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What is the Consultant's Council?

The Right of Way Consultants Council, founded in 2002, plays a vital role in addressing key issues facing the industry today. To see how the Council benefits the right of way profession, we posed some questions to the Council's Chair Wade Brown.

Why was the Council established?

Leaders in the private sector identified two primary needs. One was the need to give support to the industry's consulting firms as a collective group. The other was to raise the standards by which consulting firms provide services to our clients. The right of way industry is comprised of highly educated and competent professionals, yet many still view us as a trade. We plan to change that perception in the marketplace. The Council is one of way we could 'walk the walk' and address various issues head-on.

What is the primary mission?

The Council has three key functions. One is to raise the bar in terms of the professional standards we uphold. Second, we encourage members to pursue professional designations as a way to attain and enhance the status we deserve. And third, we provide an open exchange for users of our services—public and private sector clients—as we work to improve relations within the consultant community.

Do you face many challenges?

Creating awareness is definitely a challenge. Most members are not aware of who we are or what we do. By better communicating our mission and the benefits of joining, we will help advance the entire industry. Of course, that requires time, and time has become such a valuable commodity. We serve the Council on a voluntary basis and also have full-time jobs. Yet, the Council leadership and members consistently devote their time and resources efforts in support of the goals.

Can you share some recent accomplishments?

One of our proudest achievements has been improving the relationships between member firms, despite our competitive arena. Members have actually uncovered partnering opportunities that have increased the chances of procuring work from a limited supply. In some cases, this has led to formal working arrangements, and this clearly benefits all parties involved.

Another is our success in promoting the value of the SR/WA designation. Through our efforts, the Texas Department of Transportation has recognized its importance and includes

this as part of their procurement process. In addition, a liaison committee was formed with TxDOT personnel to help improve the relationship and procedures for acquiring right of way by service providers. This was a huge accomplishment and the first of its kind nationally. TxDOT now views the Council as a conduit to attaining mutually-beneficial goals. I give credit to John Barton, John Campbell, SR/WA and Gus Cannon, SR/WA at TxDOT for spearheading this cooperative effort. The Council appreciates this working relationship and the support these individuals have shown over the years.

What is the relationship between IRWA and the Council?

The Council was originally formed as an ad-hoc committee to IRWA. The need for private sector consulting firms to have a voice and improve working relationships had become a high priority. IRWA supported this need and helped us get it off the ground. In return, we have a formal Memorandum of Understanding to support the Association in the areas of education and leadership. The Council also supports IRWA's educational efforts through funding and sessions at the annual conference and the Federal Agency Update.

How is the Council funded?

We are funded through membership dues, sponsorships and donations, much like other non-profit industry organizations. I consider the time donated by Council members and their willingness to absorb their own expenses another source of funding. It's not required that members subsidize their expenses, but more of an unwritten commitment to do whatever is in the best interest of the organization. This speaks to the exceptional dedication and commitment of those firms that belong to the Council and further demonstrates the caliber of consultants that users have at their disposal.

Who can join?

Council membership consists of consultant firms, not individual memberships. For us to address the needs and challenges facing consulting firms as a whole, this differentiation was essential. The Council has established criteria for membership approval, which specifies that member firms must offer right of way services to the private sector.

Is there a benefit to IRWA members?

I believe there is an enormous benefit. IRWA has a large private and public sector contingency, and they are the ones that hire our member consultants. Whatever benefits and advancements are gained, we ultimately pass those on to those who have hired us, as well as those we employ who are also IRWA members. We have also become another voice in the important role of communicating industry concerns. And our voice is being heard. When we work toward a common purpose, we all benefit.

For more information, please visit www.rowcouncil.org.