

FHWA Office of Real Estate Services Research Results:

Public Sector Real Estate Certification Needs Analysis

March 2006

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Executive Summary

The public sector real estate work force consists of those staff working for Federal, State, and Local Public Agencies or private consultants who work with or under The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (Uniform Act). The Uniform Act provides the framework, rules and procedures under which private property is acquired for public benefit on projects funded all or in part by Federal funds.

This public sector real estate work force is currently facing a number of challenges. These challenges include an increasing emphasis on outsourcing by public agencies, leading to the need for private sector firms to develop stronger capabilities; an aging work force; a desire to elevate the standards of the public sector real estate profession and a general lack of understanding and respect for the roles, responsibilities, and significance of real estate service activities within many Federal, State, and Local Public Agencies.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in its role as the lead agency for the Uniform Act, believes one of the ways to address these challenges is through expanded education and training programs that are linked to Uniform Act-based learning requirements. One component of such an education program is a professional certification program for public sector real estate. To assess the feasibility of defining and implementing such a professional certification program for individuals working with or under The Uniform Act, FHWA commissioned a study in the fall of 2003 to evaluate the market value of this type of professional certification.

This report summarizes the results of that research study. The study consisted of a number of steps. These steps included an inventory of current real estate licensing requirements nationally; a survey of available public sector real estate courses; detailed interviews with a number of Federal agency staff to assist in designing a web-based survey for a broader audience within the public sector real estate community; the conduct of this web-based survey and a series of three (3) focus groups to collect follow-up information to supplement the results of the web-based survey.

Through these research steps, a number of key findings were identified, including:

- **The public sector real estate work force strongly supports the concept of a professional certification.**
 - The public sector real estate workforce overwhelmingly recognizes the potential value of a professional certification. 67% of survey respondents indicated that a public sector real estate certification would be either very valuable or valuable.
 - 66% of the survey respondents indicated they would be either very likely or likely to pursue such a certification themselves.
- **Respondents believe the certification should be based on a mix of courses and work experience, which require demonstrating basic competencies in a broad set of multidisciplinary skills.**

- Survey respondents and focus group participants suggested a potential public sector real estate certification should consist of course work, a work experience component of at least 12 months in duration and an independent capstone examination.
 - Individuals pursuing the potential certification should demonstrate at least a basic understanding of the main technical competencies within the public sector real estate field including appraisal, business relocation, residential relocation, etc.
 - Individuals pursuing the potential certifications should also demonstrate competency in a number of softer skill areas viewed as critical to success in today’s complex environment. These include project management and a general overview of the project delivery process and environmental processes and requirements.
- **Implementation of a certification program will require a substantial commitment from service providers in terms of course standardization and the development of new course offerings.**
 - A number of courses are currently available to meet most of the technical competencies areas proposed for the certification such as appraisal and relocation. These courses are offered by various providers including national organizations such as the Appraisal Institute and the International Right-of-Way Association (IRWA) as well as various Federal Agencies. However, there will need to be an effort among the course providers to standardize the curriculums for these courses and to establish common standards for end of course testing.
 - Some of the technical skills courses currently available have a distinct focus on one or more market segments (for example utilities or transportation); thus, there is also a need for courses which have a broader or more general scope and better address the needs of the larger public sector real estate community versus the specific skills needed by one or two segments of the community.
 - There are very few courses readily available to address the softer skill areas with a public sector real estate focus. To support these topic areas, new courses will need to be developed and made readily available to the public sector real estate community in areas such as project management.
- **A number of administrative and transitional issues will need to be addressed to successfully implement a potential certification program.**
 - A majority of respondents to the web-based survey suggested that FHWA as the lead agency for the Uniform Act take responsibility for administering a potential certification program. However, a number of the focus group attendees also suggested the establishment of an independent organization following the model of the Appraisal Foundation as an alternative approach for managing the certification program. In addition, there are also some potential legal and policy issues that would

need to be resolved before FHWA could commit to assuming ownership of the certification program.

- Focus group participants stressed the need for developing a phase-in or transition period, with work experience credit given to current public sector real estate professionals for most competency areas.
- A number of focus group participants indicated that FHWA or other agencies would need to provide incentives to jump-start the certification program in order to ensure it gains wide acceptance. This could include setting goals for work being performed by certified staff or encouraging any outsourcing initiatives to utilize consultants providing certified staff.

Based on the strong acceptance within the public sector real estate community for the concept of a public sector real estate professional certification, the study recommended a number of follow-on actions to complete the process of defining the certification program and establish a detailed implementation plan for launching the certification program. These recommended next steps include:

- Developing a detailed curriculum for the certification program.
- Defining a multi-year implementation strategy and supporting detailed work plan.
- Establishing a marketing program to present the concept of the certification program and the results of this study to various groups critical to the success of the program including members of the public sector real estate community, national professional organizations and educational institutions.

It is also recommended that a multidisciplinary stakeholder group be established, under the guidance of FHWA for at least the interim period, to oversee these recommendations. This stakeholder group should include a mix of individuals who perform various functions within the public sector real estate community such as appraisal, acquisition and relocation, It should also be representative of the various constituencies and stakeholders of a potential certification program including Federal Agencies, State Agencies, Local Public Agencies, private sector consultants, national associations, educational institutions and other training providers.

I. Project Overview

This section provides an overview of Phase I of the Uniform Act Certification Needs Analysis project including a brief project overview, a discussion of project objectives and an outline of the project approach and methodology utilized to meet these objectives.

A. Project Background

The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (Uniform Act) provides the framework, rules and procedures under which private property is acquired for public benefit on projects funded all or in part by Federal funds. Federal, State, and Local Public Agency staff and private consultants who work with or under the Uniform Act are considered to be operating in the arena of “public sector real estate”. These individuals perform a number of roles including appraisal, negotiation with property owners, property acquisition, relocation of displaced property owners and property management of acquired real estate.

Currently, the public sector real estate profession is facing a number of business drivers. These include:

- An increasing emphasis on outsourcing of Uniform Act related work by public agencies resulting in:
 - A need for private sector partners to build staff capabilities. Initially, many private sector organizations relied on staff retiring or leaving public agencies to provide the staffing needed. However, many of these staff are now retiring for the second time from the private sector and the demand for services is becoming more than can be filled by simply relying on retirees from public sector agencies.
 - A need for public sector staff to develop new skills in contract and project management. Typically, public agency staff may have strong technical skills in their functional area such as appraisal or acquisition but not necessarily project management experience.
- An aging work force. A great number of the individuals working in the public sector real estate field are approaching retirement. Thus, there is need to attract new professionals to the field to keep up with the demand for work to be performed. Whereas in the past these new hires may have joined public agencies, a great majority of new hires into the field will likely be with the private sector. However, it is often difficult to recruit new workers into the needed disciplines due to a lack of trained individuals. Because there is an absence of a professional credential for many of the disciplines, competency assessments are particularly challenging for potential employers.
- A desire to elevate the standards of the public sector real estate profession. Public sector real estate professionals work closely with staff from a number of other professions who have professional certifications and designations. For example, public sector real estate personnel often work with registered land surveyors.

Likewise, those working with or for transportation agencies usually work very closely with professional engineers, while those working in urban development may be working with architects or landscape architects. While some parts of the public sector real estate work force have professional certifications and designations, most notably appraisers, there is not currently a universally recognized credential for public sector real estate professionals similar to the professional engineering license.

- A lack of understanding and respect for the roles, responsibilities, and significance of real estate service activities within many Federal, State, and Local Public Agencies. This situation may be due, in part, to the absence of a system that recognizes real estate service providers as “professionals.”

B. Project Scope and Objectives

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in its role as the lead agency for the Uniform Act, believes one of the ways to mitigate some of the risk associated with these business drivers is through expanded education and training programs that are linked to Uniform Act-based learning requirements. One component of such an education program is a professional certification program for public sector real estate.

To assess the feasibility of defining and implementing a professional certification program for individuals working with or under The Uniform Act, FHWA commissioned a study in the fall of 2003 to evaluate the market value of such a certification.

This project effort was divided into two phases. Phase I included the assessment of the need for a professional certification for public sector real estate professionals, an evaluation of the potential market value of this certification and recommendations concerning the steps required to implement such a certification program if appropriate. A Phase II study could have consisted of a high-level curriculum design of a certification program. The FHWA decided not to initiate a Phase II study.

The Phase I Uniform Act Certification Needs Analysis has the following objectives:

- Developing an inventory of state licensing agencies and these agencies licensing requirements including both courses required for licensure and the process for obtaining certification or approval of a course by a licensing agency as being applicable for licensure.
- Developing an inventory of existing public sector real estate course offerings by:
 - Developing an inventory of institutions offering real estate courses and a list of courses being offered by these institutions.
 - Establishing an inventory of Federal Agency public sector real estate course offerings.
 - Establishing an inventory of course offerings by various national organizations and associations.
- Assessing the market need for a public sector real estate certification by:

- Conducting a number of detailed interviews with Federal Agency staff.
- Developing and conducting a web-based survey of public sector real estate professionals to assess the market need for a public sector real estate certification.
- Conducting a series of three (3) follow-up focus groups to gather additional input and explore a variety of follow-up issues concerning a potential certification in more detail with professionals working in the public sector real estate field.
- Developing recommendations concerning the establishment of the public sector real estate certification based on the results of the surveys and focus groups. These recommendations will include an evaluation of the effectiveness of existing designation and certification programs in creating a desirable and marketable credential for existing and potential public sector real estate workers. These recommendations will address issues such as:
 - Possible curriculum components.
 - Work experience requirements.
 - Process for administering the certification.
 - Transition process for implementing the certification.
 - The potential for attracting professionals who do not work under the Uniform Act to attend public sector real estate courses as a way to expand the market for academic institutions that offer degree programs in real estate services.

As part of this analysis, the team utilized the course inventory information gathered in the earlier phases of the project to help to determine the availability of existing courses which might be a part of or complimentary with the proposed certification and to assess the extent to which organizations and institutions will need to establish new courses in order to support the full implementation of a proposed certification program.

