



Real Estate Careers and Public Agencies

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It takes special skills to be a public land acquisition agent, and this career field needs to be invigorated by new recruits. A group of federal agencies,¹ the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the International Right of Way Association (IRWA) convened recently to examine the reasons for shortages of recruits in the real estate professions. Participants agreed the problem is due to limited knowledge and representation in major training curricula, particularly at the college level.



Real estate professional roles are not typically on career lists. The phrase “in real estate” is used derisively to denote a person involved in non-credentialed bottom level sales solicitation. The terms “in real estate” imply that valid real estate employment does not exist. In fact, real estate professionals do exist and they play essential roles in building security, property development and financial validation. Public service agencies rely extensively upon skilled real estate professionals for fiduciary management of billions of dollars in expenditures.

Marketing of educational venues is essential to ensure that short-term and long-term personnel needs are met. Potential candidates can take steps to inform themselves of the career choices available and what it will take to become proficient for entry level, career change, or advanced positions. Federal, state and professional associations also offer programs for mentoring, internships and cooperative experience.

WHAT IS A REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONAL?

The real estate professional represents a complex array of performance categories. The demand for public land acquisition personnel is just one of many prospective real estate positions. Here is a short list of titles that correspond to different real estate careers.

- Disposition Agent
- Property Management Agent
- Commercial and Industrial Property Manager
- Negotiator
- Appraiser
- Project Manager
- Acquisition Specialist
- Legislative Analyst
- Legal Representative

- Right of Way Agent
- Financial Analyst

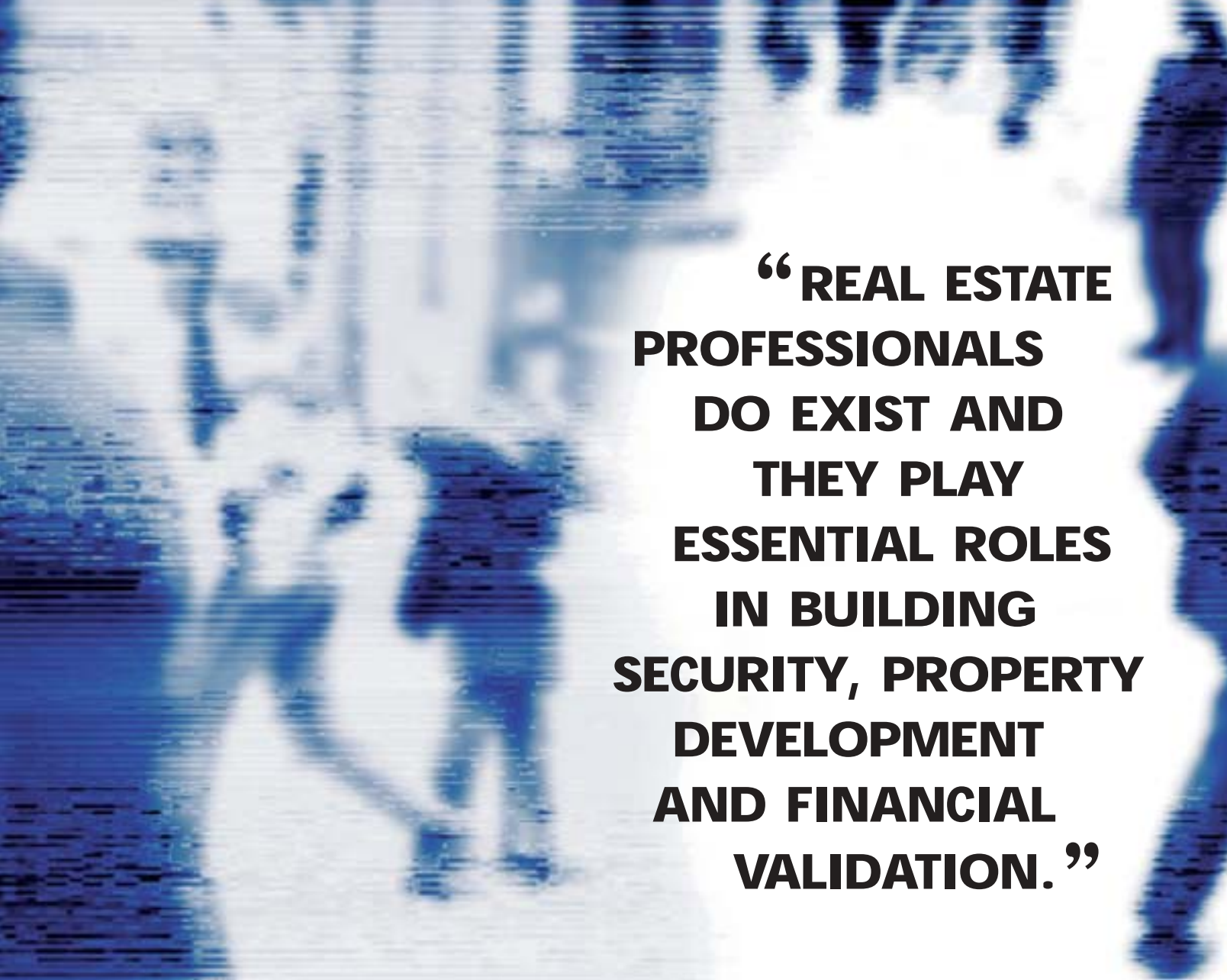
HOW DO YOU ENTER THE REAL ESTATE PROFESSION?

