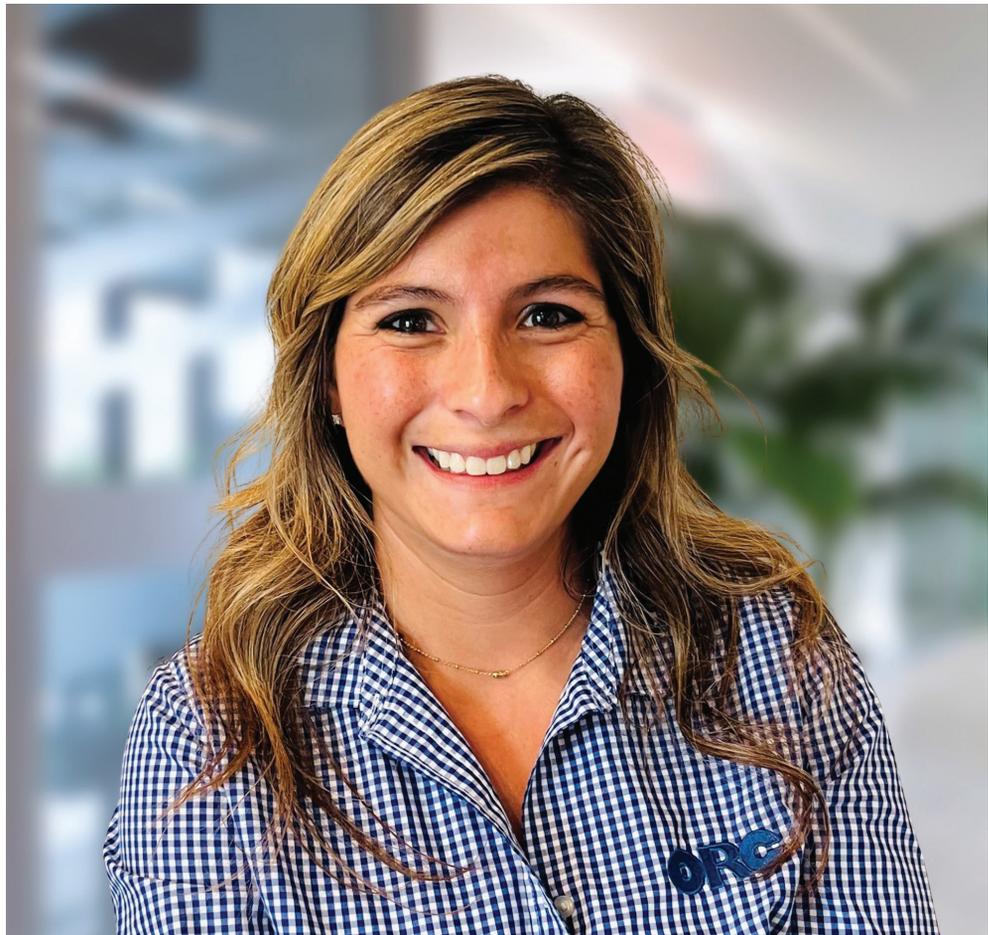




Industry Profession Series Spotlight

An Interview with Alyssia Padilla, SR/WA

BY TIARA MCCRAY, RWA, AND JANIELLE EDGE, RWA



The Clubhouse Session can be found by scanning the QR Code below:



The Young Professionals Committee, in partnership with the Eminent Domain & Right of Way Club, has developed the Young Professional’s Industry Profession Series. This collaboration shines a spotlight on the dynamic and innovative minds shaping the future of IRWA and introduces high school and collegiate students to various disciplines within the industry! In our third series event, we were thrilled to introduce Alyssia Padilla, divisional director for the Public Sector at ORC. Her passion, expertise and dedication have set her apart as a rising star. Join us as we delve into Alyssia’s journey into project management, uncovering her passion for the industry, professional milestones and valuable takeaways for all emerging professionals within our industry.



What specific skills or talents are essential for excelling in your role?

Problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills and being an active listener are at the top of my list. I approach right of way project management and acquisition with a scenario-based, problem-solving lens. This process helps me critically analyze all aspects of my projects. In addition, I'm actively listening in meetings, whether they are for pre-planning and scoping projects or during landowner interviews. I really want to understand the objectives, constraints, concerns and needs of all stakeholders involved. I continuously ask myself what's important and how I can help mitigate or anticipate possible issues. My right of way brain doesn't operate on an 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule. I am always thinking of ways to improve my team, the project or our processes. I truly love what I do, so I remain committed to my profession.

Transitioning from a ROW agent into project management, how did that shift impact your professional journey?

