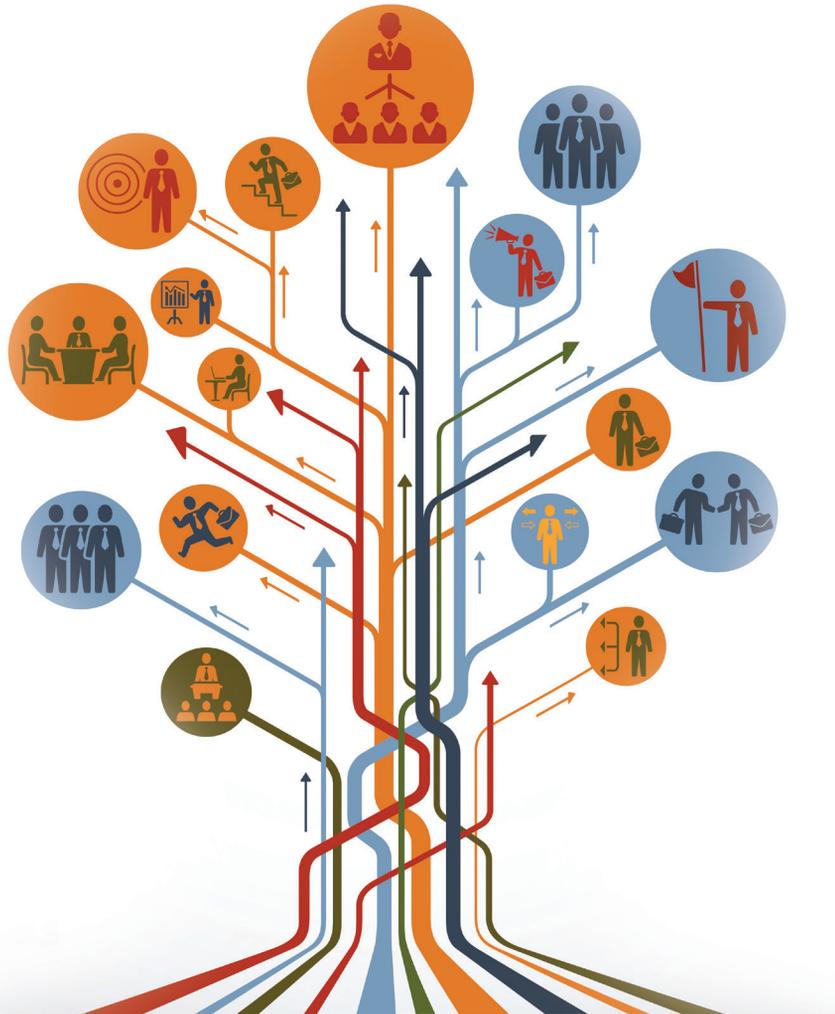


# Why Titles Matter

Adopting standardized positions can level the playing field

BY BRENT LEFTWICH



with titles such as Land Acquisition Specialist, Real Property Agent, Right of Way Agent 1 and Right of Way Consultant. While each job description has a different wording, all have overlapping roles and responsibilities. From a client perspective, inconsistent job titles make it impossible to accurately compare one company's proposal to another. The client might think the service company is placing senior personnel on their project, when in reality, the right of way agents are inexperienced and learning on the client's dime. Standard job titles come with assumed standard job skills. Without that clarity, clients are at a disadvantage when qualifying service companies, especially when Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are being reviewed and evaluated.

## Finding a Solution

In the right of way industry, all job titles have variants depending on the company culture, its internal structure and salary guidelines and even the whim of the Human Resources manager sourcing the job. It's confusing for both the client as well as the service company.

Recognizing the importance of having uniform and consistent job descriptions for commonplace jobs in our industry, the Right of Way Consultants Council (ROWCC) stepped in to tackle the challenge. The ROWCC is comprised of 43 member service companies representing a wide cross section of industry leaders and premier service providers from small, medium and large service companies. Members meet throughout the year to exchange ideas and information, and to develop and promote higher standards for the industry.

Over the last three years, the ROWCC has worked to create a standardized list of job titles and descriptions that more

**M**et Stan. He's a right of way professional with 10 years of experience, a bachelor's degree and has managed several project field offices. Now let's meet Steve. He's also a right of way professional with two years of experience and a real estate broker's license. On paper, these two employees are quite different, so you wouldn't expect them to hold the same job title. Yet in the right of way industry, Stan

and Steve can, and often do, hold the title of Lead Right of Way Agent.

As the number of service companies multiplied during the shale boom within the right of way private sector, once straightforward job titles and duties morphed into a patchwork of non-standard titles that vary significantly from one company to another. A quick search on the IRWA jobs database brings up open positions

# RIGHT OF WAY CONSULTANTS COUNCIL

## Standard Position/Classification Descriptions for the Private Sector

### ▶ RIGHT OF WAY

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**Project Manager** - Responsible for selecting a field office and overseeing all its operations while working under the direction of the client and the supervision of the service company.

**Right of Way Supervisor** - A seasoned agent working under the direction of the Project Manager who is responsible for supervising the activities of a number of agents.

**Lead Right of Way Agent** - Responsible for supervising the activities of a more limited number of agents while working under the direction of the Project Manager or Right of Way Supervisor.

**Senior Right of Way Agent** - Works under the direction of the Lead Agent or Right of Way Supervisor; possesses an excellent working knowledge of all right of way disciplines, including title, permitting, acquisition and documentation.

