

New Organizational Concept of Right of Way in New Mexico

by Bill Garner

I will open my talk with a quote from the **Right of Way Magazine**, October, 1981; "A Non-Futurist's View of the 1980's" by Charles M. Fornaci, SR/WA, Executive Vice President:

Finally, the days of the single disciplined right of way practitioner are over. A person simply cannot exist and operate effectively if the only thing we can do is negotiate, or appraise, or provide relocation assistance. We are in a multi-disciplined age, and as much as we may wax nostalgic about negotiating in the good old days, those days are over. Either we adapt to the management requirements of the 80's, or we will soon fall by the wayside, or be an "also ran".

The New Mexico State Highway Department recognized the reality of Mr. Fornaci's statement three years ago. Due to the completion of the final stages of the Interstate Highway Program in New Mexico, we found ourselves overstaffed with R/W area specialists, i.e., Relocation Assistance Officers, with little or no background in other R/W disciplines. Further, we had no comprehensive program to cross-train these people in other work areas in an economical manner. Work existed in other disciplines, such as appraisal or negotiations, but we could not immediately expect the under-utilized employee to fit in as he had little useful background in the new work area. The sins of the past had come to roost! We had been lulled to sleep by the huge

Interstate Highway Program. We had designed an organization of specialists to meet the unique requirements of the Interstate program. With the completion of the Interstate program, our organization was no longer suited to our needs. It has been made quite evident to us that we will be required to maintain large workloads and high level of expertise with far fewer people in the future. Cross training our remaining personnel has become a necessity; rather than a luxury. The question then became, how are we going to implement cross training and what are our organizational resources? In terms of education, high travel costs, and inconsistent political edicts restricting out-of-state travel professional training in New Mexico had been brought to an effective halt.

We were confronted with a joint dilemma: (1) the need to train our R/W personnel in multi-disciplines due to our smaller work force, and (2) financial limitations hampered our ability to train our personnel. Our organizational resources were found to be as follows:

1. Become more active in the local R/W Association Chapter and appraisal organizations hoping to influence and encourage in-state; and therefore, offer less expensive professional training courses be scheduled in Santa Fe and elsewhere.
2. Play upon the evident and apparent need to train our personnel in multi-R/W disciplines. Using our quite visible need as justification, we



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Garner is a native Texan and began his career with the Texas Highway Department in 1955 at Wichita Falls. He spent four years in Construction and Engineering and transferred to the Right of Way Department in 1959.

Prior to his appointment to Director in 1980, Bill served twelve years as Deputy. He has been in the Right of Way Association for eighteen years and a Senior Member since 1969. He is currently Chairman of the Highway Sub-Committee of the International Transportation Committee.

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successfully pushed through a personnel specification and salary study which had built in the requirement for multi-disciplined R/W Agents. This necessitated further educational training to comply with State Personnel Board requirements. Our personnel specifications were built to help resolve our most pressing problem — hiring and training versatile employees.

3. Fall back upon our own extensive resources of experienced and professional personnel. This resource has proven to be as important as the two prior resource areas.

In-house training is now a continuing and beneficial fact of life at the New Mexico State Highway Department. We have developed comprehensive utility and railroad adjustment courses dealing with both State and Federal regulations and construction plan reading. We believe expertise in reading construction plans and R/W plans to be a must for the R/W professional. We found that some of our personnel were lacking in these areas.

A basic real estate appraisal background is of great benefit to any R/W professional. The New Mexico State Highway Department has implemented weekly sessions whereby our personnel are required to attend and brush-up on their skills. Sessions cover everything from filling out forms correctly through appearing as an expert witness at a condemnation trial. The idea is to assist our personnel in achieving a level of performance where their narrative appraisal reports consistently pass review in a satisfactory manner; and therefore, eliminate wasteful duplication of effort.

We have sent our employees through basic technical writing and writing skills courses where basic grammar, composition and narrative skills are stressed. The idea is to eliminate jargon and help our employees develop the skills necessary to write concise and understandable reports.

While in-house training is used to sharpen existing skills, it is not used to replace the professional training offered by the IRWA or other organizations. We feel such instruction should be conveyed in a classroom setting with little outside distraction.

New employees are immediately given a self instructional plan and map reading course during their first week of employment. They are then assigned to each Unit in the R/W Section for a designated period of time which is geared to the complexity of work performed by the Unit. They are then assigned to the Unit for which they were hired to begin their on-the-job training and attendance in training courses.

During the last two years, the New Mexico State Highway Department has managed to get the following courses scheduled in Santa Fe or Albuquerque:

1. A.I.R.E.A. Course IV, Condemnation, January 11-16, 1981.

2. IRWA Course 101, Principles of R/W Acquisition (all four segments), March 30—April 10, 1981.

3. FHWA Course, Relocation Assistance Payments, May 11—15, 1981.

4. IRWA Course 203, Advanced Communication Skills, October 8—9, 1981.

5. FHWA Course, Inspection for Decent, Safe and Sanitary Housing, October 20—22, 1981.

6. IRWA Course 401, the Appraisal of Partial Acquisitions, February, 1982.

7. A.I.R.E.A. Course, Rural Valuation, in Santa Fe, in April, 1982.

As you can see, we are offering our employees extensive training in a short period of time. In each of the above courses 25 to 50% of our employees were in attendance. Also, we are attempting to vary the kind of education offered in an attempt to train well-rounded R/W Agents.



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