



5 SIMPLE WAYS TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF EVENTS

In a previous column (ie: July 2017), I reviewed some of the primary reasons why permitting—specifically event permitting—is important for a community; for example, permitting can reduce liability, improve health & safety, and minimize the impact of events on a community and its environment. But there are many more ways in which an Event Office and Event Organizer can use the permit process to their advantage. An Event Office can measure the overall impact of events on their community, and in turn, Event Organizers can leverage this data to help build a business case for things such as: additional funding; event expansion; and measuring their economic and social impact in the community.

We all have more data than we know what to do with, but I would encourage Event Offices to focus on collecting some baseline information. This will help demonstrate the benefit of events on their community (especially to Council and the community-at-large), and help monitor the growth of events, year over year.

Here are some examples of information that an Event Office can collect that may ultimately help grow event tourism:

1. Economic Diversification

Economic diversification is intrinsic at most levels of government, and usually rooted in growing employment and different types of industry. By adding a question on your Event Permit Application form that asks how many local full-time, part-time and casual positions will result from the event each year, you will start to build a picture of job growth as a direct result of event tourism.

If possible, Event Offices should encourage or require events (especially larger events) to coordinate an independent economic impact study so both the hosting town or city and the Event Organizer can learn more about their attendees. This only needs to be completed periodically (e.g. every other year) and may include questions about travel, accommodation, length of stay, spending, and likelihood of returning to the location as a future visitor.

2. Attendance

It sounds simple, but it's surprising how many Event Offices don't collect information about an event once it has come and gone. By sending each Event Organizer a simple post-event wrap-up survey, you can gather reasonably accurate information about the actual impact of an event, including ticket sales and overall attendance.

3. Community Participation & Donations

More than just volunteerism, community participation is a way for an event to build community support, contribute back to the community, and involve the community in their event at a grassroots level. Add a question to your event application, or post-event wrap-up survey, asking about any community programs hosted at the event or donations made to the community. For example, maybe the event partnered with a local youth club to help run the bike valet, redirecting donations to the club. Or perhaps leftover materials and equipment were donated to a local charity. This type of information is invaluable when demonstrating the long-term benefits of an event, especially when a community may be expected to endure

some unavoidable disruption during the event.

4. Eco Initiatives

Event Organizers and Event Offices have been pushing for more sustainability and zero waste initiatives for years, yet very few communities are measuring the scale and impact of these initiatives. Some Event Offices require the bare minimum of on-site recycling, and others enforce zero waste policies that disallow the sale or use of any non-biodegradable materials during the event (including promotional materials and all forms of plastic). Developing a multi-tiered program that educates, informs and measures these efforts will see the greatest results. Consider adding a question to your application process that asks each event to list a minimum of two initiatives, and then add a follow-up question in your post-event wrap-up survey that requests final numbers (e.g. number of items recycled, number of items deflected from landfill). It may be more effective to include events (and other activities like filming) in your environmental policies to ensure events adopt eco initiatives.

5. Process Efficiencies

Aside from asking each Event Organizer to rate your Event Office's level of service post-event, you could also consider measuring:

- the time it takes for each approving agency to approve a permit application (e.g. liquor licensing branch, local police, health authority);
- the time it takes to complete an Event Permit Application (a feature of some online application solutions); and
- the time it takes to issue a permit from start to finish (e.g. measured in days from the date an application is received to the date the permit is issued).

Again, make sure to follow-up with each Event Organizer and ask them for feedback. And don't forget to ask for suggestions – this is a really effective way to improve customer service and reduce overall administrative costs.

At times, event permitting can feel arduous both for the Event Organizer and for the approving Event Office. However, if the application process can focus on capturing and sharing meaningful information, both parties will be better equipped to measure the impact of an event and grow event tourism.

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