



At the Core of It All

How IAP2 values intersect with IRWA acquisition principles

BY DANITA AKENDENGUE-OGANDAGA

Public participation and effective land acquisition are crucial to any successful infrastructure project. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and the International Right of Way Association (IRWA) provide valuable frameworks for achieving these objectives. IAP2 promotes meaningful public engagement while IRWA principles guide professionals in acquiring land rights for infrastructure development. Though seemingly distinct, these two bodies share common values and principles that intersect at the core of responsible and sustainable project implementation.

The intersection of IAP2 values and IRWA principles offers a holistic approach to infrastructure development. By incorporating IAP2's values of transparency, inclusivity, accountability and respect, IRWA professionals can go beyond the technical aspects of land acquisition and create a more participatory and socially responsible process. This integration ultimately leads to more sustainable outcomes, as projects are designed with the needs, aspirations and overall respect for the community in mind.

As a power delivery consultant for Burns & McDonnell, I work on the public involvement team in collaboration with an experienced land rights team. While the public involvement field has made an indelible mark on my professional development, I have learned quickly the importance of understanding and applying the principles of the IRWA. This experience has led me to realize the fascinating confluence between these two organizations — IRWA and IAP2 — especially within the area of land acquisition and its importance to the public involvement process.

Intersections Within IAP2 and IRWA

As an organization committed to promoting public participation, IAP2 emphasizes several core values that are crucial in fostering meaningful engagement. These values include transparency, inclusivity, accountability and respect for diverse perspectives. By incorporating these values into the land acquisition process, IRWA professionals can enhance public trust and provide a voice in decision-making to affected communities.

Transparency is a crucial principle advocated by both IAP2 and IRWA. In today's society, there is an increasing demand for transparency, public participation and inclusivity in decision-making processes. Openly sharing information about a project, its objectives and potential impacts helps build trust with the public. IRWA professionals can utilize IAP2's transparency guidelines to communicate all relevant information effectively, allowing affected parties to make informed decisions.

Inclusivity, another shared value, is essential to IAP2 and IRWA principles. Both organizations recognize the importance of involving all stakeholders, especially those who may be disproportionately affected by infrastructure projects. By actively seeking input from these communities and minority groups, IRWA professionals can address potential inequities while guiding a land acquisition process that is fair and just.

Accountability is also a core value shared by IAP2 and IRWA. Both organizations stress the need for project sponsors and land acquisition professionals to be accountable to the public and affected individuals. IRWA professionals can adopt IAP2's accountability principles to create mechanisms for ongoing dialogue, feedback and evaluation of the land acquisition process, so that any concerns raised by the public are addressed promptly and effectively.

Respect for diverse perspectives is a fundamental value upheld by both IAP2 and IRWA. Recognizing that different stakeholders may have varying interests, opinions and needs, IRWA professionals can adopt IAP2's principles on respect so that all voices are heard and respected throughout the land acquisition process. By actively engaging with affected communities and considering their perspectives, professionals can make more informed decisions that align with community values and aspirations.

Respect for the Community: Using Acquisition Principles and an Engagement Framework for Language Access

One example of how respect for the community was used in acquisition to help conquer a language barrier is a recent construction project on an electrical distribution circuit. The project required equipment placement in an area that was densely populated by communities of people that included a significant number who spoke a language different from the dominant language of the region.

In this scenario, the project team — inclusive of the contractors, real estate manager, land agents and public involvement team — recognized the importance of engaging with the local community and effectively communicating project details throughout the acquisition process. Several community members were approached and provided with resources to inform them about the project. In addition, there were some residents who had concerns about the project and their concerns were exacerbated by a language barrier. To assist in bridging the language barrier

that existed while showing respect for the community, the project team took the following measures:

1 Collaborating with bilingual staff: Utilizing and collaborating with bilingual staff members who could communicate effectively with the community members who spoke the local language has been a key component to our outreach. These staff members played a crucial role in facilitating discussions, providing information and addressing concerns throughout the acquisition process.

2 Community outreach: Having a dedicated team of professionals who were fluent in the local language and shared a desire to assist in active outreach to community leaders, local organizations and individuals paid dividends. This measure was instrumental in gaining assistance from local leaders with one-on-one meetings and information sessions specifically tailored to the local language speakers. This approach helped build trust, fostered open dialogue, and helped to see that no one felt excluded by a language barrier.

3 Respect for cultural norms: Making an authentic effort to understand and respect the cultural norms and values of the community by incorporating cultural sensitivity into their communication approach and seeing that their interactions were respectful, inclusive and aligned with the community's customs and traditions are priceless engagement practices.

By incorporating these measures, our team demonstrated respect for the community and a commitment to overcoming the language barrier. They recognized that effective communication and community involvement were essential not only for successful acquisition but also for building positive relationships and long-term support from the local community.

Overall, the core values promoted by IAP2 and the principles advocated by IRWA intersect at the heart of responsible and sustainable land acquisition for infrastructure projects. By embracing transparency, inclusivity, accountability and respect for diverse perspectives, right of way professionals can help facilitate practices that keep the public meaningfully engaged in the decision-making process. This convergence of values and principles strengthens the foundation for successful project implementation, fostering trust and promoting the long-term well-being of communities affected by infrastructure development. ★



Danita Akendengue-Ogandaga is a senior public involvement specialist at Burns & McDonnell. She is an experienced and passionate strategist working with real estate, communications, project management, engineering, and construction teams on large-scale construction projects. She is a board member for the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). Danita can be contacted at dogandaga@burnsmcd.com.