



A Guide to Finding Landowners

Essential steps for contacting landowners



The ability to find landowners is an essential skill that every right of way agent needs to have. The first phase of each project that I've worked on is obtaining permission to survey. To get survey permission, you first have to find and contact the landowner. I've distinguished myself by being able to find landowners and obtain survey permissions quickly. So far, there has not been a landowner that I haven't been able to find. I've found absentee landowners across the U.S. and in China, Canada, Jordan. Below, I'll share the process that I go through when I'm searching for landowners.

After getting the landowners name and address from the tax card or line list, if possible, I prefer to drive to the address listed on the tax card. If no one is home, I leave my business card and a note to call me on the door or the closed gate to the driveway. I try to confirm with neighbors that the landowner still lives there. I ask if the neighbor has the landowner's phone number and explain why I need to contact the landowner. If a PO Box is listed on the tax card, I will drive to the property because often, the land owner will live on the property. My next step is to use an online app, such as Whitepages, Truthfinder, BeenVerified or Spokeo, to search for the landowner by his name, city and state. I call all the numbers that in the search results, including numbers of relatives that are listed. I'll also do a reverse address search and call the list of residents. By this point, I will have made contact or will have a confirmed phone number with 80% of the landowners I need to reach. These are the easy ones, the low-hanging fruit.

While making calls, I use a legal pad to keep track of the landowners and phone numbers I've called. Beside each number I call I write a code: "VM" means I left a voicemail; "Confirmed VM" means the landowner identified himself on his voice mailbox and it is a confirmed phone number; "DC" means disconnected; "WN" is wrong number; and "NA" is no answer. After leaving a voicemail, I'll send a text message to that number and write "TS" for text sent.

BY CRAIG LUDRICK





When leaving a message on a voicemail or talking with a neighbor, I tell them the name of the energy company that I'm representing, that there is a proposed pipeline that may cross land they own and how important it is that they contact me at their earliest convenience. That message usually gets their attention, and they contact me. However, there's usually one or two times on each project where I know I've left messages on the landowner's voicemail, and they won't call me back. If they aren't calling me back, then I drive to their residence.

On a few recent projects, I had a couple of landowners who would not return my calls. I've found that evenings and early Saturday mornings are good times to catch the landowners at home. In one of these cases, it was a landowner who doesn't return anyone's phone calls. When I explained the proposed project and that I needed survey permission, he quickly agreed. Another landowner who wasn't returning my calls had a PO Box, and he didn't live on the property. I did a search on the County Central Appraisal District website and found his residence. He lived in a rural area, and when I drove up to his house, I noticed a U.S. Army sticker on his pickup truck. There were dogs on the property that were barking at me, and I wasn't comfortable getting out of my truck, so I honked my horn a few times to see if the landowner would come out, but he didn't. So, I put on my bright yellow safety vest that I always wear, especially in rural areas when I'm going up to a landowner's residence, and approached the landowner's residence. The dogs were yapping, probably louder than my horn. (I always carry a can of pepper spray in the pocket of my safety vest) I knocked, and there was still no response from the landowner. After the third round of knocks, he finally opened the door and stepped outside on the porch with a look on his face that read, *why are you bothering me this morning?* I quickly introduced myself and the company I was representing and then mentioned that I noticed a U.S. Army sticker on his truck. We talked about it for several minutes and discovered we had very similar jobs in the army. His countenance and demeanor changed, and it was like we were old friends. After I explained the project, he granted survey permission and also provided the phone number of another landowner I was looking for.

When I'm making calls and talking to a family member or a neighbor, I give them the same message above, but I also reassure them that I'm not a debt collector — on the contrary, I have a check for the landowner. That is true; I provide a check to the landowner after they sign the easement agreement. This has happened numerous times. When speaking with friends

or family, I explain how the landowner would benefit from me contacting them, and in every case, they either give me the landowner's phone number or give the landowner my phone number.

After getting the low-hanging fruit by driving to the address and searching on a people finder app, I then begin searching with Google and social media for the remaining 20%. If the landowner has a distinct name, it obviously makes the online search easier. If it's a common name, try adding additional keywords such as the city or profession, if you've been able to figure that out. When searching Google or other search engines, keep an eye out for obituaries. The landowner may be deceased or listed as one of the surviving relatives. Get the names of other surviving relatives and begin doing a search with the app for their phone number and addresses. Often, the obituary will provide the city of the surviving relative. I found an absentee landowner in Canada who owned a tract of land in west Texas by contacting a relative I found in his obituary. Ancestry.com can be a good source for finding relatives of the landowner you're trying to find. This has been helpful in a few of the hard-to-find landowner cases.

