



# Tips for Submitting City Permits

By Dolores Mendoza

When you are organizing an event, the last thing you may think about is permit applications. After all you are working on your budget, looking for entertainment, booking food vendors and so many other things. It's probably not the most fun part of your event, but without these permits you can't move forward and have all the attractions you have been working on. On the other hand, you could be the type that starts early to get it done so you can focus your attention on the event itself. Whichever your process, below is a general list of tips that can hopefully help your next permit journey be a little smoother.

## Submitting the Application

City liaisons typically have to work on multiple events at once. If it is a busy month, they could be processing 10, maybe 20 permits in one month so the application process is very important.

Make sure you always submit your application with ample time and before the deadline. Late applications may be denied because there isn't enough time to process it.

Fill out the application completely. Incomplete applications cannot get processed properly. Give as much information as you have and if something is still pending, state that in the application.

Read the application thoroughly and make sure to include any supplement documents required. As an example, an event proposal and draft site plan may be required along with your application. If an application fee applies, follow the

payment instructions carefully. Missing payment and other items could hold up the process and put you behind schedule.

Wait and hear back from your city liaison regarding the status of the application before moving forward with any other applications and/or payments. If you are not sure what the next step is, send them a follow-up email or give them a call.

## Submitting Early

Most cities work with multiple departments when it comes to permitting an event, Fire, Police, Transportation, etc. Applications are routed to the various departments for approvals and that can take some time.

For those of you who work on gathering permits regularly, you know that you need to give yourself enough time to turn in applications and wait on approvals. More times than not, the departments need additional information about the event before they will sign off, that can hold up the process another 2-3 weeks. You want to make sure you allow time when planning, should any problems like this arise.

Plan ahead. As soon as you have that date, get the application in and get your date on the books. If you have an annual event that takes place in the same city, at the same venue every year, get that date secured a year out, this way you avoid any potential conflicts.

Do not wait until the very last minute to submit your paperwork to your city liaison. If it's a new event, apply a year in advance; if the city allows you

to. You want to make sure you have time to make adjustments or look for a new venue should you need to.

## Requesting an Estimate

Gathering an estimate for a large special event takes time. There can be multiple fees from all the various departments and fees that may require some additional research.

If you know you will need an estimate, or specific information, give the liaison ample time to prepare it for you. You could find yourself very frustrated if you need an estimate, but did not ask your city liaison with enough time to prepare one.

## Addition Permits

All cities have a different set of requirements. The municipal/county codes and/or ordinances in one city wouldn't be the same in another. It's good to do some research as to the requirements before spending hours planning an activity that may or may not be allowed in that city. For example, you may be planning to rent a Ferris wheel because it was a big hit in the last place you held your event. So you place a deposit, but when you go to apply for the permit in the next city, you learn Ferris wheels are not allowed there.

Permits can get expensive. Look into permit fees for a specific attraction or activity before putting a non-refundable deposit down for it.

Get all the permit forms and/or applications in within their deadlines.

You could end up paying late fees or worse not getting the appropriate permits in time for your event.

### Communicating with Your City Liaison

Everyone has a specific method of communication, e-mail, text, phone, possibly fax. Ask your city liaison what works best for them and try to communicate that way. You might get a quicker response if you communicate via their preferred method.

Some events are coordinated by multiple committees and have a different committee for each area of their event and that's a great way to coordinate an event. However it is not always the best way to coordinate with your city liaison. Multiple contacts for one event can become very confusing, especially for large scale events. When emails are sent from multiple email addresses, it's hard to keep track of who sent what and what got sent to whom. Try to have just one person coordinate with the city liaison, this will save a lot of time and help eliminate any miscommunication.

You may have a specific deadline for your budget or need to get updates to your supervisor on where your permit is in the process with the city. Let your city liaison know what those deadlines are. If they know what your timeline is, they can properly plan to get you the information you need in a timely manner.

### Meetings

Every person works differently. There are event organizers who are more comfortable with the permit process than others, and then there are those who are a little terrified of all the forms, very understandable.

