





The ELEMENTS of a Successful REVIEW PROCESS

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Tips for the appraisal process

All appraisers who specialize in right of way or eminent domain work will have their reports reviewed by an administrator, a project manager, a review appraiser, an attorney or all of the above. More often than not, this process can seem stressful, and in worst-case scenarios, it can be downright contentious. There are ways to turn a potentially negative interaction into a positive, professionally enhancing experience.

A successful review process boils down to two key elements: attitude and communication.

The Beginning of the Appraisal Process

Your mindset at the beginning of the appraisal process will set the tone for all of your interactions with your reviewers and is vital to a positive experience and outcome. Firstly, remember your reviewers have their own job criteria to fulfill. Because these types of appraisals are part of a process in which taxpayer money or corporate funds and individual property rights are at stake, extra scrutiny is required. Secondly, you need the reviewers to be as thorough as possible. This will allow you to be prepared to answer any questions by the other participants involved in the right of way acquisition or the eminent domain process. If they don't understand what you did, property owners, jurors, etc. who are unfamiliar with narrative appraisals certainly won't either. The review process should be used to ensure that you present a cogent, mistake-free report enabling you to be ready to testify in an understandable manner and withstand a potentially hostile cross examination. Remember: your reviewers will have your back.

When you receive your initial assignment, contact your reviewers. Note: it is rare, but some local governing bodies do not have a review process in place at the beginning of an assignment and you will not be able to discuss anything with them prior to starting your appraisal. When you speak with your reviewer/s:

- Confirm format (federal, state, grant, etc.) and scope of work
- Get a checklist, if available.
- Ask if they would like to be included in the inspection in order to identify any unusual appraisal problems that might arise.
- Ask if there is anything particular to the individual reviewer's process
- Ask how the report for review should be communicated: Word document, PDF, hard copy, etc.
- Ask for a timeline
- Ask as many questions as you need to in order to feel that you have a clear path forward.
- Most importantly, if you receive legal instructions, make sure they are in writing, and you **MUST** save multiple copies — printed and electronic.

After the Report has been Reviewed

All reviewers will have corrections and comments on your report. Once again, your mindset is crucial. When you begin to read the reviewed report, do not get defensive. Approach the corrected report with an open mind.

When you begin the correction phase:

- Print out a copy of the corrections/comments. This will provide you with a place to make notations to keep in your work file.
- Review for clarification points.
- Contact the reviewer(s) in the specified manner to review notes. Even if these seem self-explanatory, double-check.
- Make a record of all reviewer interactions with date and time.
- Ask how corrections should be identified in the report when resubmitting. Does your reviewer want you to highlight corrections in the report? And so on.
- Make sure each resubmitted version has a current date of report.

You may have to repeat this process multiple times.



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Communicating with your Reviewers

Communication failures are most likely to occur and be exacerbated at this point in the review process. Following your personal guidelines can help mitigate problems and keep in mind:

- Reviewers have their own guidelines that they must follow, even if they seem redundant or unnecessary to you.
- Everyone has different communication styles.
- If you do not understand a comment or correction, keep asking clarifying questions. If you ask a question one way and your reviewer(s) do not understand you, try a different method.
- If you disagree with your reviewer(s), it may be because you have not explained your position as clearly as you need to and you should expand upon the verbiage in your report. Remember, if someone in the profession does not understand you, those outside of it most certainly will not.
- Try not to get frustrated because your frustration can heat up an interaction. More often than not, you will discover that everyone is saying the same thing but using a different style or approaching from a different angle.
- If the reviewer(s) loses their temper in a manner you deem inappropriate, end the conversation by saying that you need to take a break to reflect upon the comments and that you will reach back when you have done so. This will give you time to regain your composure and avoid escalating a tense situation.

Impasses

Impasses are a rarity, but they do occur. So, what happens if you fundamentally disagree with your reviewer and/or you feel that your integrity will be compromised? One option is to contact your reviewer's supervisor. Another option, particularly if it is a large project or one involving legal counsel, is to have a discussion with all those involved to explain your position. If no options for appeal are available to you, you may have to walk away. When you do, make sure that you do so in a professional manner and in writing detailing your concerns and objections.

You, as an appraiser, have the ability to convert the stressful, perhaps daunting, review process into a professionally enhancing opportunity. You can obtain new insight into complex problems and continually changing formatting procedures. You will be able to clearly explain your methodology to all participants in the right of way acquisition or eminent domain process. And should you have to testify in court, you will have confidence in your ability to discuss and defend your appraisal. All in all, your positive approach to the review experience will allow you to provide your clients and intended users with enhanced security and trust in your work product. ✪



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