- Defining a proposed implementation strategy and timeframe for moving forward with the proposed certification program.

The results of this research study will include action plans covering the development needs for education/training courses and for a certification program. These plans will be designed to achieve the objective of increased workforce capacity for the public sector real estate community.

The remaining sections of this report provide a summary of the findings and recommendations of this research project as follows:

- **Section II. Project Approach and Methodology.** This section provides an overview of the project approach and methodology including the survey of licensing agencies, survey of

institutions and courses, detailed interviews of Federal Agency staff, conduct of a web-based survey and follow-up focus groups.

- **Section III. Summary of Key Findings.** This section summarizes the key findings from the research study. Areas to be addressed include the market value of a public sector real estate certification, components of a potential certification, the availability of courses to meet the requirements of a potential certification, requirements for and perceptions about public sector real estate courses, and several administrative and implementation issues which would affect the establishment of a certification program.
- **Section IV. Recommended Next Steps.** Based on the strong acceptance within the public sector real estate community for the concept of a public sector real estate professional certification, this section outlines a series of recommended next steps designed to continue to advance the definition of and ultimate implementation of a public sector real estate certification program.

II. Project Approach and Methodology

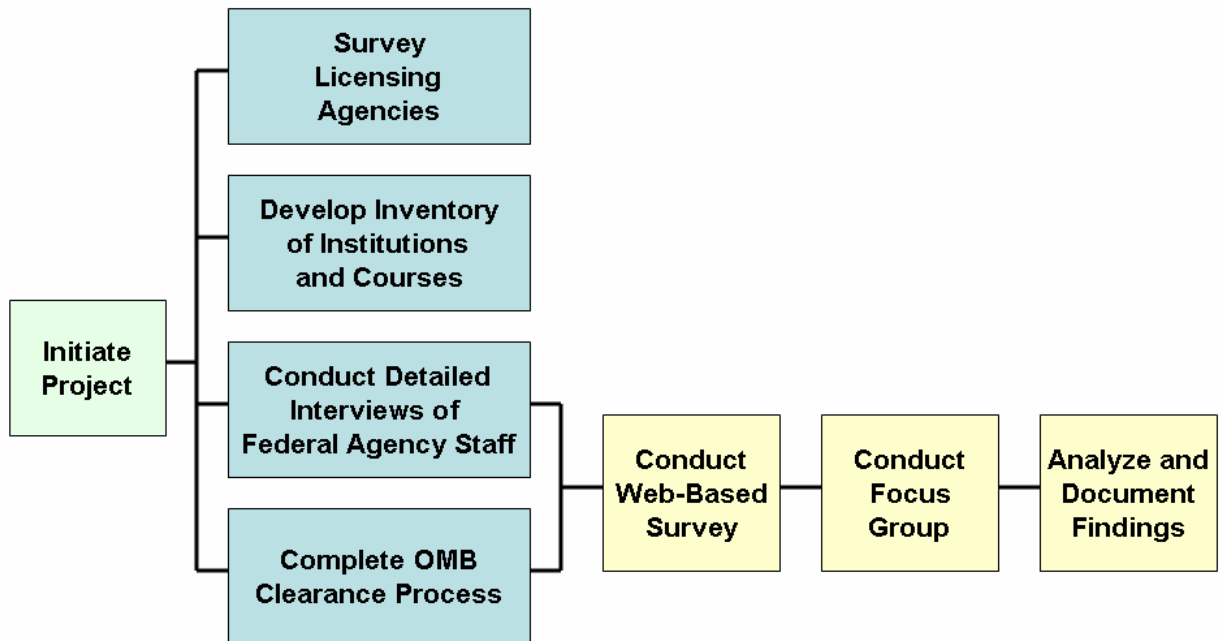
The methodology for performing the Public Sector Real Estate Certification Needs Assessment study consisted of the following primary elements and work steps:

- Survey of State Licensing Agencies
- Survey of Institutions and Courses
- Interview of Federal Agency Personnel
- Web-based Market Needs Study
- Follow-up Focus Groups

This research approach initially relied on secondary research and direct contact with Federal Agency staff while FHWA obtained Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval for the information collection process required to conduct the web-based survey and other data collection activities with individuals outside the Federal government. Following OMB approval, the researcher conducted the web-based market needs study and completed the primary research required to complete the survey of state licensing agencies and the survey of institutions and courses.

Exhibit II-1 provides an overview of this project approach. Each of the primary research techniques is described in further detail below.

Exhibit II-1: Public Sector Real Estate Certification Needs Analysis Project Approach



A. Surveys of State Licensing Agencies

Licensing agencies in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and Pacific Territories were surveyed to confirm licenses required for various real estate specialties and the associated educational and work requirements for each license. The purpose of obtaining this information was three-fold:

- To understand pre and post licensing requirements for the real estate profession generally as a point of reference for determining potential requirements for public sector real estate professionals.
- To understand the amount of pre and post licensing course work required of real estate professionals generally to help determine the potential for public sector professionals to leverage courses, which might be required for a public sector real estate certification to meet more general requirements in their home states or territories.
- To better understand the process for having courses certified by states so that any new public sector real estate courses can potentially be approved by licensing agencies so that public sector real estate professionals can apply these courses to general requirements and if so desired other non public sector real estate professionals could take these courses as part of their continuing education requirements, thus expanding the market potential for new courses.

A survey instrument captured information about real estate and other related licensing requirements including pre-licensing education requirements, licensing examination requirements, post licensing requirements and continuing education requirements.

Exhibit II-2 depicts the information collected from each state or territory licensing agency. Exhibit II-3 depicts the information collected for each type of license issued by a licensing agency in a state or territory.

Exhibit II-2: Information Collected from Licensing Agencies

Inventory of Licensing Agencies
Certification Agency Name
Address
City
State
Zip
Telephone
Fax
Website
Contact Name
E-Mail Address of Contact
Types of Licenses Regulated

Exhibit II-3 Information Collected About Specific Licensing Requirements

Inventory of Licensing Requirements
Minimum Age for License
Prelicense Education Requirements (clock hours, classroom hours)
Prelicense Education Expiration
Experience Requirements
Exam Required
Post License Education Requirements
Other Post License Requirements
Continuing Education Credits
Frequency of Continuing Education Credits
Supervision Requirements (if any)
Limitations (if any) on Scope of Work Allowed under license
Reciprocity with other states
Other general information about license

Where possible, this information was obtained from web sites of responsible licensing agencies in each state or territory. Following OMB approval of the information collection

for this study, the researcher contacted a number of these agencies as required to obtain missing information and complete gaps in the research.

B. Inventory of Schools, Institutions, and Courses

To determine the type and extent of public sector focused real estate courses available, the researcher surveyed four year colleges in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and the Pacific Territories, Federal Agencies and major national organizations, associations and institutions. The purpose of this survey was to inventory and document existing real estate course offerings in order to determine the extent to which different types of courses might already be available in the marketplace to meet requirements for a potential certification and to help in planning strategies to address any apparent gaps in course offerings.

Exhibit II-4 outlines the basic contact information which was collected from four-year colleges in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and the Pacific Territories and major national organizations, associations and institutions to inventory and document existing real estate course offerings. Exhibit II-5 outlines the information, which was collected for each of the real estate courses offered at the schools, and other organizations surveyed.

Exhibit II-4: Schools and Associations Inventory Information

Inventory of Schools and Associations
School or Organization/Association Name
Type of School (Four Year College, Community College, For Profit, Non Profit, Professional Association)
Address
City
State
Zip
Telephone Number
Fax #
Contact Name
Contact E-Mail
Website
Real Estate Courses Offered

Exhibit II-5 Course Inventory Information

Inventory of Courses
Course Name
Type of Course (Credit, Continuing Education)
Classroom/Credit Hours
Course Classification (General Real Estate, Appraisal, Broker, etc.)

As with the survey of state and territory licensing agencies, this information was primarily collected from the web sites of educational institutions and associations. In the case where all or some of the information was not available on a web site, our structured survey instrument was utilized following OMB approval to collect the information from appropriate staff at the educational institution or association through e-mail or a telephone interview.

The results from this survey are also contained in a Microsoft Access database. This Microsoft Access database has been provided to the FHWA Office of Real Estate Services, along with a set of reports for accessing the information.

C. Interviews of Federal Agency Personnel

During the summer and fall of 2004, interviews were conducted with 21 Federal Agency personnel. The staff interviewed performed either real estate roles in their Agencies or were responsible for the conduct of real estate training in their Agency. Interview topics included:

- Training courses offered by various Federal Agencies.
- The extent to which individuals take advantage of public sector real estate course offerings.
- Perceptions about the value of currently available public sector real estate course offerings.
- Perceptions about the value of a public sector real estate certification.
- Insights concerning the curriculum and other components of a potential Uniform Act certification.

The information received from the interviews was a primary input into the design of the web-based survey.

Exhibit II-6 provides a summary of the interviews conducted by Federal Agency. Appendix A contains a copy of the structured interview questionnaire utilized for these interviews. Appendix B provides a summary of the findings from these interviews.

Exhibit II-6: Summary of Federal Agency Interviews

Agency	Number Participants
Federal Highway Administration	7
Housing and Urban Development	3
General Services Administration	2
Federal Aviation Administration	1
Department of Agriculture	1
U.S. Forest Service	1
Bureau of Land Management	1
U.S. Navy	1
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	1
Bureau of Reclamation	1
National Park Service	1
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	1
Total	21

D. Web-based Market Needs Survey

The researcher conducted a web-based survey of public sector real estate personnel during March and April 2004. A total of 175 public sector real estate professionals from the FHWA Office of Real Estate Services, FHWA Division Offices, other Federal Agencies, state transportation agencies, large local public agencies and private sector firms performing work for public agencies received e-mail invitations to take the survey, with additional follow-up reminders sent via e-mail as appropriate.