At first, you're a little nervous because you own the show, and failures in the project rest on you. But I am a type A person, so it was a natural role for me. I understood that success in the position came from thoroughly understanding the project elements, carefully creating an implementation plan and knowing how I wanted to run my meetings. I also had great success finding mentorship by simply asking "Can I pick your brain? How do you do what it is that you do? What works best for you? What hasn't worked? What does it take to be successful in your role?" Cultivating these relationships over the years has helped me to easily transition into my new role. I would advise others considering this discipline to remember that you're not limited to mentors within your organization. The other recommendation is don't be afraid to make mistakes! This was a hard lesson for me to learn, as I often want everything to run seamlessly, but I've learned to accept things outside of my control. Learning to accept my mistakes with grace and patience was pivotal.

In your previous role as a ROW manager, did you actively pursue opportunities to learn the different industry disciplines to increase industry knowledge and best practices?

Yes, absolutely! Early in my career, I would visit projects with our surveyors, appraisers and engineers and ask a variety of questions to ensure I had a clear understanding of the acquisition areas or key factors in value determination. I sought to absorb any information they were willing to share, and the beauty of our industry is that most individuals are open to sharing their knowledge. I've formed meaningful connections with professionals in diverse specialties who continue to serve as resources today. As a project manager, your goal is to be a Jack/Jill of all trades; enough to be dangerous, but I recognize the importance of letting experts in specific disciplines take the lead, especially given licensing constraints.

What level of education, training, certifications, or licenses are required for entry into this discipline?

IRWA credentialing and real estate licensure have been crucial for my job advancement. Within the IRWA, I completed the credentialing program, obtaining my SR/WA during May of 2022. As a director, I highly encourage staff to obtain professional designations with the IRWA, as those are highly regarded for job advancement and recruiting. Additionally, many states require real estate licensure for property acquisition, especially in public sector work. Check with your state, but employers know their state's requirements and can help you with training and a coursework plan— some even offering tuition reimbursement or sponsorship! Otherwise, I'm happy to help anyone navigate their IRWA credentialing or real estate licensure. On a personal note, it was a goal of mine last year to become an IRWA Peak Instructor. Participating in the IRWA Peak Instructor Development Training proved to be an incredibly enriching journey and pushed the boundaries of my personal and professional development. I highly recommend anyone, especially the talented YPs out there, who are looking to have a meaningful impact in our industry to apply for the next opportunity offered.





What is your favorite thing about the industry?

My favorite thing about this industry are the remarkable people I work with. I've had the privilege of connecting with incredible individuals, whether a fellow IRWA member or other professionals in the industry. I've never met people more eager to contribute to another individual's success and a willingness to genuinely foster friendships.

What is your typical day like as a divisional director with ORC?

My role has changed significantly moving from an in-house project manager in Colorado to a divisional director with ORC overseeing projects in three states and relocating to Texas. I am spending my time learning about the firm and our public agency efforts in Texas, Oklahoma and Utah. On any given day, I may be working on business development pursuits, responding to proposals, staying apprised of all our project financials, or working on active projects alongside our PMs and agents. I travel to the states and offices in my territory and attend national, regional and local events and conferences.

How do you balance your career and your family?

Admittedly, I don't know if I always get it right, and it's not always easy, but time with my family is the highest priority. When I'm at work, I focus on giving my best effort, and when I'm with my family, I try to be fully present. I'm fortunate to have a strong support system at home and work. I value flexibility and effective time management. By being organized and prioritizing tasks, I can ensure that I meet both my professional and family commitments. It's all about finding the right balance for each day and having an organized calendar!

How would you recommend others "try-out" this line of work (i.e., through a summer job, internship, volunteering, etc.)?

Exploring internship opportunities, and shadowing is the best way to go. For collegiate and high school students, I would recommend attending your school/university career and college fairs where industry professionals can tell you more about their companies.

What is the key to developing the next generation of leaders?

Telling more and more people about our awesome industry! The best advice I can give is "Don't be a secret agent, be a right of way agent!" If you currently are within the industry, I challenge you to tell everyone you know about your job and the interesting and valuable work you are doing so that more people can be exposed to it. On the firm side, attending college career fairs and providing internship opportunities can only expand our reach to the next generation. ✪



Tiara McCray, RWA, serves the Montgomery County, Maryland, Department of Transportation, as the property acquisition section chief. Since joining the IRWA in 2019, she has been recognized as a motivated leader in the right of way industry, serving the Association in International, Regional, and local leadership roles. She is currently the chair of the International Young Professionals Committee.



Janielle Edge, RWA, is a devoted right of way professional with extensive experience overseeing diverse projects for Caltrans and NCDOT. She is an alumna of the North Carolina Agriculture and Technical University, and she holds a bachelor's degree in sports science and fitness management/kinesiology. Janielle is currently the vice chair of the International Young Professionals Committee.