ONIT MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

CASE STUDY

Onit Helps City Streamline its Event Permitting Process, and Plan for Digitization

1. Issue: Onit's client, a city of nearly 750,000 residents, struggled with a cumbersome and manual process for issuing permits for special events impacting City streets, parks, and buildings. With 13 City departments and two state agencies required to process different elements of the permit, the organizers of festivals, marathons and other events were typically receiving their final permits only a few days before their events, instead of two weeks in advance per the municipal code.

City stakeholders had identified a potential IT solution, however were unable to properly analyze its benefits without a better understanding of the complete permitting process and pain points.

2. Strategy: With event permit stakeholders including the City public safety agencies, health department, liquor and cannabis regulator, state and city transportation agencies, and others, Onit recognized the need to properly map the existing process and create consensus on the future state vision, before engaging with any particular solution.

Onit proposed a strategy leveraging a Lean/Agile hybrid approach to scope the boundaries of the permit process. This included identifying the key stakeholders, documenting the pain points, and articulating the "voice of the process" – extracting the steps necessary for the process to deliver value to the stakeholders.

3. Crafting a Solution: Onit first worked with the City team to build a Lean-style SIPOC chart - an acronym for "Suppliers, Inputs, Process, Outputs and Customers". This results in a simple diagram outlining the process start and end points, high level steps, and stakeholders, and it established the boundaries for the improvement work.

The team then used an Agile tool of creating "user stories" to envision system functionality. Working with representatives from across the stakeholder groups the team captured 48 opportunities for improvement, then derived user stories for these. Examples included notifications to stakeholders of changes in permit application status; reduction in manual data entry from PDF application forms into City systems and streamlining permit payment processes. Of particular resonance was the user story around how payment was calculated – a process that currently requires up to 100 decision and calculation points, including the manual counting of intersections on a map.

The user stories enabled the creation of a hybrid stakeholder/ OCM table, which articulated each stakeholder's input to the process, what they needed out of the process, and a model communications protocol. Data was gathered for each step, including cycle time and handoff points between different systems and groups. This created a framework for analyzing the ROI of potential solutions, making proposed changes data-driven and quantifiable.

4. Results:

- Identified 289 unique points of human intervention on each permit application
- Identified opportunities to reduce cycle time and to reduce handoffs
- Enabled City Permits Specialist to clearly articulate the complexities of the process
- Created four solution opportunities and analyzed each based on cost, implementation time and other key criteria. This let the City make a data-driven decision on the future state.

For more information:
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