Appendix C contains a hard copy version of the Market Needs Survey. The survey covered a number of areas, including:

- Perceptions about public real estate course offerings including:
 - Previous public sector real estate courses attended and the respondents' perceptions about the value proposition of these courses.
 - Perceptions about the types of additional course, which are needed but not currently available in the marketplace.
 - Decision criteria utilized for determining what kinds of courses staff members can attend (manager and supervisor respondents only).
- Perceptions of the market value of a potential public sector real estate certification and how likely the respondent would be to pursue a potential certification themselves.
- Input on the specific components of a potential certification including:

- Types of courses or skills, which should be included in a potential certification.
- Whether course work only or work experience or both should be required to obtain a certification.
- Whether an independent capstone examination should be required.
- Perceptions about what organization or agency should administer the potential certification.

A total of 134 individuals responded to this survey for a response rate of 76.57%. Exhibit II-7 provides a break out of survey respondents by type or category of employer.

Exhibit II-7: Web-based Survey Responses by Employer Category

Agency	Number Participants
FHWA	38
Other Federal Agencies	34
State Departments of Transportation	34
Private Sector Firms	24
Local Public Agencies	4
Total	134

A reasonable response to the survey was received from all groups except local public agencies, with a slightly higher mix of Federal responses versus non-Federal responses than anticipated.

E. Focus Groups

Three (3) focus groups were conducted as a follow-up to the web-based survey. These focus groups were convened in May 2005 in the following locations:

- Austin, Texas on May 18, 2005.
- Washington, DC on May 26, 2005.
- Baltimore, Maryland on May 27, 2005.

Appendix D contains a copy of the focus group agenda.

The Washington focus group consisted of the attendees at the regularly scheduled Interagency Coordination meeting and consisted of representatives of several Federal agencies. The Austin and Baltimore sessions consisted of invited public sector real estate professionals. These invitations were extended by the project team based on a number of factors designed to obtain a reasonably representative mix of participants including varying

degrees of work experience, different functional roles and different types of stakeholders and/or employer organizations (Federal, State, Local Public Agency, private sector firms and training providers).

Exhibit II-9 provides a profile of the focus group attendees by location. Exhibit II-10 breaks down by Federal Agency the representatives who attended the Washington focus group.

Exhibit II-9: Focus Group Attendees by Employer Category

Agency/Function	Total	Austin	Washington	Baltimore
FHWA Division Realty Officers	3	2		1
FHWA Headquarters staff	2	-	2	-
Other Federal Agencies	10	-	10	-
State Departments of Transportation	7	3	-	4
Private Sector Firms	6	5	-	1
Educational Institutions/Training Providers	2	1	-	1
Local Public Agencies	-	-	-	-
Total	30	11	12	7

Exhibit II-10: Washington Focus Group Attendees by Federal Agency

Agency	Number Participants
Housing and Urban Development	3
FHWA National Highway Institute (NHI)	2
GSA	2
Department of Agriculture	1
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	1
Federal Aviation Administration	1
Department of Energy	1
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	1
Total	12

This section summarizes the key findings from the Public Sector Real Estate Certification Needs Analysis. The findings are organized into the following groupings:

- Market value of a public sector real estate certification.
- Components of a potential certification.
- Availability of public sector real estate courses to meet the requirements of a potential certification program.
- Feedback about existing public sector real estate courses and expectations about any new courses to be developed.
- Implementation considerations, which could affect the establishment of a certification program.

Each grouping of related findings is presented in more detail in the subsections below.

F. Market Value of a Uniform Act Certification

Both respondents to the web-based survey and focus group participants strongly supported the concept of developing a Uniform Act or public sector real estate focused professional certification.

Exhibit III-1 shows that 67% of survey respondents believe that a public sector real estate certification would be either very valuable or valuable and another 19% considered such a certification somewhat valuable.

The perceived value of a public sector real estate certification is also consistent across respondents based on their role within their organization (manager, supervisor or staff). Exhibit III-3 provides a breakout of respondents' perceptions of the value of a potential certification based on role within their organization.

Exhibit III-3: Perception of the Value of a Public Sector Real Estate Certification by Respondent Level in Their Organization

	All Responses	Manager or Above	Supervisor	Staff
Very Valuable	29%	29%	36%	27%
Valuable	38%	43%	21%	34%
Somewhat Valuable	18%	13%	21%	25%
Limited Value	8%	5%	7%	12%
Little or No	5%	7%	7%	3%

Value				
N/A or No Response	2%	3%	7%	0%
Total Responses	134	76	14	44

This finding was somewhat surprising given the larger number of managers and supervisors in the survey population who given their substantial work experience might be less inclined personally to pursue a certification. This finding itself tends to underscore the perceived value of the certification and is potentially an indication that senior public agency staff believes that such a certification would be important to have if they are planning on pursuing a post retirement career with a private sector consulting firm.

Further, Exhibit III-5 on the page below indicates that 90% of the respondents classifying themselves as manager or supervisors indicated that they would be either very likely or likely to be supportive of a staff person pursuing a certification.

The findings from the web-based market survey are consistent with the feedback received in the three focus groups concerning the potential value of a public sector real estate certification. Focus group participants indicated that, a certification that is broadly defined to provide managerial level proficiency in the various acquisition disciplines would be a valuable integrator during the project development process. In addition, there was significant discussion in two of the three focus groups about the lack of recognition for the real estate discipline in an engineering based organization, which several participants believed is linked to the perception on the part of the engineering staff that there are lower hiring standards for real estate professionals. It was believed by the focus group participants that a professional certification would help to reduce these perceptions about lower hiring standards and would help to enhance acceptance for the real estate staff within engineering or technical organizations.

While projections for the future size of the public sector real estate field (and consequently ongoing demand for a potential public sector real estate certification) were not specifically included as part of the research conducted for this study, it is reasonable to extrapolate that the need for public sector real estate professionals who would pursue a potential certification program will continue to grow over the foreseeable future.

Based on the experience of the research team; the market needs survey results; findings from the follow-up focus groups and additional research on the future of public sector real estate currently being conducted as part of a separate project, the research team would offer the following anecdotal observations:

- Public sector project work (transportation, public housing and other public benefit projects) should continue to grow in budget terms by at least a minimum of 10% a year for the foreseeable future. This assumption is based in part on the funding levels in the recent Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (Safetea-Lu).

- The existing public sector real estate work force is aging. This is especially true of staff employed by State and Federal Agencies. Thus, there will be a need for new staff to replace the current work force and manage the anticipated growth in public sector real estate work.
- The nature of projects are expected to be at least as complicated in the future, if not more complicated, due to more projects being in urban or suburban areas with existing infrastructure, residences and businesses. This will lead to more complicated acquisition and relocation activities and require staff with the necessary training and experience to perform this work.
- Where public agencies were the primary employer of public sector real estate personnel in the past, a larger percentage of public sector real estate personnel in the future are likely to be employed by private sector firms performing work on behalf of public sector organizations.
- Private sector firms have relied extensively on retiring public sector employees who want to continue to work for several more years to meet their needs for highly experienced staff to execute contracts for public agencies. Private sector firms will not be able to count on the availability of these highly experienced workers in the future and will need to do substantially more internal development of staff or better leverage education and training programs from universities, community colleges and other organizations.

G. Components of a Public Sector Real Estate Certification

This subsection summarizes findings concerning the components of the curriculum for a public sector real estate certification. This includes both findings about the balance between course work and work experience, the need for an independent capstone examination and the specific skill sets or competencies that an individual seeking a certification should demonstrate.

The major findings in this area include the following items.

- 1. Based on the results of the survey and discussions in the focus groups, there is substantial agreement that a public sector real estate certification should require course work, some level of work experience and an independent capstone exam.**

Discussion in all three (3) focus groups for the most part mirrored the survey results. The focus group attendees generally expressed that any certification needed to reflect both classroom accomplishments and experience. Mixing course work with on-the-job work activities to prepare for some form of a capstone exam was thought by focus group participants to probably be the best way to demonstrate mastery of the qualifications needed for certification. In terms of what the right amount of work experience might be, 90% of all respondents indicating that work experience should be required believe that 12 months or more work experience should be required

2. Survey respondents and focus group participants believe that any public sector certification should consist of both a mix of technical disciplines/skills and a set of softer skill areas integral to public sector real estate.

Soft skills is intended to describe those skill sets identified by survey respondents that are not specifically technical in nature (i.e. business relocation) that were identified by market needs survey respondents and focus group participants as being essential skills for public sector real estate staff to have regardless of their specific technical discipline (i.e. appraisal, acquisition, relocation, etc.).

For purposes of the study, the research team defined soft skills to include:

- General knowledge areas specific to public sector real estate such as:
 - General knowledge of the Uniform Act.
 - General knowledge of the overall project delivery process and the role of public sector real estate in this process.
 - Overview of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.
- General management and core staff developmental skills such as:
 - Project management.
 - Oral and written communication skills.
 - Effective negotiation.
 - Effective people skills including working with difficult people and team building.

Some of the soft skill areas such as oral and written communication skills and people skills were not specifically identified as possible choices in the market needs study. However, the importance of these soft skills was consistently emphasized by a number of focus group participants at all management levels across the three follow-up focus groups.

Exhibit III-8 on the page below shows that while technical disciplines and skills appropriate to public sector real estate rank very high on the list of skills for a certification, several other managerial oriented skills are also viewed as extremely important. These softer skill sets include overviews of the project delivery process, environmental processes and requirements, and project management.

The emphasis on project management skills is very important given the increased outsourcing of work by public sector agencies. Public agency staff will need experience managing projects and/or contracts to oversee outsourced work, while staff joining private sector organizations will likewise need these skills.

The importance placed on an overview of the project delivery process and environmental processes and requirements is especially critical for individuals working for or with transportation agencies. It is a best management practice to involve real estate staff as early as possible in the project delivery cycle in order to be able to identify and mitigate potential project risks or cost impacts related to right-of-way-acquisition. The more understanding real estate staff have of the entire project delivery process, the more effectively they will be able to participate as an equal partner in the project delivery process.

