

Streamline Your Next Project: The Case for Goodwill

BY JAMES A. KENT

In the November/December issue of Right of Way magazine, International President Kenneth Davis, SR/WA spoke of the rising respect that IRWA is receiving globally. That respect is what leads to creating organizational goodwill, a highly-valued commodity, which should not be wasted. He wrote, "We will be poised to respond quickly to changing markets and demands, not only at home but around the world."

In the complex world of right of way projects, there is an emerging trend. People are no longer willing to sit on the sidelines and have relatively little input into the right of way decisions that directly affect their lives. This is particularly true when it comes to approving local infrastructure projects. Regardless of whether it's a power corridor or a new pipeline, citizens everywhere are advocating for more participation, predictability and control in deciding what will happen in their communities and how change will impact them personally.

Too often communities are unpleasantly surprised by corridor projects that seem to be announced with little or no warning. The ensuing reaction can set off irrational fears which take on their own life, fueled by rumors and misinformation. Hostile citizen actions often cause costly delays as evidenced by an increasing number of projects being stopped or dragged out over unreasonable amounts of time. Lost in a hostile environment are a company's most vital assets - trust and goodwill - both of which are critical if we want to collaborate effectively with communities in implementing corridor decisions.

Local residents have a vested interest in their community and care more about their environment than any outsider would. If we could simply incorporate the issues and concerns of the community up front, our projects would be perceived as enhancing the community's livability, rather than taking something away from it.

An Essential Best Practice

Taking the time to properly introduce projects to the local community can often make or break the project's ultimate success.

One example of this is the Holy Cross Energy transmission line and substation project in the resort town of Snowmass, Colorado. The project manager estimated that, as a result of including the local community in every aspect of the project, litigation was avoided, saving the taxpayers a potential expenditure of more than \$10 million. In addition, the entire project schedule was accelerated by years. A project of that scope could easily take five to fifteen years from start to finish. In this case, the project took only three years to complete.

The goodwill and trust that Holy Cross Energy earned during this project also benefitted them when faced with other issues, such as dealing with renewable energy decisions and fee increases that could have been controversial, but were not.

There is no denying that citizen-based stewardship has proven to be a best practice. At home and abroad, this focus on the community affects our projects every step of the way. President Davis put his finger on the essential ingredient for our success in the future - IRWA is moving from a management-focused organization to one that is oriented toward leadership. This leadership dimension is exactly what's needed to ensure the right people are involved in our current and future efforts.

Better tools and techniques can be developed and used to engage the impacted people and communities when a project is first being designed. Recognition of the leadership component is one reason why IRWA is well positioned to advance into this new territory of community collaboration.



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