Facebook and LinkedIn are the only two social media sites I use for searching for landowners. I have had a lot of success finding landowners on Facebook. However, Facebook users rarely respond to a message on Facebook Messenger from someone they don't know. I had a hard-to-find absentee landowner in Chicago who owned a tract in west Texas. I sent her several messages via Messenger, and she would not respond. However, she did call the trustee of her property at the bank and had him call me. So, the mission was accomplished. I use Facebook to scroll the landowner's posts, looking for friends and family. When searching for the landowner on Facebook, click on people in the search results and then try narrowing your search results by entering the city. Once I find the landowner on Facebook, I do a search in the landowner's friends section using the last name of the landowner. This search will display their relatives with the same last name. I then look into that person via a people finder app.

I have also found relatives and friends of the landowners by scrolling through the landowner's posts. I once found a daughter and where she lived by scrolling through the landowner's Facebook posts. I found her phone number in a people finder app, called her and she had her mother call me. In another instance, I found a picture of the landowner with her realtor at a closing. They were holding a key with the realtor's phone



number. I then called the realtor's office and explained why I needed to contact the landowner. I did find an absentee landowner in Jordan through his Yelp business listing, but I rarely use Yelp when searching for a landowner. LinkedIn works well if the landowner you're looking for is on there — I found an absentee landowner in China on LinkedIn who owned a tract of land in west Texas.

In rural/agricultural areas, think of the common places where locals gather. I was having a difficult time finding landowners in south Texas, where there were a lot of cotton farms. Many of these were absentee landowners who had leased out their land to tenant farmers. I went to the local cotton gin, and within 20 minutes, I had the names of all the tenant farmers for the tracts that I needed. The farmers gave me the phone numbers for the landowners. In rural areas, many of the landowners and farmers know each other. Asking other landowners for names and contact information of other landowners has always yield great results. I've found them to be very friendly and happy to help. It may not be a cotton gin in your area, but the local cattle auction, feed store, ranch supply or local coffee shop might be a great resource.

If the property is owned by an LLC, you'll need to get a person's name associated with the LLC. This is pretty easy to do by doing a Google search with the name of the LLC. With websites like Corporation Wiki, you can see the other businesses/LLCs associated with the landowner in the Network Visualizer section. Corporation Wiki will list the key people for the organization. Other sites, like Buzzfile, provide helpful contact information for the LLC. Often, you will still need to get out and pound the pavement when searching for landowners. I had the address of an LLC at a local bank. I had to go down to the bank and talk to two or three people to finally get to someone who provided the name and phone number of the landowner who lived in a large city two hours away. I had to physically go there to chase it down. Sometimes a registered agent will be the contact listed for an LLC. I've been able to get the phone number of the contact person of the LLC by doing a reverse address search in my people finder app and then calling the names associated with that address. I had a tract in east Texas that was owned by an LLC in Massachusetts. I did a reverse address search in my people finder app, called the phone numbers associated with that address and made contact with the landowner. Sometimes, I've had to make calls to several offices in a building to find the person I was looking for. You can also find the owner of an LLC by doing a search on the website of the Secretary of State in your state, though they typically charge a fee.

You will have success finding landowners if you are persistent, resourceful and creative. The best thing you can do is drive to the property or the residence of the landowner. I had a landowner who would not return my calls, and I finally drove to his house to make contact. He opened the door, and I had a signed easement agreement within 20 minutes. Too often, I've seen agents who are reluctant for whatever reason, to drive out and find landowners on their property, residence or business. You can knock out finding a large percentage of landowners just by showing up. The company I work for was awarded the contract to do the right of way on a project that had previously been given to another company. By the time I got on the project, the landowners had already had four different right of way agents assigned to them over the course of the project. I was surprised when one of the landowners told me that I was the first right of way agent that had showed up at his house and who he had met in person. Building rapport with landowners during this early phase will pave the way when you go into the acquisition phase of the project. When I meet with landowners, I'm always looking for areas of common interest to help me build rapport. Were they in the military? Where did they go to school? What degrees are on their wall? What books are on their bookshelf? What bumper stickers are on their vehicle? Where do they go to church? All of these things can provide information to help me connect and build trust with the landowner.

Finding landowners is my favorite part of the project. It's a challenge, and I like to see how quickly I can get it done. Remember in all your communication during this phase to be courteous and professional. You're representing your company and your client, and you want to strive to represent them well.

Let's share! Email me a tip that you have used to locate landowners, and I'll reply with an additional tip for you. You can send me an email at Craig@RightOfWayAgent.us. 📧



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