The focus group participants were even much stronger on the need for a mix of technical skills and managerial skills than the survey respondents were. Several focus group participants indicated that strong people skills, effective communication skills and the ability to manage projects effectively were much more important than specific technical competence. One state department of transportation right-of-way manager even indicated that their state had recently changed many of the job requirements for real estate positions to adjust the desired skill mix to put less emphasis on technical or discipline specific skills.

In addition, several focus group participants also indicated that the skill level required in the technical acquisition disciplines should be established at an introductory or basic level. These participants stressed that a certification should focus on providing a generalist credential indicating that the individual has a broad background in and a solid understanding of the concepts of public sector real estate. It was believed that existing programs and certifications already provide opportunities for individuals to demonstrate mastery in specific functional areas such as appraisal or relocation.

H. Availability of courses to meet the requirements of a potential certification program

This subsection summarizes findings concerning the availability of courses in the marketplace to meet the requirements of a potential public sector real estate certification program and actions, which may be required to address some gaps in course coverage.

1. Implementation of a certification program will require a substantial commitment from educational institutions, national organizations and other training service providers in terms of course standardization and consistency.

A number of courses are currently available to meet most of the technical competencies areas proposed for the certification such as appraisal and relocation. These courses are offered by various providers including national organizations such as the Appraisal Institute and the International Right-of-Way Association (IRWA) as well as various Federal Agencies such as FHWA's National Highway Institute or the Realty Academies sponsored by a number of other Federal Agencies. However, there still needs to be an effort to increase the standardization of the curriculums for these

courses to be consistent with the baseline to be established for the certification curriculum and to establish common standards for end of course testing.

One of the concerns discussed in some detail during two of the focus groups involved the wide variations in quality of some of the courses offered by national associations and/or their local chapters. Participants expressed that too often the quality of the course was directly dependent on the quality of the instructor and the teaching style of that person. In addition, several examples were given where end of course tests were not consistently administered so as to allow the tests to provide a true indication of whether or not a student had actually mastered the material covered in the course.

2. Many of the courses currently available have too narrow a focus for some potential participants in a public sector real estate certification program.

Several focus group participants raised the issue that a number of the courses currently available in the market place, while potentially intended to broadly cover a topic area, are very narrowly focused on transportation and/or utilities making them less meaningful to many potential participants.

3. Additional course development will be required to address the softer skill areas with a public sector real estate focus.

There are a number of providers who market project management training and provide course offerings geared towards helping students achieve their Project Management Professional (PMP)[™] certification from the Project Management Institute. While these courses will provide generalist project management training, there are very few courses available focusing on project delivery, project management, environmental processes or other related processes from a public sector real estate context. One exception is a recent course on Project Management for Public Sector Real Estate recently offered by Baltimore County Community College in Maryland. Consequently, to support a public sector real estate certification, several new courses will need to be developed and made readily available to the public real estate community in areas such as project delivery, environmental processes, and project management for public sector real estate professionals.

4. Many of the courses required for State licensing are not generally applicable to a public sector real estate certification.

The survey of the 54 states and territory licensing agencies conducted as part of this research study indicated that there is little correlation between the courses required for licensure and those courses viewed by survey respondents and focus group participants as being most applicable to a Public Sector Real Estate Curriculum or Certification.

Typical requirements for licensing as an appraiser include course work such as basic appraisal, residential appraisal, overview of the Uniform Standards of Professional

Appraisal and appraisal report writing. Typical broker course requirements include such courses as real estate law and practice; contracts and regulations and trust accounts and record keeping.

The market needs study and the follow-up focus groups, however, indicate that public sector real estate professionals require a different set of skills including:

- General knowledge of the requirements of the Uniform Act.
- At least a baseline knowledge of topics such as residential and business relocation regardless of the specific area of emphasis within public sector real estate
- General knowledge of the overall project delivery process and the role of public sector real estate in this process.
- Overview of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.
- General management and core staff developmental skills such as:
 - Effective negotiation.
 - Project management.
 - Oral and written communication skills.
 - Effective people skills including working with difficult people and team building.

I. Feedback about existing public sector real estate courses and expectations about any new courses to be developed

This subsection summarizes the research findings in terms of perceptions about existing public sector real estate courses and expectations about any new courses to be developed. This feedback will be of special importance as educational institutions, national associations and other training providers update existing courses or design new courses to meet specific requirements in a certification program.

1. A limited number of specific public sector real estate courses are available from colleges, associations and other non Federal agency providers

Of the 182 institutions in the database, three (3) non-government institutions specifically offer courses that are principally designed for and marketed to public sector real estate professionals. These institutions are Baltimore County Community College, Delaware Technical and Community College and the International Right-of-Way Association.

An additional eight (8) non-public institutions offer courses which while not completely focused on the public sector have the public sector as a key or principal target market for the course. These include the American Society of Appraisers, American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, the Appraisal Institute and several Appraisal Institute chapters, the Columbia Real Estate Institute (“Easements and Right-of-Way”) and the National Society of Professional Surveyors.

Exhibit III-9: Analysis of Public Sector Real Estate Course Offerings by Provider Type

Category	Institutions	Courses
Non-Government Institutions Offering Courses with a Specific Public Sector Real Estate Focus	3	16
Non-Government Institutions Offering Courses with a Significant Emphasis on Public Sector Audience	8	37
Government Agencies or Private Sector Organizations Contracted on Behalf of Government Agencies	7	28
Total: Public Sector Orientation or Significant Focus	18	81
Total: Survey Database	182	748

- 2. In general, public sector real estate courses, that are currently available, are considered an excellent return on investment.**
- 3. There is some concern about the variability of the quality of courses offered by national institutions.**

As discussed above, there was an extensive amount of discussion in two of the focus group sessions about some inconsistencies in the quality and delivery methods of courses offered by national associations. There was also recognition by the focus group participants that there are efforts underway, for example by the IRWA, to revise and strengthen where appropriate their entire curriculum.

4. Consistent with the recommended components of a certification, public real estate staff are interested in new course offerings, which go beyond technical acquisition and appraisal disciplines.

While there is interest in new courses being developed in traditional public sector real estate disciplines, there is also significant interest in courses being developed for softer skill topic areas directly applicable to public sector real estate such as a Uniform Act Overview, environmental process overview and fundamentals of project delivery/project development.

5. Public sector real estate professionals strongly prefer instructor led courses, but recognize that travel and other cost restrictions will require greater use of distance learning concepts.

Focus group participants strongly indicated a preference for classroom based, instructor led training. At the same time, representatives from several state departments of transportation indicated that both course cost and travel cost were limiting their staff's ability to attend training. Thus, there was a recognition that for future courses, distance learning, while less preferable, may be more cost effective.

J. Implementation considerations related to a potential certification program

This subsection describes some of the potential implementation considerations related to a public sector real estate certification. The findings in this area include the following.

1. A large number of survey respondents recommended that FHWA take the lead role in administering a public sector real estate certification, while a number of focus group participants suggested an independent foundation be established.

49% of respondents suggested that FHWA assume the lead role in administering a public sector real estate certification, while 29% recommended a consortium of professional real estate organizations.

Many of the focus group participants, on the other hand, suggested that an independent organization would be the most appropriate group for administering a certification. Participants in the Austin focus group, for example, suggested that the Appraisal Foundation and the Appraisal Standards and Certification programs could be a good model for a public sector real estate certification.

In addition, concerns were expressed by a number of study participants about potential legal liability based on FHWA's administering the certification.

Twelve (12) of the 134 respondents provided specific comments on the most appropriate approach/method for organizing and administering a proposed Public Sector Real Estate Certification program. An inventory of the comments made by market survey respondents on this topic are provided below.

“FHWA should have significant input/control over curriculum elements and development. Courses should be available in each state w/some being somewhat generic, ex. Basic Appraising, Basic Negotiations etc.”

“Unless there were some Federal law mandating a certification of sorts, the value of such a certification would be dubious. The idea of right of way people being professionals is an "in-house" understanding generally not shared by the rest of the transportation community. A new piece of paper will not change their minds.”

“This is a great opportunity for FHWA to take the lead and to develop and maintain a high quality, well respected certification program.”

“The IR/WA does a good job in reaching their own members but there are lots of LPA's that are not in the IR/WA loop and never hear about training. An independent consortium might be able to target that audience. Also for people who are not already in the field, colleges offer an opportunity for students to enter the field.”

“FHWA and IRWA offer very good training. Structuring the existing courses by these two entities into a formal curriculum would be adequate to serve as a basis for certification.”

“A Uniform Act certification by FHWA as Lead Agency for the Uniform Act is long overdue. FHWA certification should put an emphasis on using FHWA courses, however, other courses should also be applicable to achieving the required coursework. Any other courses FHWA considers should be highly scrutinized by a panel of Federal technical experts in the Uniform Act. Panelists should include technical experts from government agencies outside of FHWA. Remember to gain a certification, candidates need to realize and understand the context of applying the Uniform Act to other Federal programs outside of the Federal Aid Highway Program.”

“The IRWA is the only organization to currently offer this type of designation: the SR/WA designation. IT should be promoted and expanded; another designation is NOT needed. IRWA should have just kept ONE designation instead of implementing their "alphabet soup" of certification specialties, etc... That might help the egos of some people who get them, but its all too confusing for users of services. All doctors, regardless of specialty, are an M.D.; the same thing with accountants - CPA (even if they do personal accounting or corporate). Similarly, an appraiser who appraises office buildings has an MAI but still has the same designation if condo developments

are appraised. ONE UNIFORM ACT FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION IS NEEDED - use the SR/WA as the vehicle to promote this."

"Pursuing an advanced designation from the International Right of Way Association might be easier to implement. I'm a member of that organization."

"The issue of a Uniform Act focused professional certification is something I can not see a Federal agency administering. There are always issues of differences between State DOT's on implementation issues as well differing issue among the Federal agencies. How to you administer, recertify, etc. This is a private (non-government) issue."

"Additionally, for the certifications being asked about, I feel they would they would be of more substance if the FHWA strongly encouraged public sector clients to require or reward more on proposals for those with such certifications."

