

Right of Way Industry Professions

Note: The information provided below is intended to give a general overview of the profession, the education requirements and estimated salary ranges. Salary ranges will vary by consultant or agencies.

Surveyor

Surveyors make precise measurements to determine property boundaries. They provide data relevant to the shape and contour of the Earth's surface for engineering, mapmaking, and construction projects. They also research land records, survey records, and land titles as well as look for evidence of previous boundaries to determine where boundary lines are located. Surveyors prepare plots, maps, and reports and present findings to clients and government agencies.

Land Surveyor's mark and document the location of lines per recorded documents. For example, when a house or commercial building is bought or sold, surveyors may mark property boundaries to prevent or resolve disputes. They use a variety of measuring equipment depending upon the type of survey.

When taking measurements in the field, surveyors make use of the Global Positioning System (GPS), a system of satellites that locates reference points with a high degree of precision. Surveyors use handheld GPS units and automated systems known as robotic total stations to collect relevant information about the terrain they are surveying. Surveyors then interpret and verify the results on a computer.

Although advances in surveying technology now allow many jobs to be performed by just one surveyor, other jobs may be performed by a crew, consisting of a licensed surveyor and trained surveying technicians. The person in charge of the crew, known as the party chief, may be either a surveyor or a senior surveying technician. The party chief leads day-to-day work activities.

Surveyors also work with civil engineers, landscape architects, cartographers and photogrammetrists, and urban and regional planners to develop comprehensive design documents.

Education: No formal education is required for a survey field crew member. To be a licensed surveyor, graduation in an approved survey curriculum is required. Detailed specifics for licensure vary from state to state.

Estimated Salary Range: \$30,000 (new grad) - \$110,000 (20 years experience with license)

Who hires for this profession: Survey Firms, Civil Engineering Firms, Right of Way Firms, Governmental Agencies, Utility Companies

Title Researcher

A Title Researcher is responsible for researching all available records from the appropriate County Court House to identify all parties and/or entities having any type of ownership interest in the property that is to be acquired. A set of Right-of-Way Construction Plans are used to identify the property/properties that need to be researched. The County's GIS (Geographical Information System) is then used to identify these properties, gather Tax Identification #'s, Legal Descriptions, Property Assessments, Taxing Information and a Property Record Card. The Ownership Chain of Title which will need to be searched will be taken from the Property Record Card. At this point, the search begins at the appropriate County Court House. This search needs to be a minimum of 20 years and include a thorough search of all books/computers for Deeds, Easements, Right-of-Ways, Miscellaneous, Mortgages and Judgments. After the research is complete, the work is turned over to a Project Supervisor/Manager, where it is examined and proofed for errors. The examination process includes the plotting and analyzing of legal descriptions to ensure that the correct property has been researched, any property line discrepancies were found and that there is a valid Chain with no cloud of title. The product is then ready for typing, scanning and submitting to the appropriate firm.

Education: No formal education is required. Researchers should be trained as to public record research and property transfers. Travel throughout the state is required. Project Supervisor/Manager must be able to understand Construction and Right of Way Plans and be able to draw legal descriptions in CAD, if necessary.

Estimated Salary Range: \$30,000 (new grad) - \$86,000 (20 years experience)

Who hires for this profession: Title Companies, Civil Engineering Firms, Right of Way Firms, Governmental Agencies, Utility Companies

Right of Way Engineering Technician

A Right of Way Engineering Technician is responsible for preparing the documents needed for each parcel that right of way is being acquired from. They read through the title work that is received from the title researcher to determine the property owners and any other people or companies that has any kind of ownership interest in the property that is being acquired from. They then prepare area computation forms, showing how much total land the property owner owns, and how much is being acquired for the project. They then prepare legal descriptions for the property being acquired for the project, along with a parcel plat, that depicts graphically the overall property and that part which is being acquired. They then prepare the final right of way plans which shows the proposed design elements of the project, along with the property information of the properties being acquired from.

Education: Minimum High School Diploma, but needs to be proficient in Computer Aided Drafting software (Autocad, Microstation), and have an understanding of land surveying principles.

Estimated Salary Range: \$40,000 (new grad, high school diploma) - \$90,000 (20 yrs exp)

Who hires for this profession: Survey firms, Civil Engineering firms, Right of Way firms, Government Agencies

Appraiser

A Right of Way Appraiser is responsible for determining how much money should be offered to the property owner for each parcel that is being acquired. They examine the right of way plans, read the legal descriptions of each permanent and/or temporary taking and use this information to judge the impact of a public infrastructure project on the affected property. The appraiser meets with the property owner in most cases to explain what property rights are being acquired and what is to be constructed as part of the project. The appraiser then uses traditional appraisal techniques and procedures to form an opinion about the amount of money that should be offered to the property owner as just compensation for the land, land improvements and/or economic damages that result from the subject project. The appraiser needs to have a variety of skills including the ability to read the right of way plans and engineering documents, explain these topics to the property owner, be able to apply traditional appraisal procedures in order to form their opinions about value loss, report their opinions in a written format that is acceptable to the acquiring agency and defend their opinions in a legal forum if litigation becomes necessary.

Education Requirements: a four-year education is required for appraisal licensing in the State of Indiana. Introductory appraisal courses are also required to enter an appraisal trainee program under a licensed appraiser during which experience hours are obtained.

