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Turnstiles: Your Event Under the Influence



WHY DOES AN EVENT NEED A PERMIT

Most communities recognize that events are more than just a celebration; they are valuable community assets. Events are image-makers, they attract visitors and new businesses, they improve the quality of life for residents, they are learning opportunities, and they can be catalysts for economic growth. With more local governments investing in event tourism, oversight is needed to manage the impact of events on a community's infrastructure, people, services and environment.

For nearly 20 years, my team and I have worked closely with event organizers and policy makers. During this time, we've met with event offices around North America and discussed the rewards, headaches, and nuances of event permitting. Each community's approach to permitting is as varied as the types of events they host. Some communities produce events, while others only work with third-party event producers. Some communities prioritise local community events, whereas others spend resources attracting international event brands such as adventure races. Differences aside, there is a common thread that connects them – each government's priority is to protect people and place. This includes event organizers, vendors and attendees, public property, public organizations, businesses, taxpayers and the environment.

Regardless of whether an event is held in Montana, Manitoba or Maine, there are six common areas reflected in most event policies:

1. Liability

Event organizers are typically required to obtain liability insurance (e.g. commercial general) for the duration of their event. This can range anywhere from \$2-10M and helps protect the event organizer and the landowner (often government) in the event of any litigation.

2. Health & Safety

Events that serve food, drinks or alcohol to the public must comply with local and state/provincial health and safety guidelines in order to protect those serving and attending. The last thing an event needs to contend with is a salmonella outbreak, or failure to adhere to alcohol serving laws.

3. Electrical, Power & Fire Safety

Depending on the type, location and size of an event, different safety protocols may be triggered. For example, electrical safety and permitting can apply to food trucks, stages, sound systems, inflatable amusements, and lighting. Fire safety requirements may apply depending on the location, the use of fireworks, motorized stunts, road closures, fenced/enclosed exits, cooking facilities and alcohol service. As with health and safety, these protocols are in place to protect users and nearby public from fire, and other electrical-related dangers.

4. Environmental Impact

Environmental considerations run the gamut from ensuring sufficient waste management (public toilets, proper public hygiene, garbage receptacles and post-event clean-up) to more modern

best practices in recycling, composting and zero waste initiatives. Ultimately, the motivation is to protect the environment, directly and indirectly, by encouraging event organizers to leave the environment in the same or better condition than before the event. Direct impact may include pressure placed on parks and wildlife; and indirect impact may be the cost implications of an aging landfill that can no longer accommodate excessive event waste.

5. Community Impact

If you've ever attended an event, you probably haven't paid too much attention to the logistics of road and park closures, signage, public parking, noise and light pollution, and whether or not local businesses have bolstered their supplies for event goers. But these are the types of concerns community members have when considering the impact of events on their community. It's usually up to the local government and their supporting agencies to ensure the impact of an event is minimized.

6. Taxpayer Burden

Attracting new events, reviewing event applications, meeting with event organizers and community stakeholders, issuing permits and providing oversight for an event all require time and resources. As stewards of taxpayer money, local governments strive to be efficient, streamline processes, and cover the cost of administering permitting through various fee structures. Events are often voluntarily produced and any profits are directed back into the event or donated to charitable causes, so keeping permitting costs as fair and balanced with the cost of administration is an ongoing challenge for communities.

In order to meet the varying number of requirements for an event, it takes a community of approving agencies to review, approve and monitor each event. This is a coordinated effort that ultimately needs to be transparent, reasonable and timely.

In the next issue of "ie" Magazine, I'll discuss a few ways in which government Event Offices can improve customer service.

Join the conversation on Twitter by using the hashtag, #eventpermit.

Rene Michaely is the founder and chief visionary of eproval, a software platform designed to automate and streamline complex application and approval processes including event permits. Based in Vancouver, BC Canada, his team has an intimate understanding of government permitting and approval processes through their experience working with and for event offices. Rene has also been a product manager at an event registration startup and founder of a web development firm specializing in event websites and complex applications. You can reach Rene at rene@eproval.com, learn more about eproval at www.eproval.com, or follow @eproval.