"Public sector real estate training, as currently constituted, is adequate in my opinion. The IRWA and similar professional organizations such as the Appraisal Institute, have addressed the need for basic and continuing education within the various disciplines. A focused Uniform Act Certification however, should consolidate these diverse efforts into a more relevant program."

"I think the UA Professional Certification is critical to the continued success of the program. Our experience in hiring people with basic appraisal skills has been less than satisfying and finding other UA skills in our market place is virtually impossible. That, coupled with the move toward using off-season construction personnel for ROW negotiations opens the door for some problems. I strongly support the UA certification programs and would recommend looking to IR/WA cert programs as a model."

2. A number of focus group participants suggested the need for a phase-in or transition period to allow existing public sector real estate professionals to grandfather in for all or some requirements of a certification.

The web-based survey suggested that almost 66% of respondents would personally pursue a public sector real estate certification. During the focus groups, however, some of the participants did express the need for establishing a phase-in period for existing professionals during which experienced professionals could grandfather in for all or some requirements. This issue will need to be explored in more to determine what requirements could be grandfathered and whether existing professionals should demonstrate mastery just by documenting experience or by taking the capstone examination.

3. A number of focus group participants indicated that FHWA or other Agencies would need to provide incentives to jump-start the certification program in order to ensure it gains wide acceptance.

Focus group participants believe that some agencies and some staff will need a little extra motivation to make achieving the public sector real estate certification a priority. Suggested incentives from the focus group participants included:

- Establishing Federal, State and/or Local Agency goals for the percentage of work being performed by certified individuals.
- Encouraging public agencies to require or give preference to contractors providing certified staff.
- Encouraging Agencies to revise job descriptions to make a public sector real estate certification a requirement for new hires and/or promotions within the real estate function.

4. It is anticipated that the existing IRWA certification programs and course offerings should be complimentary with any proposed public sector real estate certification program.

The offerings of the International Right-of-Way Association (IRWA) were analyzed by the research team as part of this study from a number of perspectives. This includes reviewing and assessing the role of the IRWA as:

- A provider of an existing certification program.
- A model for how a new certification program could be established and governed.
- A primary provider of public sector real estate oriented courses.

IRWA management was interviewed as part of the research process and various IRWA materials were reviewed in compiling the database of course offerings and in understanding the composition of the current IRWA certifications.

The findings from the market needs survey and the follow-on focus groups provided several insights in terms of how the IRWA's existing and planned offerings compliment and integrate with a potential public sector real estate certification. These findings include:

- IRWA is a leading provider of existing courses which would meet many of the proposed requirements for a public sector real estate certification.
- IRWA would likely continue to be a significant if not leading provider of courses which individuals would take towards meeting the requirements for the proposed public sector real estate certification.

- Courses which IRWA offers towards their own certification program(s) could likely also count towards a proposed public sector real estate certification.
- IRWA's existing course offerings were viewed by the focus group respondents as more focused on the transportation and utility segment within public sector real estate and are viewed as potentially less applicable to other public sector real estate professionals. This comment was also made by several respondents to the market needs survey in the additional comments section. The research team understands that the IRWA is working to address these perceptions as part of its strategic review of its education offerings.
- IRWA's existing course offerings were viewed by the focus group respondents as not necessarily being consistent nationally in terms of course content and instructional approach and methodology. The research team understands that the IRWA is working to address these perceptions as part of its strategic review of its education offerings.

III. Recommended Next Steps

Based on the strong acceptance within the public sector real estate community for the concept of a public sector real estate professional certification, the researcher recommended next steps designed to continue to advance the definition of and ultimate implementation of a public sector real estate certification program. These next steps include:

- Establishing a multidisciplinary stakeholder group to oversee the recommended next steps.
- Developing a detailed curriculum for the certification program.
- Defining a multi-year implementation strategy and supporting detailed work plan.
- Establishing a marketing program to present the concept of the certification program and the results of this study to various groups critical to the success of the program including members of the public sector real estate community, national professional organizations and educational institutions.

A. Establishing a multidisciplinary stakeholder group to oversee these recommended next steps.

A multidisciplinary stakeholder group should be established to oversee the other recommended next steps. This stakeholder group should include a mix of individuals who perform various functions within public sector real estate such as appraisal, acquisition, and relocation. It should also include representative of the various constituencies and stakeholders (Federal Agencies, State Agencies, Local Public Agencies, private sector real estate agencies, professional associations and educational providers) who will be critical to successfully implementing a certification program. In addition, since there was limited Local Public Agency input into Phase I, it is strongly recommended that at least one of the stakeholders be a representative of the realty function at a medium to large Local Public Agency. This Local Public Agency participation is critical given the large number of public sector real estate professionals who work for Local Public Agencies.

This stakeholder group should operate under the leadership of FHWA, as the Lead Agency for the Uniform Act, for at least the intermediate term while an approach for administering the program is finalized.

This stakeholder group will be responsible for reviewing the proposed certification curriculum and the associated implementation strategy/plan. This group should also act as champions or change agents for this effort, including assisting with execution of the stakeholder and public outreach programs.

B. Developing a detailed curriculum for the certification program

This recommendation involves taking the general outline of the certification program established based on the findings of the Phase I study and developing a complete outline of the curriculum and other requirements for a proposed certification program.

The working assumptions to be utilized in developing this detailed curriculum include:

- The potential certification program will require demonstration of a general level of understanding and competency of a number of skill areas integral to public sector real estate as identified in the market needs study and focus groups.
- The potential certification program will consist of education and work experience requirements of at least 12 months, as well as an independently administered capstone examination.
- The certification will be administered by an independent foundation chartered by numerous stakeholder groups involved in the public sector real estate community. This assumption is based on suggestions received from focus group participants to utilize an independent foundation and some potential legal and policy issues if FHWA directly oversees the certification program. It is assumed in the interim, however, that FHWA will continue to lead the immediate next steps while the specific composition and structure of an independent group is finalized and a plan for implementing this organization is established and initiated.

The detailed curriculum being developed under this recommendation will include the following elements:

- Definition of specific courses or skill competencies to be required.
- Definition of which courses/skills will be required versus which ones may be electives from which a certain number of courses or hours should be selected.
- Specification of the number of course hours to be required.
- Development of specifications and course hour or credit hour requirements for each course or skill element.
- Definition of the work experience requirements.
- Specification of the general framework for the capstone examination including form, style, test length and method of administration.
- Establishment of guidelines for exempting or waiving experienced personnel based on work experience during an initial transition period.

It is envisioned that this curriculum will be developed in a collaborative manner, leveraging the insights and experience of the stakeholder team described in Section IV.A above. Work steps will include:

- Group discussion or interviews with stakeholder team members to further define requirements.
- Development of a draft curriculum by the consultant assisting FHWA based on the identified requirements.
- Review and discussion of the draft curriculum by the stakeholder team. This review can take place remotely through collaboration software and/or in on-site workshops.
- Updating and finalizing the work products by the consultant based on input received from the stakeholder team.

C. Defining a multi-year implementation strategy and supporting detailed work plan

This recommendation involves developing a three to five year implementation strategy and supporting detailed plan for launching the proposed certification program based on the completed curriculum design. Some elements of the implementation strategy could include:

- Defining recommended goals that could be phased-in at the Federal, State or Local level concerning the percentage of the Agency's program being executed by certified professionals.
- Developing recommended language for use by public sector agencies in making potential updates to job descriptions in order to establish being a certification holder as either a requirement or a highly desired attribute for various public sector real estate positions.
- Defining a detailed schedule for launching the certification program including:
 - Finalizing the definition of and establishing the organizational entity to manage the certification program.
 - Establishing and implementing the mechanics of a transition period for current, experienced public real estate professionals to grandfather in for many of the certification requirements.
 - Providing education providers with sufficient time to update existing courses to meet certification requirements.
 - Providing education providers with sufficient time to design and rollout new course offerings needed to support the certification program.
 - Developing and initiating the first capstone examination.

D. Establishing a marketing program

This recommendation involves developing a marketing program to present the findings from Phase I and the preliminary plans for defining and implementing the certification program to a number of stakeholders, organizations and other groups who will be critical to the success of a certification program.

This marketing program is envisioned to consist of the following components:

- Communications program.
- Stakeholder outreach effort.
- Public outreach effort.

Each of these elements is described briefly below.

1. Communications Program

This communication program should include:

- A one-page brochure describing the proposed certification program and highlighting the findings of the Phase I study, which can be posted on the FHWA Office of Real Estate Services web site and linked to by other interested parties.
- Implementation of a web page on the FHWA Office of Real Estate Services web site to provide general information and frequently asked questions about the proposed certification. The content on this web site should be developed initially based on information in the Phase I study and then updated at the completion of the curriculum definition activity and the detailed implementation strategy and plan.
- Development of one or more articles on the proposed certification and the results of the Phase I study for professional journals of interest to the public real estate community (Appraisal Institute, IRWA, etc.)

2. Stakeholder Outreach Program

A stakeholder outreach program should be designed to generate interest and support for the initiative. Elements of this effort would include:

- Briefings for members of the Interagency Coordination group and other leaders of the Federal real estate community.
- Several scheduled web-based presentations for the public sector real estate community generally on the findings of the Phase I study and the concept of the potential certification program.
- One-on-one meetings with key leaders of public sector real estate professional associations including IRWA, Appraisal Institute, the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Subcommittee on Right-of-Way and Utilities and others.
- Meetings with leaders of real estate educational associations to build interest in the higher education community in providing courses needed for the certification program.
- Follow-up meetings with the key leadership of a short list of potential higher education partners.
- Presentation to national meetings of key industry associations such as IRWA, Appraisal Institute and AASHTO.

3. Public Outreach Program

A public outreach program should have the following components:

- Awareness meetings with leaders of the National Association of Realtors and other similar industry organizations.

- Presentations to two to three state licensing boards and/or the national meeting of the real estate licensing board association to gauge interest in allowing courses under the proposed certification to be counted towards general licensing requirements.
- Development of a “careers package” including the brochure on the certification program and several one-page case studies illustrating the work opportunities in public sector real estate. This information should be designed to sell the advantages of a career in public sector real estate, emphasize the forthcoming certification program, and be packaged for distribution to, and use by high school guidance counselors and career counseling centers at universities and community colleges.