Estimated Salary Range: \$40,000 - \$60,000 (college graduate to 5 years experience), \$60,000 - \$100,000+ thereafter. Appraisal business owner \$150,000+ depending upon experience and types of appraisals undertaken.

Who hires for this profession: Appraisal firms, Civil Engineering firms, Right of Way firms, Government Agencies

Acquisition Agent (Buyer)

An Acquisition Agent works directly with the property owner and any other individuals or entities that have an ownership interest in the property that the easement or right of way is being acquired from. The Acquisition Agent reviews the parcel documentation that is provided to them, the title report, engineering documents, right of way plans, appraisal. They confirm that the property has not changed ownership or that there is no other individuals or entities that have ownership interests in the property other than what is identified in the title report. They then prepare and present the offer package to the property owner. The offer packages identifies what land is needed for the project, what the scope of the project construction is, what dollar amount is being offered for the land needed, and what the property owners rights are either under state/federal guidelines. Then after the offer is made to the property owner, the agent works with the property owner to reach an agreement for the property owner to transfer the needed land to the owner of the project. This sometimes involves several meetings and conversations with the property owner, along with conversations with the right of way manager or owner of the project. A successful Acquisition Agent is one possesses good communication skills and is able to work with people.

Education: Minimum High School Diploma, but must hold real estate broker's license.

Estimated Salary Range: \$40,000 (new grad, high school diploma) - \$90,000 (20 yrs exp). Acquisition Agent business owner \$150,000+ depending upon experience and types of projects undertaken.

Who hires for this profession: Civil Engineering firms, Right of Way firms, Government Agencies, Utility Companies

Relocation Specialist

A Relocation Specialist works directly with any entity (individuals, families, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, advertising signs, and personal property) displaced by a Federally funded Right of Way Project under the Uniform Relocation Act (URA). The agent will work with the displacee from the appraisal inspection through the completion of the relocation including the payment of all relocation benefits. The agent also provides advisory services relevant to the move and the displacees' situation (including small business resources, moving companies, information on real estate financing, credit issues, and other issues that may arise.) Characteristics of a successful relocation agent are the ability to listen to displacee and communicate the details and requirements for relocation reimbursement. The relocation agent works closely with the displacee, their real estate agent, their lender, moving company, the displacing agency, project manager, the acquisition agent and other professionals to accomplish a successful and timely move. The relocation regulations (URA) are complex and a good understanding of them is required as knowledge of real estate law, engineering, acquisition and principles of appraising. A successful Relocation Specialist must be a people person and able to put the displacee at ease.

Education: Minimum High School Diploma, but must hold real estate broker's license.

Estimated Salary Range: \$30,000 (new grad, high school diploma) - \$80,000 (20 yrs exp)

Who hires for this profession: Civil Engineering firms, Right of Way firms, Government Agencies

Right of Way Manager

A Right of Way Manager oversees the entire process of acquiring the land needed for infrastructure improvement projects. They have a good understanding about the life of an infrastructure project, not just their process. They are responsible for setting schedules, communicating with agents, design engineering and clients to make sure the process goes as efficiently as possible. They are responsible for making sure issues are getting resolved as they come up on the project. They are a problem solver and sometimes a counselor in dealing with all of the different personalities involved in the process. They typically will have multiple projects going on at any given time, and because of that every day brings on new challenges. They make sure that agents are following the appropriate procedures and guidelines. They attend project meetings involving other disciplines of the project to address anything that would affect the right of way acquisition process for the project. They prepare status reports to provide to clients to keep them aware of how the project is progressing.

Education: Minimum High School Diploma, but needs to have some experience as it relates to the right of way industry, and a familiarity with the process.

Estimated Salary Range: \$45,000 (5-10 yrs experience in industry) - \$120,000 (20 yrs exp)

Who hires for this profession: Civil Engineering firms, Right of Way firms, Government Agencies, Utility Companies

Eminent Domain Attorney

An eminent domain lawyer typically needs to combine the qualities of a trial lawyer and a transactional lawyer. The trial lawyer will assess the facts of the case and determine strengths and weaknesses to present to a judge or jury. The transactional lawyer will negotiate and draft proposed forms of easement documents to ensure that the client is protected.

Land disputes like condemnation actions are often emotional and highly contested matters. The eminent domain lawyer must carefully and objectively grasp the most important facts, understand the legal concepts involved in the dispute and advise the client of possible outcomes and recommendations.

The eminent domain lawyer will often rely on expert witnesses as part of a case. Appraisers, surveyors and engineers will often testify at trial. The eminent domain lawyer must review their reports, discuss findings and question the supporting information for the opinions of such witnesses. Written discovery and depositions are common methods used by the lawyer to gather facts and information from opposing counsel.

Education: Bachelor's degree (any major) and law degree (Doctor of Jurisprudence) generally taking 7 total years of post-high school study. The bar exam in the State where the lawyer practices must also be successfully completed.

Estimated Salary Range: \$50,000 to \$100,000 are starting salary ranges for new attorneys who practice in law firms upon graduation. Salaries increase with experience and if an attorney is able to become a partner in a law firm or establish an independent law firm.

Who hires for this profession: Law firms (with 1 to 1,000+ attorneys), state and local governments, utility companies