



A Unified Voice

Industry consultants come together with strength and purpose

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This year marks the 10th anniversary of the formation of the Right of Way Consultants Council. To understand the significance of this milestone is to understand the Council's evolution. It began in 1998 at IRWA's Annual International Education Conference in Alabama, when a handful of respected right of way consulting professionals met to vent about industry issues and offer shoulders of support, as we are known to do at these events. As the conversation turned to areas of improvement, we asked ourselves how we could better serve the needs of the consultant industry.

Collectively, we recognized the need for a unified voice - one that would elevate the professionalism of those consultants who agreed to unite and also operate as an intermediary for the users of our services. We agreed that the highest possible standard of professionalism and ethics would be a mandatory component, as this would enhance our efforts and help transform the perception among our users—that we are a profession, not a trade.

As fellow competitors, the initial challenge was getting individuals who by nature are very territorial and close-minded, to agree to meet. But given the significance of our mission, the group quickly demonstrated

that this was possible. It was sheer determination that led to more in-depth discussion, which increased participation and led to IRWA's support. The final step was a meeting with numerous leaders from the consultant community to introduce our idea and test its potential viability. That meeting occurred in September 2002 in Austin, TX, and the positive feedback led to the formation of an ad-hoc committee known as the Right of Way Consultants Council.



In formalizing the organizational structure and drafting our objectives, we recognized that becoming an independent entity would be beneficial, especially in lobbying efforts. So in 2004, the Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IRWA and formally separated from the Association. Since then, both parties have maintained a strong, viable relationship.

Over the last decade, we have successfully broken down barriers that were previously unheard of. Rather than viewing each other as competitors, Council members now see

the teaming opportunities as vital to our existence, especially during challenging economic conditions. It has joined those of us who believe in maintaining high ethical standards and creating a healthy working environment. The Council has shown its growing strength through the benefits offered to its members, including affordable professional liability insurance, education in employment accounting and practices that have saved our member firms millions of dollars collectively. It has also provided guidance in lobbying efforts and recognition by the leading agencies for whom we provide our services, including AASHTO, FHWA and states with significant work programs such as the Texas Department of Transportation.

Our voice has grown louder and is being heard by others who can make a difference. Today, our meetings are growing in attendance and membership continues to increase. Requests for action items—including a seat at the table of upcoming procurement opportunities for the Council's input—are doubling annually. Some are attainable tasks, while others will require much effort and expertise. But our history proves that nothing is out of reach. With determination and a common goal, together a few can truly make a difference.