reports may value the same items or overlapping lists, and they may reach different conclusions.

The approach gives each side a valuation it controls and a professional it can consult privately. It duplicates the work and creates two sets of figures that must then be reconciled through negotiation or decided by the court. When the reports differ, the difference usually traces to identifiable causes: different effective dates, different standards of value, different assumptions about condition, a different list of items, or different market evidence.

Hypothetical: one spouse operates a landscaping business with a skid steer, two trailers, a dump truck and assorted handheld equipment. Each spouse retains an appraiser. One report assumes the equipment is in working order based on the operating spouse's photographs and records. The other appraiser, without access to the equipment, cannot verify condition and states the limits of what was reviewed. The two conclusions differ, and much of the settlement discussion turns on condition rather than on market evidence.

Criterion-by-criterion comparison of the three divorce valuation approaches

Credibility and documented support for each approach

Agreed values have no documented support. They may be reasonable, but the reasoning lives in the spouses' heads or in negotiation notes, not in a report that identifies the property, the method and the evidence. When both spouses are knowledgeable and the property is familiar, the figures may still be close to what an appraisal would conclude. Nothing in the record shows that.

A single neutral appraisal and separate appraisals both produce reports. AppraiseItNow prepares every appraisal in accordance with USPAP, the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP, 2024 edition). Under USPAP the report describes the scope of work and states the effective date and the report date, and any extraordinary assumption must be stated clearly. Those statements let counsel, the other side and the court see what the appraiser did and did not examine.

Credibility in separate appraisals depends partly on how the two reports compare. Two reports that use the same date and standard and reach close figures reinforce each other. Two reports that differ widely invite scrutiny of both. A neutral appraisal has one report to examine, so its credibility rests on that report's support and on both sides' confidence in the inputs.

Alignment with the valuation date and standard set by state law

The valuation date matters for movable property because values change. Vehicles accumulate mileage. Machinery accumulates hours and wear. Boats can be laid up or damaged. Household goods can be sold, moved or discarded between the filing and the trial. Because a state may allow a range of dates, as New York does, or may value assets as near the trial as practicable, as California does, counsel has to settle the date before any value is useful.

Agreed values seldom carry a stated date. Spouses negotiating a list in the middle of a case may be thinking of what an item was worth when they separated, what it is worth today, or what it cost. That ambiguity is the main way agreed values drift away from what the case requires.

Both appraisal approaches can state the date explicitly. 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. Where a past date applies, the appraiser values the property as of that earlier date, and the report shows both the effective date and the later report date.

The comparative risk with separate appraisals is that the two sides give their appraisers different dates or different standards, sometimes without noticing. A neutral appraisal removes that risk when counsel agree on the inputs. With separate appraisals, counsel can reduce it by exchanging the date and standard each appraiser is using before the reports are prepared.

Counsel may also want more than one date. A case might need values as of the filing date and as of a later date so that the court can choose. That should be stated at the outset, so that the report can state the effective date for each valuation date counsel provides.

Neutrality and perceived fairness to each spouse

Agreed values are neutral only to the extent the spouses negotiate as equals. Where one spouse managed the vehicles, ran the business equipment or bought the art, that spouse often knows far more about the property. The other spouse may accept figures he or she cannot evaluate. The process can feel fair at signing and less fair later.

A single neutral appraisal offers the strongest structural neutrality. One appraiser, one report and one set of figures serve both sides. Fairness then depends on equal treatment of inputs. Both spouses should have the chance to identify items, supply photographs and records, and raise condition issues. If the property sits with one spouse and only that spouse supplies information, the neutral report can still reflect a one-sided view of condition.

Separate appraisals give each side its own representative valuation. That can increase each spouse's confidence in his or her own report, while reducing confidence in the other side's. Separate appraisals also make the question of which side each appraiser acts for explicit. AppraiseItNow needs to know which side it acts for.

Cost structure and effort for spouses and counsel

This study states no prices. It compares only the structure of the work.

Agreed values require no appraisal engagement. The effort is negotiation time, which can be small or substantial depending on the couple. If agreement fails partway through, an appraisal is often commissioned anyway, and the earlier effort does not reduce the appraisal work.

A single neutral appraisal involves one engagement, one set of photographs and documents, and one report. Coordination takes effort, since counsel for both sides must agree on the appraiser, the item list and the inputs. The appraisal work itself is done once.

Separate appraisals involve two engagements and two reports. Each spouse prepares information for his or her own appraiser, and the same property may be photographed and documented twice. Reconciling the reports adds more effort.

On how AppraiseItNow structures its charges, the published position is this: Clients request an appraisal from AppraiseItNow online and receive a fixed-fee quote before any work begins; AppraiseItNow does not bill hourly (www.appraiseitnow.com).

Exposure to later dispute over the values

Agreed values are the most exposed to later dispute. They have no report behind them, so a spouse who later regrets the agreement has no record to argue from, and neither does the spouse defending it. The exposure grows with the share of the settlement that the agreed items represent.