Appendix A: Federal Agency Interview Questionnaire

Market Needs Assessment of Uniform Act Certification Federal Agency Interview Questionnaire

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Real Estate Services, as lead agency for the Uniform Act, has commissioned a study to examine and report upon training and certification options for public sector real estate professionals and to assess the market need for the establishment of a new certification program which would have as a focus the development of a qualified workforce to assist agencies and private sector organizations operating under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act (Uniform Act). As part of this project, FHWA is seeking information from other Federal agencies concerning their sponsorship of existing training, use of existing training offerings, perceptions on the needs for additional training, and perceptions about the value of a proposed Uniform Act certification program. This survey can be completed in 30 - 45 minutes over the phone or in person. Thanks in advance for your participation in this research study.

I. Perceptions about Existing Public Sector Real Estate Training

1. Does your agency currently sponsor or offer any public sector real estate specific training courses? If yes, please provide the point of contact for these courses if other than yourself.
2. In addition to any courses, which may be offered by your agency, what types of other public sector specific real estate training is currently available to your staff?
3. Who delivers current public sector or other real estate training (NHI, IRWA, other organizations, etc.) that your staff attends or is considering attending?
4. How often is real estate training typically provided?
5. What method(s) are used to deliver the current training (classroom, on-line, etc.)? Which method(s) does your staff prefer?
6. How would you rate the quality of the training currently available from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) and the reason for this rating?

7. How would you rate the return on investment to your organization of the training currently available from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) and what are the reason(s) for this rating?

II. Level of Participation in Current Training Offerings

8. Is your agency's staff members required to attend a certain amount of public sector or other real estate specific training annually (or over some other period)?
9. How many staff attended Uniform Act or other public sector real estate training in the last 12 months? What percentage of total real estate staff in your organization does this represent?
10. Who approves training in your organization and what is the process for getting approval to attend a class?
11. What is the approximate annual training budget of your group (if known)? What is the total number of real estate professionals that this training budget is intended to cover?
12. What was the last public sector real estate course you personally attended? On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), how would you rate this course and why?

III. Agency Training Requirements

13. Do the current public sector real estate training courses which are available adequately address your organization's needs? Why or why not?
14. What other training courses (topics) would you like to see offered?
15. How often should any new training courses be provided?
16. What mediums (distance learning, classroom, etc.) are most preferable for new training courses?
17. Is your agency currently planning (as an agency, jointly with other agencies or organizations, etc.) any real estate related training courses?

IV. Agency Training Requirements

18. Do you think a potential public sector real estate professional certification should be education based only, experienced based or a combination of both? How much work experience should be required? Should a capstone examination be required?
19. What type of courses/skills or other qualifications would you recommend be part of a professional Uniform Act certification?
20. Whom do you think would be best positioned to administer this type of certification? Why?
21. What is your perception on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) of the potential value of a public sector real estate or Uniform Act centric professional certification? What is the rationale for the rating selected?

22. On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), how valuable do you think your agency's staff would find a public sector real estate certification? What is the rationale for the rating selected?
23. On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), how likely do you think your agency's staff would be to pursue a public sector real estate certification if offered? Why?
24. On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), how likely would you be personally to pursue a certification if offered? Why?

V. Wrap-up

25. Are there other issues related to the availability of public sector real estate training and/or a potential Uniform Act Certification that you would like to discuss?
26. Is there anyone else in your organization that you would recommend we speak with concerning this research?

Appendix B: Summary of Federal Agency Interviews

Uniform Act Training, Certifications Needs and Implementation Program August 9, 2004

I. Interview Participants

A. As of August 9, 2004, 21 interviews were completed and documented

B. The 21 interview participants were representatives from the following agencies:

- FHWA - 7
- HUD- 3
- GSA - 2
- FAA - 1
- USDA - 1
- USFS - 1
- BLM - 1
- U.S. Navy - 1
- USFWS - 1
- BOR – 1
- NPS – 1
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – 1

C. Right of Way vs. Real Estate Acquisition, Relocation, and Appraisal

- The seven (7) Right of Way respondents were from FHWA
- Real Estate, Acquisition, and Appraisal respondents amounted to the remaining fourteen (14)
- Right of Way focuses on the acquisition of parcels of land for highway related construction
- Real Estate Acquisition, Relocation, and Appraisal focus mostly on blocks or parcels of land or property

II. Perceptions about Existing Right of Way Specific Training

A. Training Providers

- IRWA – Right of Way, relocation, and appraisal training mostly for highways
- NHI – Right of Way, relocation, appraisal, and acquisition mostly for highways
- ICS – All The Right Moves for HUD and grant recipients
- BLM for electric and pipeline systems
- NMI for easement appraisals and real property law
- National Center Training Academy

B. Preferred Methods for Training Delivery

- Virtually all respondents preferred classroom training
- On-line and distance learning was preferred as a supplement to classroom training

C. Rating of Current Training

- The majority of respondents rated current training slightly above average or “3.5 to 4”
- Training providers such as the IRWA and NHI do not tailor courses for a specific agency or organization
- Training is not provided frequently enough; most only once a year
- Training content needs to be updated more frequently
- Training barriers include funding, time, location, staff, and course content

III. Level of Participation in Current Training Offerings

A. Annual and Uniform Act Training

- The majority of respondents stated that there was no annual training requirement. Of those who did have to attend a certain amount of training annually or semi-annually, had not been able to participate due to low budgets
- The majority of respondents participated in Uniform Act training within the last year

B. Training Approval and Agency Coordination

- Approval for training is done through a formal request and review process via an individual development plan

- Virtually all respondents did not know the budgeted amount for training because it is handled through headquarters or a Training Academy

IV. Agency Training Requirements

- The majority of respondents indicated that the current right of way and/or real estate training is adequate most of the time
- Other courses the respondents would like to see include: appraisal and relocation methodologies with actual cases, economics, market valuations, communications, and negotiations. Cross agency courses were also desired
- The new courses should be offered at least each quarter, but no less than twice a year
- The new courses should be taught in a classroom because of the interchange of knowledge

V. Value of a Professional Certification

- All respondents stated that a professional certification should be a combination of education and experience
- Types of courses and skills depend on the discipline, but should include: appraisal methodologies, ROW processes, relocation and negotiation, federal law and federal regulations familiarity, and a few years of experience in the discipline
- A slight majority of the respondents stated that the FHWA is best positioned to administer the certification because it is the lead agency. Other suggestions included the IRWA or NHI because of certifying experience. A few suggested the state or locality with federal oversight because of resource issues
- In terms of perceptions of a potential value of a certification as well as pursuing a certification, the majority believed it would depend on if the certification was mandatory or voluntary
- Issues with the certification included reciprocity with other agencies, compliance and ethical standards, and payment for the attaining the certification

Appendix C: Market Survey

This collection is voluntary and replies will be confidential. The information will be used to report on training and certification options for right-of-way and other real estate service providers, and to assess the market need for the establishment of a new certification program to develop a qualified workforce to assist agencies and private sector organizations operating under the Uniform Act. It takes approximately an average of 30 minutes to complete this survey. Please note that an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 2125-0590, which expires on April 30, 2008.

Demographics

1. Please select the description which best fits your organization.
 - State DOT
 - Local Public Agency
 - FHWA
 - Other Federal Agency
 - Private sector engineering or real estate services firm
 - Other (please specify) _____
2. Please describe your level in your organization.
 - Manager or above
 - Supervisor
 - Staff member
3. How many years of experience in the public sector real estate field do you have?
 - Less than one year
 - More than one year and less than five years
 - More than five years and less than 10 years
 - More than 10 years
4. Please indicate highest level of education completed.
 - Advanced Degree
 - Bachelors Degree
 - High School, GED or equivalent
 - Less than high school

Previous Course Experience and Needs

5. How many public sector real estate focused training courses (4 hours or more) have you completed in the last two years?

- More than three
 - Three
 - Two
 - One
 - None
6. On average, how often do you attend public sector focused real estate specific training courses?
- Every six months
 - Once a year
 - Once every two years
 - More than once every two years
 - Never attended a course
7. Existing public sector real estate courses provide an excellent return on investment for me and/or my employer.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
 - Don't Know
8. Existing public sector real estate courses help provide me with the skills required to successfully perform my position.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
 - Don't Know
9. Please rank from 1 (highest) to 10 (lowest) the areas or subjects in which you believe additional public sector real estate training courses would provide the greatest value.
- ___ Appraisal
 - ___ Residential Relocation
 - ___ Commercial Relocation
 - ___ Negotiation
 - ___ Property Management
 - ___ Project Management
 - ___ Uniform Act Overview/Public Sector Real Estate Law

___ Overview of Project Development Process

___ Environmental Processes and Requirements

___ Other (Please identify: _____)

Potential Value of Uniform Act Certification

10. Do you think a potential professional certification focused on the Uniform Act should be:

- Based on course work only
- Based on course work and an independent capstone exam
- Based on course work and a minimum work experience requirement (Please specify desired number of months of work experience ____)
- Based on course work, an independent capstone exam and a minimum work experience requirement (Please specify desired number of months of work experience ____)

11. A professional Uniform Act certification should be administered (i.e. setting requirements for obtaining the certification, establishing and coordinating a capstone exam if given, issuing the certificate, etc.) by:

- Individual colleges or other organizations offering a certificate
- A consortium of colleges or organizations offering a certificate
- FHWA as lead Federal agency for the Uniform Act
- Other Federal Agency (please specify _____)
- Specific professional association (please specify _____)
- Consortium of professional real estate associations such as IRWA, Appraisal Institute, etc.
- Other (please specify _____)

12. What type of courses/skills or other qualifications would you recommend be part of a professional Uniform Act certification? (please select all which apply)

- Appraisal
- Residential Relocation
- Commercial Relocation
- Negotiation
- Relocation
- Property Management
- Project Management
- Uniform Act Overview/Public Real Estate Law
- Overview of Project Development Process
- Environmental Processes and Requirements

- Basic Real Estate Sales Course
- Required Professional Internship (Desired duration in months _____)
- Other (Please identify: _____)

13. What is your personal perception of the potential value of a Uniform Act focused professional certification?

- Very Valuable
- Valuable
- Somewhat Valuable
- Limited Value
- Little or No Value
- Don't Know

14. How valuable do you think your employer would find a Uniform Act focused professional certification?

- Very Valuable
- Valuable
- Somewhat Valuable
- Limited Value
- Little or No Value
- Don't Know

15. How likely would you be to pursue a Uniform Act focused professional certification?

- Very Likely
- Likely
- Somewhat Likely
- Not Likely
- Don't Know

16. Please use this space to provide any additional input you have on the quality and appropriateness of existing right of way training, the need for additional right of way courses and the potential value of a Uniform Act focused professional certification.

