

## The Right of Way Consultants Council:

# A Valuable Link for All Members

BY FAITH A. ROLAND, SR/WA



The Right of Way Consultants Council is an organization that grew out of a desire of those in the consulting industry to exchange ideas and information efficiently and to establish standards of professionalism. Now in existence for nearly a decade, the Council has evolved into a valuable conduit for member consultants to address important issues and challenges.

IRWA has a large private sector constituency, and for the most part, they are the ones that hire our member consultants. As a result, the Council has focused on continuing our commitment to help other agencies and firms better understand their role as they employ our services for various right of way projects. Open communication is a key goal, and we serve as a vital link for users of our services—both public and private sector clients—as we work to improve relations among the consultant community.

### Sharing a Common Goal

For some time prior to its formation, those working for right of way consulting companies believed that the success of the consulting community as a whole would be greatly enhanced by open communication and mutual support between its members. Leaders in the private sector had also expressed the need to support to the industry's consulting firms as a collective group. It was evident that the private sector and the consulting companies shared a common goal, as both were determined to raise the standards by which consulting firms provided services to their clients.

Over time, the Council has become an essential resource for government agencies and other stakeholders who are responsible for getting new infrastructure projects approved and funded. Our consultant members have been solicited for their expertise, advice and guidance by those who are tasked with drafting requests for proposals and generating bids for these new projects. We have also made ourselves available to those who need assistance in resolving disputes, should they arise.

We are pleased to be of service to the industry, and we take great pride in knowing that every action the Council undertakes is ultimately designed to benefit the Association, either directly or indirectly.

### Enhancing the Professional Status

The right of way industry is comprised of highly educated and competent professionals, and we encourage all IRWA members, regardless of their educational background, to pursue professional designations as a way to attain and enhance the professional status we strive to uphold.

The Council has worked toward improving the proposal process, standardizing agreements, enhancing the perception of the right of way industry and encouraging companies to recognize IRWA certifications industry-wide. In many states, right of way acquisition and relocation services are yet to be perceived as a professional service. This often leads to low-bid procurement, which is not always the best means of an award and also places limitations on industry fees. The Council has been addressing this on an ongoing basis and working to ensure that right of way professionals become acknowledged as highly-trained professionals whose qualifications are just as important as pricing consideration.

The Council's ever increasing recognition in the industry has led to a host of important opportunities. One was the participation in the FHWA/AASHTO sponsored International Scanning Tour on Right of Way and Utility. The purpose of the scan was to identify how other nations have streamlined processes for acquiring real estate, relocating displaced residents and businesses, and relocating utilities required for transportation projects. The scan uncovered some valuable new ideas for coordinating right of way and utilities with project planning, environmental analysis and documentation, environmental mitigation and design plans preparation. In fact, following the scan tour, nine of the team's 20 recommendations were selected for implementation.

More recently, the Council has been collaborating with the Texas Department of Transportation to help improve procedures, and the California Transit Authority to provide input for the scope of work needed for its upcoming high-speed rail projects.

**Membership in the Council**

The Council’s membership consists of consultant firms, not individual members. For us to address the unique needs and challenges facing consulting firms as a whole, this differentiation was essential. Becoming a member firm is not a complex process, however a firm must offer right of way and land acquisition services to the private sector, meet the Board-approved criteria for membership, and their employees are required to uphold the IRWA Code of Ethics.

Being connected to a diverse network of member firms is an important benefit. Members have access to new request for quotes and proposals once they are available. They also have voting rights on Consultants Council business and receive email updates on issues and events that impact the industry.

The Council’s Board of Directors is comprised of nine members who are each elected to serve a three-year term. Terms are staggered to ensure continuity. The Board meets throughout the year in conjunction with IRWA’s Annual Conference, as well as other major industry events. The Council provides speakers and educational opportunities at many of these conferences.

**Getting Involved**

The Consultants Council strives to become a greater resource for right of way professionals in the future. Many of our members have been involved in the right of way industry for decades and appreciate the opportunity to share their knowledge. Their commitment to elevating the level of professionalism has earned the Council a voice in the future direction of the right of way consulting industry.

We are available to all agencies and firms seeking to discuss issues, opportunities and trends in the industry. We also encourage member input and participation through website discussion forums and at meetings. Anyone interested in more information about the Council can contact any of our Board members or visit our website at [www.rowcouncil.org](http://www.rowcouncil.org).

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