A single neutral appraisal lowers the chance of a dispute over the figures, because both sides started from the same report. Disputes that remain usually concern inputs. A spouse may argue that an item was left off the list, that the photographs did not show damage, or that the date counsel supplied was not the one the court later used. Clear written inputs at the start reduce these disputes.

Separate appraisals invite the most open disagreement over figures, because two reports exist by design. That disagreement is visible and can be worked through. Counsel can compare the reports line by line and identify where they diverge. The divergence is often concentrated in a few items with uncertain condition or thin market evidence, and the rest of the list may be close.

Access to property and information when one spouse holds the assets

Divorce appraisals often involve property that one spouse controls. The vehicles may be at one spouse's new residence. The boat may be in storage under one spouse's name. The equipment may be at a job site.

Agreed values need no access, which is part of their appeal, but they are only as good as the spouses' knowledge of current condition.

Appraisal approaches need information. AppraiseItNow collects what the appraiser needs before the appraisal starts, and asks only for what the appraiser needs. AppraiseItNow's photo requirements by asset type: for vehicles, the outside and inside, plus the mileage for anything motorized; for boats, the outside with the cover off, the helm, the engine and the inside, plus the HIN and engine hours; for machinery, a few photos of each machine, the hours and whether it runs; for fine art, the front, back, signature and frame; for household items, one clear photo per item or group.

Remote and in-person work differ in who gathers the information. Most AppraiseItNow appraisals are completed remotely from photographs and documents; when an inspection is needed, an appraiser visits the asset in person (www.appraiseitnow.com). Of the 1,226 appraisals AppraiseItNow opened between November 8, 2025 and November 8, 2026, 1,137 were done from photographs and documents and 27 in person; the method was not recorded for the other 62. In divorce work, the attorney's confirmation that a remote appraisal is acceptable is part of what AppraiseItNow needs before it begins.

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 (USPAP, 2024 edition). In a divorce, this means a remote appraisal is possible when

counsel confirms it is acceptable and the appraiser concludes that photographs and documents support credible results. When the spouse holding the property will not cooperate, an in-person visit may be the practical path. 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.

Some facts may remain uncertain even after reasonable efforts, such as whether a machine runs or whether a vehicle's interior matches older photographs. An appraiser may assume an uncertain fact is true (an extraordinary assumption) only when it's needed for credible results, there's a reasonable basis for it and the analysis stays credible, and the report must say so clearly (USPAP, 2024 edition). Whether those conditions are met in a particular assignment is the appraiser's decision. For counsel, the practical point is that the report will say so clearly if it relies on such an assumption, and that statement shows which facts the other side may wish to verify.

Requests for more information are common in appraisal work generally. Of 867 appraisals AppraiseItNow reviewed between October 27, 2025 and September 23, 2026, 31% needed something more from the client and 24.6% went through a formal request for missing details. As general practical advice, gathering titles, hour readings and photographs before any engagement begins tends to reduce back-and-forth. That matters most when the information must pass through counsel for the spouse who holds the property.

Handling of mixed asset classes in one marital estate

Marital estates rarely contain only one kind of property. A single household might include a daily-driver vehicle, a classic car, a pontoon boat, a woodworking shop, a set of paintings and ordinary furnishings. Each category has its own markets and evidence.

Agreed values handle mixed estates unevenly. Spouses can usually estimate a common vehicle's value from listings with some confidence. They are far less reliable on specialized machinery, older boats or artwork, where condition and market details matter more.

Appraisal approaches handle mixed estates according to the appraiser's competence in each class. AppraiseItNow's appraisers specialize by asset class rather than by geography. Between them, AppraiseItNow's appraisers hold ASA, ISA, AAA, CAGA, NACVA, NEBB Institute, ABV and CFA credentials. By asset class, the same 1,226 appraisals included 377 vehicles, 323 general personal property, 174 machinery and equipment, 54 boats, 45 business inventory, 40 fine art and 39 business valuations.

With separate appraisals, each side may retain appraisers with different strengths. One side's report may treat the equipment in detail and the household goods briefly, while the other side's report does the reverse, which complicates reconciliation. A single neutral appraisal covering all classes produces one consistently organized report, provided the appraisal work for each class is done by appraisers competent in that class.

Summary table of divorce valuation approaches by criterion

Criterion	Values the spouses agree	Single neutral appraisal	Separate appraisals for each side
Credibility and documented support	No report; reasoning undocumented	One report stating scope, effective date and any extraordinary assumption	Two reports; credibility tested by comparing them
Alignment with valuation date and standard	Date and standard often unstated	One date and standard agreed by counsel and stated in the report	Each report states its own; risk of mismatched inputs unless counsel coordinate
Neutrality and perceived fairness	Depends on equal knowledge and bargaining	Structurally neutral; depends on equal access to inputs	Each side controls its own report; the other side's report may be distrusted
Cost structure and effort	No appraisal engagement; negotiation effort only	One engagement, one set of information, one report	Two engagements, duplicated information gathering, reconciliation effort
Exposure to later dispute	Highest; no record behind figures	Lower; disputes tend to concern inputs	Open disagreement by design, but traceable item by item
Access to property and information	None needed, but condition unverified	Both spouses supply information to one appraiser	Each spouse supplies information to his or her own appraiser; one side may lack access
Handling of mixed asset classes	Uneven; weakest on specialized items	One consistent report across classes	Coverage of each class may differ between reports

Choosing among agreed values, a neutral appraisal and separate appraisals in a divorce

The choice is made by the spouses with their attorneys and within whatever the court directs. The considerations below organize that decision. They do not replace counsel's judgment about the case.