Supervisors and Managers Only

17. How many Uniform Act or public sector focused real estate professionals are employed in your office or specific part of your organization and in the total organization?

Your Office or Group

- < 5
- Between 5 and 25
- Between 26 and 50
- > 50
- Not sure or don't know

Entire Organization

- < 5
- Between 5 and 25
- Between 26 and 50
- > 50
- Not sure or don't know

18. What is the approximate annual budget for public sector real estate training for your office or specific part of your organization and for your total organization?

Your Office or Group

- \$50,000 or more
- \$25,000 to \$50,000
- \$5,000 to \$24,999
- < \$5,000
- Not sure or don't know

Entire Organization

- \$50,000 or more
- \$25,000 to \$50,000
- \$5,000 to \$24,999
- < \$5,000
- Not sure or don't know

19. Please rank in order from 1 (highest) to 7 (lowest) the decision criteria used in your organization to determine when or whether someone will attend a training class.

- ___ Skills needed for current position or assignment
- ___ Skills needed for anticipated position or assignment
- ___ Course Cost
- ___ Course medium
- ___ Course Provider
- ___ Travel Cost

___ Other (Please specify _____)

20. As a manager, how supportive would you be of an employee's desire to pursue a Uniform Act focused certification?

- Very Supportive
- Supportive
- Neither Supportive or Unsupportive
- Unsupportive
- Very Unsupportive
- Don't Know

Appendix D: Focus Group Agenda

Market Needs Assessment of Uniform Act Certification Focus Group Agenda

NOTE: This collection is voluntary and replies will be confidential. The information will be used to report on training and certification options for right-of-way and other public sector real estate service providers, and to assess the market need for the establishment of a new certification program to develop a qualified workforce to assist agencies and private sector organizations operating under the Uniform Act. This focus group will take a maximum of 90 minutes. Please note that an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 2125-0590, which expires on April 30, 2008.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Real Estate Services, as lead agency for the Uniform Act, has commissioned a study to examine and report upon training and certification options for public sector real estate professionals and to assess the market need for the establishment of a new certification program which would have as a focus the development of a qualified workforce to assist agencies and private sector organizations operating under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act (Uniform Act). As part of this project, FHWA is seeking information from public sector real estate professionals concerning their sponsorship of existing training, use of existing training offerings, perceptions on the needs for additional training, and perceptions about the value of a proposed Uniform Act certification program. This focus group discussion is a key component of this information collection effort.

For purposes of this research study, we are defining public sector real estate professionals to be public agency or private sector real estate staff who are required to comply with state, federal and local laws and regulations, when valuing and acquiring real estate and/or causing displacement of residential, business and farm occupants under the threat of eminent domain. Public sector real estate courses are classes focused specifically on topics related to elements of the Uniform Act or the specifics of public sector real estate work and not general real estate courses.

I. Perceptions about Existing Public Sector Real Estate Training

1. Who delivers current public sector or other real estate training (NHI, IRWA, other organizations, etc.) that your staff attends or is considering attending?
2. What method(s) are used to deliver the current training (classroom, on-line, etc.)? Which method(s) does your staff prefer?
3. How would you rate the quality of the training currently available from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) and the reason for this rating?

4. How would you rate the return on investment to your organization of the training currently available from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) and what are the reason(s) for this rating?
5. Who approves training in your organization and what is the process for getting approval to attend a class?

II. Level of Participation in Current Training Offerings

6. Are your agency's staff members required to attend a certain amount of public sector or other real estate specific training annually (or over some other period)?
7. How many staff attended Uniform Act or other public sector real estate training in the last 12 months? What percentage of total real estate staff in your organization does this represent?
8. Who approves training in your organization and what is the process for getting approval to attend a class?
9. What is the approximate annual training budget of your group (if known)? What is the total number of real estate professionals that this training budget is intended to cover?
10. What was the last public sector real estate course you personally attended? On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), how would you rate this course and why?

III. Agency Training Requirements

11. Do the current public sector real estate training courses that are available adequately address your organization's needs? Why or why not?

12. What other training courses (topics) would you like to see offered?

13. What mediums (distance learning, classroom, etc.) are most preferable for new training courses and why?

IV. Value of a Professional Certification

14. Do you think a potential public sector real estate professional certification should be education based only, experienced based or a combination of both? How much work experience should be required? Should a capstone examination be required?

15. What type of courses/skills or other qualifications would you recommend be part of a professional Uniform Act certification?

16. Whom do you think would be best positioned to administer this type of certification? Why?

17. What is your perception on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) of the potential value of a public sector real estate or Uniform Act related professional certification? What is the rationale for the rating selected?

18. On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), how valuable do you think your agency's staff would find a public sector real estate certification? What is the rationale for the rating selected?

19. On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), how likely do you think your agency's staff would be to pursue a public sector real estate certification if offered? Why?

20. Would a public sector real estate certification if offered influence your hiring process (i.e. Would having the certification provide an advantage for a candidate over a candidate without the certification)? If yes, for what levels in the organization (entry level only or other levels) would having a certification be an advantage for a candidate.

21. Who in your agency is responsible for certifying compliance with governing Uniform Act and other requirements and would their comfort level be enhanced if responsible real estate staff had public sector real estate training and/or held a certification related thereto?

V. Wrap-up

22. Are there other issues related to the availability of public sector real estate training and/or a potential Uniform Act Certification that you would like to discuss?

Appendix E: Focus Group Notes

May 18, 2005 – Crown Plaza Hotel, Austin, Texas

Feedback

- 1. Who delivers current public sector or other real estate training (NHI, IRWA, other organizations, etc.) that your staff attends or is considering attending?**

The Appraisal Societies, IRWA, NHI are the primary industry resources. For more general courses, state colleges are available if they provide real estate related courses or other people skills courses. Some States rely on internal training to convey “The State Way” of doing business.

- 2. How would you rate the return on investment to your organization of the training currently available?**

Some state agencies have budgeting constraints and organizational bias related to funding training for real estate staff. That needs to be addressed and existing courses need to be made more cost effective. There is a need to focus on elevating the real estate professional.

- 3. Do the current public sector real estate training courses that are available adequately address your organization’s needs?**

For the most part the courses cover the technical details practitioners need to know. Both states and consultants report they supplement external offerings with in-house training to provide the proper integration with job expectations.

A representative of one consulting firm indicated their firm has embarked on an internal training effort. They use both classroom and a CD based relocation training program (available for sale) to provide the technical materials.

A comment was made that there needs to be a stick to require training. One participant asked if FHWA would push for more emphasis on training real estate personnel.

- 4. What other training courses (topics) would you like to see offered?**

While discussing training needs a transition occurred to broaden the scope of needed training from the technical specialties involved to address management related items such as:

- Critical path / Project Management
- Project origins / funding / inter-governmental issues
- Communication (People) Skills
- Cost Estimating

5. What mediums (distance learning, classroom, etc.) are most preferable for new training courses and why?

The consensus was that classroom presentation was preferred, however, there was also a recognition that this was the most difficult to work into employees work schedules and was the most costly.

Current online presentations have not been well received. The Uniform Act presentation offered by NHI for \$150 has not been well received. The O.R. Colan and Associates, Inc. experience has been similar with the online offerings they have developed.

A representative of O.R. Colan and Associates, Inc. made the point however those to date these offerings have not been prepared using adult education experts and are more like self-paced tutorials. There is no interaction with a trainer and hence they do not have the same give/take that occurs in the classroom setting.

Current offerings through universities and colleges address these shortcomings but are not available at the low cost sought by most public agencies.

For all offerings, a concern was shared by many of the participants that to make a certification course relevant there must be an exam that is rigorous enough to be a creditable measure that the student has, at least at that moment, a grasp of the key points of the course.

6. Do you think a potential public sector real estate professional certification should be education based only, experienced based or a combination of both?

A certification needs to reflect both classroom accomplishments and experience. No particular discussion of the mix was achieved during this short session.

The exam(s) related to course work was agreed to have to be made more rigorous. These comments were made in reference to IRWA courses in particular. It was expressed that these courses which are a part of local chapter fund raising do not meet standards that would be required in a professional certification process. (Note: Based on comments from IRWA during the Training Session at AASHTO later in the day IRWA recognizes this issue and are working on upgrading the exams)

7. What type of courses/skills or other qualifications would you recommend be part of a professional Uniform Act certification?

The mix of courses was not discussed in too much depth in this session. See above for the range of technical subjects and other focus areas needed for a Public Real Property Acquisition Professional.

NOTE: Although not covered by the focus group, comments at the AASHTO Training Session indicated that greater emphasis on people skills, namely communication, negotiation, and team work are more important than technical proficiency. A Right-of-Way Manager from the Oregon Department of Transportation made the point that a

recent revision of entry requirements, which was heavily skewed toward technical credentials in the past have broadened the mix of people to select from and has resulted in being able to hire more personable individuals who work better with others and achieve better results.

8. Whom do you think would be best positioned to administer a Uniform Act Certification?

The consensus was that there is a need to have an independent entity as the standard setter instead of FHWA since the goal would be to create a designation/certification for a professional that would not be directly linked to transportation projects. The linkage to linear right-of-way was pointed out to be the problem with the IRWA and their narrow focus on right-of-way type acquisitions, plus as was pointed out the linkage the organization has with the oil/gas pipeline industry.