Historically, real estate persons gravitated to acquisition positions because of their negotiation talents. The skills required to accomplish right of way takings, appraisals, or utility easements were gained through concentrated course work and practical experience over many years. Tutelage and practical experience provided the opportunity to gain superior judgment and skills. There are three skill paths that an individual can follow: academic training, professional association programs, and personnel development resources within government agencies.

Independently, new candidates can look toward academic programs as a starting point. Both community colleges and four year institutes offer curriculum in fundamentals of oral and written communication. After the core topics, the student can enroll in courses having relevance for real estate careers, such as business law, eminent domain law and real estate principles.

A roster of key real estate courses includes:

- Real Property Law
- Land Use Law
- Eminent Domain and Just Compensation
- Zoning and Comprehensive Land Use Legislation
- Building Codes and Regulations
- Sub-Division Development
- Brownfield and Greyfield Development
- Environmental Law
- Financial Analysis



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- Investment Analysis
- Neighborhood or In-fill Development
- Appraisals
- Residential and Business Relocation Legislation

Professional training through associations is a good option for candidates; especially after core academic courses are completed. Professional associations deliver in-depth subjects and allow for specialization. The IRWA, Appraisal Institute (AI), Appraisal Institute of Canada (AIC), American Society of Appraisers (ASA), and other real estate related organizations aggressively offer on-site and online learning opportunities. The highly focused venues provide insight into selected subject matter and permit development of personal capabilities. Professional associations are also a resource for earning credentials that distinguish expertise. Credentials can be essential for participating in complex real estate matters and may provide the basis for higher earnings.

Many understaffed public agencies do not have the time or resources to wait for long-term traditional skill achievement. Candidates can take advantage of the demand and enter public real

estate career positions at one of many different stages. There are a number of public human resource development programs that can augment academic training and bring individuals into professional competency. Federal agencies offer cooperative programs, summer employment, presidential internships, professional development programs, and even boot camp.

WHAT DO YOU DO AS A REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONAL?

Real estate positions require knowledge and awareness of real property. Extensive fieldwork is essential, although some remote large-scale assessments can be accomplished with computers. Although athletic prowess is not required, general agility is. Residential inspections mandate that the real estate agent conduct basement to attic views. In addition, there is the hidden workout provided by a general property walk-around, which can be a small lot to a significant number of acres.

Property inspections, and on-site negotiations with owners require a lot of travel miles. One-on-one contact with tenants and owners, once the appointment is arranged, requires considerable



communication skill. Not everyone the realty person meets welcomes the visit. Personal aptitude to work with others under stressful conditions is important. Diplomatic skills are essential, particularly when the agent represents a public agency. Finesse in gaining acceptance from offers is a personal craft that education cannot supply.