Questions that point toward one approach or another

- **Have counsel set the valuation date or dates and the standard of value?** Every approach depends on this. The answer comes from state law and the court, and settling it first

prevents the most common source of mismatched figures.

- **How cooperative are the spouses about access and information?** Where both will share photographs, titles and records, a single neutral appraisal is workable. Where one spouse controls the property and resists sharing, separate appraisals or an in-person inspection may be more realistic.
- **How evenly do the spouses understand the property?** Where one spouse has specialized knowledge of the equipment, boats or art, agreed values carry the greatest risk of later regret.
- **What share of the settlement does the movable property represent?** The larger the share, the more weight documented support and exposure to dispute carry.
- **How many asset classes are involved?** A mix of vehicles, machinery and household contents favors a report that treats each class with appropriate competence and presents all of them consistently.
- **Will the values be tested by the other side or by the court?** Where scrutiny is likely, a report that states its scope, effective date and assumptions gives both sides something concrete to examine.

Combining the approaches

The three approaches are not mutually exclusive. Common combinations include:

- **Appraisal first, agreement second.** A single neutral appraisal values the property, and the spouses then agree on the division using those figures. The agreement rests on a documented basis.
- **Neutral appraisal with a review.** One side reviews the neutral report with its own adviser and raises specific input questions, such as a missing item or a condition issue, rather than commissioning a second full appraisal.
- **Separate appraisals with coordinated inputs.** Each side retains its own appraiser, but counsel exchange the item list, the valuation date and the standard in advance. Remaining differences then reflect professional judgment and evidence, not mismatched instructions.
- **Split by asset class.** Counsel may treat a business's equipment and vehicles through appraisal while the spouses negotiate the division of everyday household contents with reference to appraised figures where those exist. Any such split is counsel's decision for the specific case.

Hypothetical: one marital estate under all three approaches

Hypothetical: a couple is divorcing in a state where counsel has determined the valuation date and the standard of value. The movable property includes a late-model SUV, an older pickup truck, a ski boat, a compact excavator and trailer used in one spouse's side business, several framed paintings, and the furnishings of a four-bedroom house.

- **Under agreed values,** the spouses agree quickly on the SUV using listings. They argue over the excavator, whose hours and condition only the operating spouse knows. They settle the paintings by splitting the difference between two guesses. The settlement records totals, but no figure carries a date or a method.
- **Under a single neutral appraisal,** counsel provide the valuation date and standard and confirm in writing the item list and how information will be shared. Both spouses supply photographs of the kinds listed earlier: mileage for the vehicles, HIN and engine hours for the boat, hours and running condition for the excavator, front, back, signature and frame for the paintings, and one photo per item or group for the furnishings. One report states each value as of the valuation date. The spouses negotiate the division from that report.
- **Under separate appraisals,** each spouse's appraiser values the same list. The reports agree closely on the SUV and the furnishings. They differ on the excavator because one appraiser had the operating spouse's hour readings and the other did not. Counsel focus the remaining negotiation on that one item, using each report's description of its scope and any stated extraordinary assumption to see where the difference comes from.

The hypothetical shows a recurring pattern. Disagreement between valuations tends to concentrate on the items with the least shared information. Whatever approach is chosen, the most effective step is usually to equalize information about those items early.

What AppraiseItNow needs from counsel at the start of a divorce appraisal

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. In practical terms, that means counsel has the following ready before the engagement begins:

1. The valuation date or dates, as counsel has determined them under state law and any court direction.
2. The standard of value counsel has identified.
3. A statement of which side AppraiseItNow acts for.
4. Confirmation from the attorney that a remote appraisal is acceptable, or a statement that it is not.

General preparation counsel can do under any of the three approaches

The points below are general practical advice for spouses and counsel. They are not requirements of AppraiseItNow or of any other appraiser, and an appraiser decides what a particular assignment needs.

- An item list organized by asset class, reviewed by both sides where possible, so that all parties are working from the same inventory.
- Photographs of the kinds described in the asset-type photo requirements above, together with any titles, receipts, certificates and records that either spouse already holds.

- For property that only one spouse can reach, a note to counsel of who holds it and where, so that the parties can discuss early whether photographs will be enough or an in-person visit will be needed.

Common uses of AppraiseItNow's appraisals include charitable donations, gift and estate tax, estate settlement, divorce, insurance and lending. AppraiseItNow does not appraise real estate. AppraiseItNow's website is www.appraiseitnow.com.