

Salt Lake City

CASE STUDY

How Salt Lake City Scaled Permitting Operations to Meet Growing Demand for Special Events

THE CHALLENGE

The greater metro area in Salt Lake City grew its population by 30% over the past 20 years and realized more than \$1 billion in capital investments within the past decade. All this growth didn't just drive more demand for housing and business development; it also skyrocketed requests for special events — from music festivals and block parties to marathons and even film and television productions. While events bring many benefits to the city, they also create a mountain of work for City Hall. Nobody knows this better than Ryen Schlegel, Salt Lake City's special event permit manager.

“Each permit represents hours spent not only answering applicants' questions and creating conditional checklists but also coordinating review with my City Hall colleagues who are part of the process — about 25 people across 12 different departments,” Schlegel said.

With no centralized location for receiving, reviewing, and approving new applications or orchestrating cross-departmental review at scale, the Event Review Committee (ERC) was spending a lot of time educating applicants on the intricacies of permitting in Salt Lake City and ensuring they met all requirements — even if it meant long hours, repetitive data entry, and little time to work on larger projects.

Event organizers over the years had repeatedly commented on the City's antiquated and highly manual application process that was both time-consuming and difficult to navigate. Recognizing the need for change, the city distributed a survey to previous special event permit applicants and held focus groups with organizers of large annual events.

In that survey, 50% of respondents indicated they would like to see changes to the special events permitting process, including a technology update, and about 45% of respondents experienced major barriers while completing the application process, primarily noting the confusing process. The outdated technology system and manual application process was a common theme in all focus groups. Armed with strong feedback from their users, Salt Lake City turned to OpenCounter to modernize and streamline the special event permit process.

“Salt Lake City is known throughout the state for its annual large-scale cultural and artistic festivals and celebrations. We're also home to many more small-scale gatherings that build strong ties at the neighborhood level. Moving our special event permitting process to OpenCounter makes organizing events big and small easier and more predictable for our community organizers. I'm excited to see what new traditions and celebrations this shift will make possible for our city.”

—Erin Mendenhall, Salt Lake City Mayor

THE SOLUTION

Building on the success Salt Lake City saw in 2017 after their launch of OpenCounter's ZoningCheck, Business Portal, and Residential Portal solutions — which, in 2019 alone, saved staff more than 2,100 hours and helped the city achieve a 95% self-service rate for the nearly 7,000 inquiries received — OpenCounter got to work on a quest to scale permitting operations to meet growing demand.

Through close collaboration with Schlegel and the ERC members, OpenCounter's team of in-house public sector experts began translating Salt Lake City's special event requirements into a system every applicant could easily understand. They wanted to create a single point of entry for navigating the five special event permit types and the more than 40 total requirements that could be triggered. And they knew City Hall would need a centralized dashboard to keep an endless wave of review and approvals moving.

In September 2021, Salt Lake City's Special Events Portal went live. Powered by OpenCounter, it's a one-stop-shop for all things event permitting that delivers many significant wins for both city staff and event organizers alike.

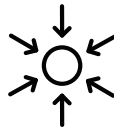
For staff it means no more carbon copy forms or shuffling applications across City Hall. The Special Events Portal digitizes every part of the permitting process — from one-click event selection to scheduling, route building, payment, and issuance inside the portal.

Applicants can also now easily understand which permits they need for their events, the specific requirements for each, and what those permits will cost — all without making a single call or sending an email to City Hall. Best of all, they can do this at any time and from any device.

THE RESULTS



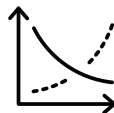
Turnaround has improved drastically with applicants, the Event Review Committee and other City Hall staff now all adhering to similar timelines.



Special event applicants can now apply for permits in one accessible, centralized system that is entirely digital, streamlining the process from application to event clean-up.



Stakeholders across City Hall are embracing the new OpenCounter-powered permitting system and discovering how much value the technology offers.



Salt Lake City has received a lot of positive feedback from applicants around a step-by-step how-to video created by OpenCounter to flatten the learning curve when it comes to using the system.