Schedule a face to face meeting with your city liaison to go over the process, applications and to get any additional information you may need, if they don't already do this themselves.

Be mindful of the city liaison's time. Try to avoid scheduling multiple meetings and walk through with them for your event. Get everyone you need together at one meeting so they can ask all their questions that day. If coordination is by committee, ensure that all members are present so that they can receive all the information first hand.

### Asking Questions

There is a lot of information given upfront when applying for permits. When you are preparing your one on one meeting with the city liaison, prepare your list of questions for them. It's good to have them written down because you will more than

likely get information that prompts new questions, and you don't want to forget what your original ones were.

Once you have met, or talked to the city liaison about the requirements, send a follow-up email about what was discussed and include any other questions you may have about the applications. It's great to have those answers in writing so you have that email to refer to later if you need it. Phone calls are great too, but it's always good to have answers in writing just in case you are asked for it.

### Before You Advertise

Don't assume because your application was submitted that it was reviewed and approved.

Get an approval before you advertise your event. Give the allotted time for the application to be reviewed and then follow up if you haven't heard back from the city liaison. The last thing you want is for the city to come back and say there are conflicts or concerns. Rescheduling or changing venues can have an impact on attendance if you have already printed flyers or sold tickets. Always wait to get the green light from your city liaison.

### City Calendars

Know what is happening in the city that you are proposing your event in, before you submit paperwork for a date. Check the calendar. Cities with popular event venues have a lot going on and some restrict the number of events they allow per month or year.

Have a backup date when you submit your application so your city liaison has an option should your original date already be taken. This way they can put a hold on it before someone else can.

If you have to change your date, send it in writing. Even if you already gave the liaison a call, follow up with an email. You want to make sure that the change is documented and get a confirmation it was made for you.

### Required Services

Events of all sizes require some level of city resources. You may wonder at times why there are so many requirements, but know they are all put in place for you, the safety of your event attendees and the city.

Know what you need far enough in advance so your city liaison can place any necessary work orders or put in request for staffing. These are different requests from permit applications so it's important you discuss all the small details.

### Site Plans

Having a great site plan can make the whole process so much easier. Other departments, such as Fire, require a

site plan in order to issue their permit. The site plan should answer as many questions as possible; where is the 40x40 tent? Where are the portable restrooms? Where is cooking taking place?

Use a clear image of the site, Google Earth is usually great to use or check the city website for images.

Have your items clearly marked and include all information required by the city, this can be items like inflatables, tents, generators, emergency access lanes, etc. Label the items in your site plan or include a map key. If possible, try to avoid hand drawings. They are messy and usually aren't clear enough to scan and send out via email.

### Insurance

Every city will require that you have general liability insurance for your event; however what they require will vary from city to city. Some may be easier than others, but if the requirements are more than you are used to providing you may want to start that process early.

Look over the requirements and ask your city liaison for any clarification before going to your insurance provider. A lot of cities will provide you with samples of the types of documents they need with the limits and specific wording they need on the Certificate of Insurance. Give those to your insurance agent to use as reference. These are very helpful.

Always allow time for revisions. Submit at least 1- 2 months prior to your event just in case something needs to be corrected. If you submit a week before your event you risk it not getting it approved in time and may have to reschedule your event.

The permitting process can sometimes be overwhelming, but the job of a city liaison is to help get you through that process and make it as easy as possible. At the same time, they need your help too. Try to be patient and know that we understand how important your event is to you, it is very important to us as well. If you start early and communicate regularly with your city liaison, the process will be much smoother.

**Dolores Mendoza** is currently the Special Events Coordinator for the City of Pasadena, Human Services and Recreation Department. She has been with the City for over 10 years. She handles permits and producers her department's community events. When she is not working on events, you can find her binge watching FRIENDS and having ice cream. She can be contacted at [dmendoza@cityofpasadena.net](mailto:dmendoza@cityofpasadena.net)