**Right of Way Agent** - Works under the direction of a Lead Agent or Right of Way Supervisor and is fairly experienced in the duties of survey permission, acquisition and some title research.

**Right of Way Agent Trainee** - Works under the direction of either a Lead Right of Way Agent or Supervisor to gain initial experience in the investigation of survey permission, acquisition and title research and has limited knowledge about property valuation, survey drawings and alignment sheets.

### ▶ DATA

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**Data/Document Supervisor** - Works under the direction of the Project Manager and is responsible for the supervision of the Data/Document Specialist staff and the preparation and maintenance of all forms, documents, tract and project files, database entry, status reports and /or other required reports associated with the administration of contracts for acquisition.

**Data/Document Specialist** - Responsible for tracking and maintaining all data (electronic and paper) pertaining to right of way acquisition, surface sites and permits related to the project.

**Project Clerk** - Responsible for various administrative tasks associated with the project office and project team members.

### ▶ PERMITTING

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**Permitting Supervisor** - A specialized position under the direction of the Project Manager who supervises the activities and work product of other permitting agents.

**Senior Permitting Agent** - A specialized position under the direction of a Permitting Supervisor who possesses an excellent understanding of local governmental ordinances as they relate to their project type, including which activities require permitting, permitting processes for required local government permits, state highway and county crossing permits, railroad permitting processes and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permitting requirements.

**Permitting Agent** - Has a basic understanding of local government ordinances as they relate to pipelines, municipal and county permitting processes, obtaining state and county highway crossing permits, railroad permitting processes and possibly U.S. Army of Engineers permitting requirements.

### ▶ TITLE

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**Title Supervisor** - Works under the direction of the Project Manager and reviews all title packages that are completed within their area of responsibility.

**Senior Title Agent** - A specialized position under the direction of a Title Supervisor who has a keen understanding of legal descriptions in the project area and can plot such descriptions.

**Title Agent** - Is experienced in researching surface land title and has a good understanding of legal descriptions in the project area.

**Title Reviewer** - Works under the direction of the Title Supervisor and should possess 5 years experience researching surface land title as an abstractor or Title Agent.

*For more information and an in-depth copy of the ROWCC Standard Position/Classification Descriptions for the Private Sector list, visit [www.rowcouncil.org](http://www.rowcouncil.org).*

accurately reflect the responsibilities within each position in the industry. The goals were fourfold:

- 1) Create a standardized system that would allow clients to accurately compare rates on RFPs.
- 2) Assist other service companies in determining proper personnel placements when staffing projects.
- 3) Standardize positions between service companies as people move between right of way service providers.
- 4) Provide clarity for both service companies and client companies into what skill level they should be receiving in return for their investment.

### Creating a Benchmark

To begin the process, we first examined the universe of job titles across the right of way industry. This was important so that we could create unification in both job descriptions and billing structure. The comprehensive list of job descriptions was gathered from actual member employment offerings, as well as input from members. From that huge list, the group culled it down to the most common job titles. With the more condensed profile in hand, we asked three key questions:

- Where could the job titles be more consistent?
- Were job titles based on the qualifications actually needed for the job?
- Were they classified correctly (exempt/non-exempt)?

Working together as a team, the group used company and industry data to craft uniform job titles, descriptions and levels that were appropriate and scalable across the board. At the end of this process, the group emerged with the “ROWCC Standard Position/

Classification Descriptions for the Private Sector,” consisting of 16 job titles and descriptions, along with billing rates based on qualifications, skills and merit.

Many of these 16 job descriptions conform to a hierarchical pattern (stair-step approach) where more senior positions have more experienced agents with more responsibilities than non-senior positions. This shows how a lesser position gains advancement to a senior/supervisory position by obtaining additional work experience. A brief outline of job descriptions and titles is provided and a complete list will be available online.

### Mutually Beneficial Advantages

The benefits to adopting the ROWCC Standard Position/Classification Descriptions for the Private Sector extend to both service companies and client companies. On the service side, adopting an industry accepted title structure means greater role clarity, increased accuracy in benchmarking pay competitiveness, better control of labor costs, and higher morale as employees have a clear career path and know where they stand with the organization.

For client companies, it levels the playing field and makes it easier for procurement to compare RFPs. When everyone conforms to the same language, differences in staffing and billing structure are clearly delineated. Additionally, ROWCC service company members hold themselves to a higher ethical standard, extending credibility to their proposals and a badge of authority to their experience level.

### Next Steps

In January, a panel of ROWCC members presented the proposed job descriptions to the IRWA International Oil & Gas Pipeline Committee at their meeting in Napa, California. The panel requested that attendees review the descriptions and provide feedback prior

to the ROWCC meeting in April. All members were encouraged to review the full list of job descriptions on the ROWCC website and provide comments prior to the meeting. After the comments and suggestions are reviewed, a revised list will be published.

Recognizing that re-designating titles within an organization can be a herculean task, we are not expecting every service company to drop their existing title structure and immediately adopt an industry standard model. Instead, we are advocating that there be two sets of titles—internal and external. The internal one will designate what currently exists, while the external titles align with the ROWCC Standard Position/Classification Descriptions for the Private Sector list.

Adopting standardized job titles will result in a unified culture across the industry anchored around transparency. Additionally, it can provide internal equity and external parity in terms of staffing practices. In short, industry standard job titles raise the professionalism of the right of way industry as a whole. 🌟



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