ID#: 12-S-27-TX
State: TEXAS

Assign Program Category (applicant): AGRICULTURE

Program Name: PROTECT YOUR TEXAS BORDER website
Administering Agency: TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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1. How long has this program operated (month and year)?
The website was launched in March of 2011 and has been operational for 13 months.

2. Describe the program:
   - Why was it created? The Protect Your Texas Border website was launched on behalf of Texas farmers and ranchers who expressed the need to raise federal and state government awareness of the ongoing violence, intimidation and fear that is encroaching on their families, properties and operations near the United States and Mexico border. Despite declarations from federal officials that the border is safer than ever, Texas Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples continues to hear countless constituent accounts to the contrary and was therefore motivated to launch ProtectYourTexasBorder.com to serve as a lookout post to tell the firsthand stories of farmers and ranchers who live and work in fear. Since the site launched, farmers and ranchers who previously felt unheard have seen an increase in federal, media and public attention to this very real problem. The innovative website allows farmers and ranchers to post their stories, and also archives news coverage of activity along the U.S./Mexico border. Public comments also are welcome in the interest of fostering dialogue regarding the critical subject of national
security. Importantly, the Texas Department of Agriculture has coupled this effort with a comprehensive study commissioned to have two retired high-ranking military generals verify the problem and provide advice from a military perspective on resolving the problem. Released in September of 2011, the report entitled *Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment* was authored by retired four-star Army General Barry McCaffrey and retired Army Major-General Robert Scales. General Barry McCaffrey is the former Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy under President Bill Clinton and former Commander of all U.S. troops in Central and South America. Major-General Robert Scales is the former Commandant of the United States Army War College. The report offers a military perspective on how to best incorporate strategic, operational and tactical measures to secure the increasingly hostile border regions along the Rio Grande River.

- **Why is it a new and creative approach or method?** Social media and the dispersion of new methods for reporting and transferring information have revolutionized society, the media, and the policymaking process. ProtectYourTexasBorder.com is an efficient tool the people of Texas can utilize to increase awareness of their experiences along the border and their concerns about border security in a timely manner. This social media venue has helped impact policymaking and resulted in improved policing, resource allocation, and national attention. The Texas Department of Agriculture recognized that the innovation needed in this debate to bring the federal resources secure the border was not going to come from a photo-op, town hall meeting, or task force but instead it would come directly from the Texans most impacted. Social media is revolutionizing communications and the department harnessed those tools to amplify the voices most impacted by the issue of border security.

- **What are the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order?**
  a. Early 2011: TDA was contacted by landowners from the Texas-Mexico border area who requested assistance in communicating with state and federal law enforcement about the dangers they were experiencing due to cross-border criminal activity.
  b. Early 2011: TDA conducted landowner listening session to fully understand concerns and discuss appropriate and effective response options.
  c. March 2011: ProtectYourTexasBorder.com website is launched.
  d. Spring 2011: TDA conducted a landowner listening session to evaluate website’s effectiveness.
  e. Summer 2011: TDA created testimonial videos
  f. Summer 2011: TDA completed first redesign and feature updates to increase effectiveness of website
g. Fall 2011: TDA conducted a landowner listening session to ensure continued effectiveness of the website.

h. Fall 2011: TDA created additional testimonial videos

- *Is it effective? Provide tangible results and examples* Yes. Many government agencies have difficulty defining and implementing their roles related to improving the quality of life for their constituents through utilization of advocacy and public awareness tools. In the twelve months of its existence, www.Protectyourtexasborder.com has created meaningful engagement with its target audience. Success for this site is not measured in the number of hits but in the level of engagement. The site tells the stories of people living along the Texas and Mexico border and is routinely visited by people from Canada, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Germany, France, Australia, and Spain, as well as people from across the United States and Mexico. This broad audience demonstrates the site’s effectiveness in communicating the constituents’ messages in a universal approach.
  - The site averages 6,417 visits per month, with 4,725 of those visitors being unique.
  - Members of Congress have convened hearings on this topic and have included testimony from Commissioner Staples, farmers and ranchers who have contributed real stories to the effort, and two retired high ranking U.S. military generals who have contributed to the effort.
  - PYTB YouTube Channel logged 15,547 views in the past 365 days.
  - A recent news report about ProtectYourTexasBorder.com aired on over forty major news stations, including the LATimes.com, FoxNews.com, and the BaltimoreSun.com
  - The website received over 470 online entries.

3. *Did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator’s name, present address, telephone number, and e-mail address.* Yes, this program originated in Texas. Many stakeholders contributed to the development of the idea and the site, but the department’s key innovator is Bryan Black, Communications Director, P.O. Box 12847, Austin, Texas 78711, (512) 475-1669, Bryan.Black@TexasAgriculture.gov

4. *Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?* No.
5. **What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter when attempting to adopt this program?**

ProtectYourTexasBorder.com is a carefully developed social media tool used to increase broad awareness of a sensitive issue. The challenge of this project was to balance the concerns of constituents in a factually relevant manner to increase awareness among a broad audience to impact and affect public policy. When utilizing social media to communicate about a sensitive issue, it is important for government agencies to ensure they are representing the interests of their constituents and are actively communicating with stakeholders to ensure expectations are met and the desired results are achieved in an efficient manner. Additionally, governmental agencies have a duty to ensure transmitted information is accurate and factual and provided in a clear and straightforward manner.