Several specializations in public real estate do not entail negotiation efforts, such as real estate appraising, or business portfolio valuation. But, even these efforts necessitate contact with people who must have confidence in the real estate representative. Potential candidates should experience as many facets of the real estate profession as possible before committing to a full time career.

COMPENSATION TO REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS

The professional real estate person can earn a respectable income. Typical entry level positions for a federal realty specialist is General Services (GS) Grade 9 with a current starting salary of \$34,451 (average U.S.). For specific programs, this earnings status can change in about three years to a GS Grade 11 with a salary of \$41,684 (average U.S.). Mid-career persons may be eligible for GS Grade 13

positions starting at \$59,409. Actual earnings can vary based upon in-grade step, city, and cost of living factors.

Available federal positions can be searched online using the Federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM) series identification 1170 for realty specialist. The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) provides links to job openings, but note, some of these addresses may take you back to OPM. The DOT site also links readers to a number of undergraduate and graduate transportation, and real estate related training venues, including a broad array of university programs. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provides a convenient Web site with links to all state departments of transportation Web addresses. This resource is ideal to begin searches for state real estate job openings.

Public agencies are interested in obtaining candidates for real estate programs. An informal preliminary survey conducted in March 2001 revealed a total population of 13,000 right of way professionals. The projected needs for federal, state, local public agencies, and private firms in this field are expected to grow by 2,000 candidates in 2001 through 2002. The number of additional candidates needed for 2003 through 2005 is estimated to become 3,256.

GET IN TOUCH:

Professional training through associations/organizations:

IRWA: <http://www.irwaonline.org>
AI: <http://www.appraisalinstitute.org>
AIC: <http://www.aicanada.org>
ASA: <http://www.asa.org>
NHI; FHWA: <http://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov>

Public human resource development programs:

Presidential Management Internship Program:
<http://www.usajobs.opm.gov>

Federal Highway Administration Cooperative Education:
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/education/career/coop-ed.htm>

Federal Highway Administration Summer Transportation Internship Program:
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/education/stipdg.htm>

Compensation to real estate professionals:

Office of Personnel Management:
<http://www.opm.gov/oca/payrates/index.htm>

Search for state real estate job openings:

OPM job search site:
<http://www.usajobs.opm.gov>

DOT:
http://www.dot.gov/jobs_and_education.html

FHWA's links to state Web sites:
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/webstate.htm>

RIGHT OF WAY STAFFING SURVEY, MARCH 2001

This information was obtained after a limited telephone inquiry to selected realty groups. The values are not a statistical compilation.

STUDY GROUP	R/W EMPLOYED	% MINORITY INCLUDING WOMEN	FY 2001/2002 NEEDS	FY 2003/2005 NEEDS
State**	6,000	13%	800	1,250
Local*	1,500	12%	200	316
Federal	1,000	28%	400	740
Private*	4,500	5%	600	950
Total	13,000	18%	2,000	3,256

FY = Fiscal Year * = Estimated

** = State DOT figures adjusted to reflect multiple state agencies with real estate positions

The projected personnel requirements are helping to gain support for community college right of way programs. In turn, FHWA's National Highway Institute (NHI) is increasing the number of right of way class presentations across the country.

A national sponsored right of way certificate program is also being considered, which could offer essential training for new career people or those involved in career change. Other types of certification or designation programs are offered through IRWA, AI, AIC, and ASA.

VARIETY, FLEXIBILITY, AND LOCATION IN REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONS

The great thing about real estate is that it is everywhere. Public real estate positions can be found in every state in the country. Public and private training programs are there to enhance the progression from beginner to career person. An individual who makes a diligent scan of what it takes to become a public real estate professional, and achieves a preferred skill level can be rewarded by a gainful position.

Candidates can further their knowledge about real estate careers by attending public and professional association conferences. Such meetings are an opportunity to get to know the people in the profession, find out how they work, what they write about, and what they value.

REFERENCE:

- 1 The Federal agencies participating in the conference were: Federal Highway Administration, U.S. General Services Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal Aviation Administration, and Federal Transit Administration.