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8 PROJECTS AN EVENT OFFICE CAN TACKLE
DURING COVID-19

As government organizations around the world close their doors to the public and scale back operations to essential services in response to COVID-19, government employees are learning to work from home and respond to change. For Special Event Office staff, this is an especially unprecedented time as they find themselves cancelling events and evaluating the impact of a potentially eventless year.

In December 2019, we reached out to several Special Event Offices and asked them about their permitting process. Several of the Event Offices stated that they wish they had a Special Event policy, a guiding strategy, permit processing fees, and a more streamlined permit application process. This can be a stressful time for many people, so it may help to build a list of projects you can accomplish, one day or one week at a time. Perhaps start by asking, what can I do to continue to show support for events in my community? What can I do to encourage new business (or new events) in my community? How can I best prepare myself and my Event Office for when events resume?

Here are a few suggestions for your to-do-list:

1. **Update or write a new Special Event Policy** – writing a new policy can take time and focus. Now may be a good time to review special event policies from other communities, draft or update your policy, and engage some event stakeholders in your community for feedback. By involving event organizers and approving agencies in the policy review process, you're demonstrating your organizations continued support for events in a safe and meaningful way.

2. **Review your existing Special Event fee schedule** or draft a recommendation to introduce a new fee. Some communities may avoid charging permit fees because they don't want to discourage events. However, there can be an upside. Fees can cover some or most of the cost of administration and, in turn, encourage ongoing support for events. By covering the cost of issuing permits, there is less tax burden on the community when the Event Office produces in-house events.

3. **Develop new event management templates** to help your event organizers (especially small and medium events) plan for operations such as waste, traffic and emergency management. Ultimately, these plans may be required for an event application, so if they are consistent in their design and content, reviewing applications will be easier and faster.

4. **Review your options for collecting information** about events that will track growth and the social, environmental and economic impact of events on your community. Can event organizers (or partners such as the local Chamber of Commerce or Business Improvement Association) recruit volunteers to collect information from attendees during an event? Can event organizers survey their attendees during the ticket purchasing

process? Do you have an event debriefing process whereby event organizers are surveyed about the final event results, e.g. total number of attendees, landfill diversion results?

5. **Review your Special Event Permit application process** and consider how you can improve the process for staff, other approving agencies, and event organizers. Is your application process online? Does it integrate with your email and document storage solutions? Can event organizers submit their permit applications from any device and check the status of their application online? Could a streamlined workflow solution improve the review process between different stakeholders?

6. **Develop a database of all of your event venues** including floor plans, capacities, rental fees, etc., and upload this information in a user-friendly format (e.g. interactive or downloadable maps) to your website.

7. **Educate yourself about what is happening in the event tourism and event management industries**. All levels of government are in the same situation when it comes to cancelled and postponed events. Reach out through social media, tourism industry organizations, and local government groups to monitor what other communities are doing to respond to these extraordinary times.

8. **Review your calendar of events and identify any gaps** at times when your community would benefit from increased tourism and spending. Then consider filling those gaps with existing events (either moving them from busy times when there are events on top of events) or initiating a new event that would be suitable.

This is just a sample of the initiatives your Event Office may consider as you wait to understand the full impact of COVID-19 on your community. If you have suggestions or questions about how your Event Office is being affected or is pivoting in response to cancelled events, please share your feedback by joining the conversation on Twitter and using the hashtag, #eventpermit.

Rene 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 start-up 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.