The FHWA position as lead agency for the Uniform Act is one supportive reason they should lead in elevating public perception of the public real property profession.

The Appraisal Foundation and the Appraisal Standards and Certification programs it created were introduced by participants as a possible model for a public sector real estate certification.

9. What is your perception of the potential value of a public sector real estate or Uniform Act related professional certification?

It was the group's consensus that a certification program would yield a benefit, but no specifics were offered. In general, a certification that would be broadly defined to provide managerial level proficiency in the various acquisition disciplines would be a valuable integrator during the project development process.

The lack of recognition in an engineering based organization is linked to the lower hiring standards for ROW related professional. Believe a recognized designation/certification would enhance acceptance.

10. How likely do you think your organization's staff would be to pursue a public sector real estate certification if offered?

Acceptance would depend on the 'carrots' provided to those who pursue the certification. Based on some of the available certifications (IRWA's SRWA, or the Appraisal Institute's MAI, for example) and the relative lack of agency support at present the availability of a voluntary program may not be well accepted. Once a Nationally recognized 'brand' for a land acquisition specialist exists the States and local agencies will probably afford the same benefits they do now for those individuals that pursue the PE designation, or the CPA. Both of these recognized designations have been afforded more relevance in the private sector than in the public marketplace.

11. Would a public sector real estate certification if offered influence your hiring process (i.e. would having the certification provide an advantage for a candidate over a candidate without the certification)?

Some participants indicated that efforts to link advancement to continuing education efforts within their organization indicated that accomplished individuals (having a certificate or designation) might be favored in advancement. In addition, if a curriculum were developed that would have academic relevance to the field those individuals may be afforded a preference in initial hiring.

May 26, 2005– NASSIF Building, Washington, DC

Feedback

1. Who delivers current public sector or other real estate training (NHI, IRWA, other organizations, etc.) that your staff attends or is considering attending?

In addition to the Appraisal Societies, IRWA, NHI the Federal Agencies represented indicated they each had their own internal or consultant provided training resources. The DOE, F&WL, FAA have 2 to 3 week academies that are offered once a year (sometimes skipped) dealing with the Real Estate needs of the agency.

HUD is investigating a certification program on the URA Relocation Program. HUD uses a consultant to provide needed training to its staff and grantees. If grantees intend to use a consultant they can have the consultant trained but such participation is limited.

DOE has a Project Management Certification Program that addresses 4 levels – Need to follow up on this.

USDA rep indicated they are seeking ways to provide training to staff. The DOI has a university that offers some courses but not too specific on real estate content. The COE has an array of real estate related courses. They make an effort to get their staff Certified in Project Management.

2. How would you rate the return on investment to your organization of the training currently available?

Consensus is that training is needed but this item was not discussed in detail.

3. Do the current public sector real estate training courses which are available adequately address your organization's needs?

As indicated above most of the technical training for Agency practitioners is addressed through internal training programs. The number of times some of these courses are given is limited as to both audience and presentation. Some are just done on an annual basis.

There is interest in learning what options exist to provide needed training. There was mentioned the need for a disposal course since the only one known to exist is presented by GSA with it being difficult to get into class presented one time a year by one individual.

4. What other training courses (topics) would you like to see offered?

The scope of training for the Federal Agencies did not get as expansive as the State representatives thought would be necessary. There was more focus on the technical aspects of the law and in particular the background & interpretations related to the Uniform Act.

The suggestion on what is needed did include some of the specialties within the right of way function (ie. Appraisal, appraisal review, relocation, negotiation, property management). The overall management of those specialists was also considered a necessary training objective. Rather than use a list of courses that would be needed to support a certification the development of a list of core competencies for various types of positions was discussed as a way to recognize the seasoned veteran's in the field.

The soft people skills were recognized as a needed part of the training package.

5. What mediums (distance learning, classroom, etc.) are most preferable for new training courses and why?

The consensus was that classroom presentation was preferred, especially since the thought was that this provided a block of time where individuals could focus on their training objective as opposed to being diversion that exists in using computer based training in the normal work place.

Current online presentations have not been well received. The Uniform Act presentation offered by NHI for \$150 has not been well received. It is now available for free but is based on the prior rule. (This presentation is more like a tutorial and is not presented at the level of college level course offerings.)

6. Do you think a potential public sector real estate professional certification should be education based only, experienced based or a combination of both?

A certification needs to reflect both classroom accomplishments and experience. There was some discussion of using a capstone exam but no indicated buy-in to the concept.

7. What type of courses/skills or other qualifications would you recommend be part of a professional Uniform Act certification?

The mix of courses was not discussed in too much depth. See the above for the range of technical subjects and other focus areas needed for a Public Real Property Acquisition Professional. It was suggested that the courses being offered via E-gov for the soft skills be explored as a resource.

8. Whom do you think would be best positioned to administer a Uniform Act Certification?

The FHWA position as lead agency for the Uniform Act is one supportive reason they should lead in elevating public perception of the public real property profession. However, it was noted that a governmental entity providing a certification has some legal hurdles to overcome.

9. What is your perception of the potential value of a public sector real estate or Uniform Act related professional certification?

It was the group's consensus that a certification program would yield a benefit, but no specifics were offered. Due to limited time this area was not covered.

10. How likely do you think your organization's staff would be to pursue a public sector real estate certification if offered?

Not covered due to limited time of the session

11. Would a public sector real estate certification if offered influence your hiring process (i.e. would having the certification provide an advantage for a candidate over a candidate without the certification)?

Not covered due to limited time of the session.

May 27, 2005 - Maryland DOT District 4 Brooklandville, MD

Feedback

This focus group session involved staff from the Maryland State Highway Administration's District 4 office and other Maryland based right of way professionals. No local agency representatives attended.

1. Who delivers current public sector or other real estate training (NHI, IRWA, other organizations, etc.) that your staff attends or is considering attending?

As in earlier focus group sessions, the main providers are the Appraisal Societies, IRWA, and NHI, along with local community college courses and courses sponsored by the local Board of Realtors. The latter offerings provide insight into State and local laws and any changes that may be enacted. There is also an active in house training program provided by senior staff to cover local laws and organizational specifics.

Maryland SHA has core training recommendations linked to specific personnel classifications. The courses cover both the technical aspects of the positions and the soft skill courses needed to be successful in each position. A scanned copy of the brochure covering the training recommended for realty staff was provided to the research team.

2. How would you rate the return on investment to your organization of the training currently available?

Training from FHWA is perceived to be less available than in the past. Due to the decrease in staff and the greater demands on the job, the ability to pull staff away from the worksite for training is difficult to do. The group felt that distance learning was needed to assure staff stayed current and informed on needed technical and interpretive information since time away from the job was difficult to arrange.

Maryland SHA staff considered they got good results from IRWA courses since they have a good cadre of instructor familiar with both Maryland SHA needs and the course content.

3. Do the current public sector real estate training courses which are available adequately address your organization's needs?

The array of training opportunities is considered adequate, but one technical function that is not given sufficient attention is public property management.

As indicated previously the main problem with the available training is being able to afford, in both time and money, to commit staff to take offered courses.

4. What other training courses (topics) would you like to see offered?

Property and land management is the main technical subject that is not covered very well in available course offerings. FHWA course coverage is limited to relocation topics. It would be useful to cover other functions from the Federal-aid standpoint.

5. What mediums (distance learning, classroom, etc.) are most preferable for new training courses and why?

As in the other focus groups the consensus was that classroom presentation was preferred. However, due to budgetary factors to provide travel and a shortage of new personnel to schedule classroom sessions for in house presentation the need for effective distance learning opportunities was indicated to be a necessity. This was thought to be even more critical for the many local governments that are becoming more actively involved in the acquisition process.

6. Do you think a potential public sector real estate professional certification should be education based only, experienced based or a combination of both?

The group mirrored the position expressed in the earlier sessions that a certification needs to reflect both classroom accomplishments and experience. Mixing course work with on-the-job work activities to prepare for some form of capstone exam was thought to be the best way to handle qualifications needed for certification.

Some mentioned that for mediation at least 3 years of work experience is required.

Generally, there was consensus around the need for a capstone examination.

7. What type of courses/skills or other qualifications would you recommend be part of a professional Uniform Act certification?

The group identified a broad range of needs to address the work functions needed to be successful. This included a mix of both technical and soft skills courses. The course recommendations included as core courses for the Maryland SHA Real Property Specialists are considered a good guideline for the array of subjects that should be part of a skill set. Communication and problem solving capabilities are key to functioning in our adversarial society.

8. Who do you think would be best positioned to administer a Uniform Act Certification?

It was the opinion of the group that any certification has to come from the Federal sector. They did not consider it a good option to have each State provide a certification based on Federal standards.

9. What is your perception of the potential value of a public sector real estate or Uniform Act related professional certification?

It was the group's consensus that a certification program would yield a benefit, but no specifics were offered. It was also unclear if the certification would have much of an impact on pay scale or promotional decisions.

10. How likely do you think your organization's staff would be to pursue a public sector real estate certification if offered?

For those in attendance there was a general opinion that certification would be of interest, even if the public employer did not provide any support. This was considered a way to assure sufficient credentials exist for private sector employment once the public career is over.

11. Would a public sector real estate certification if offered influence your hiring process (i.e. would having the certification provide an advantage for a candidate over a candidate without the certification)?

Not covered due to limited time of the session.

This particular focus group obtained input primarily from a SHA perspective. The key outcomes stem from the recognition that State based training programs such as the one developed by Maryland may already provide a good indicator of what needs to be covered to equip realty staff to perform well at various levels of responsibility. The budgetary constraints and the effect of personnel cutbacks at the State level were highlighted by the concerns regarding how best to provide training to new staff or upgrade opportunities for existing personnel. While classroom options may be preferred, it was obvious, that capabilities to send staff to training are much more limiting at the State and local levels.