



2016 Innovation Award Application

DUE: January 29, 2016

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ApplicationTitle: Planning & Development: Online Permits

Jurisdiction Name: City of Phoenix

Jurisdiction Population (US Census): 1,537,058 (2014)

City/County Manager Name: Ed Zuercher

Project Leader (Primary Contact for award notification):

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1. Describe the innovation. *100 word maximum.*

In July 2015, the Planning & Development Department (PDD) enhanced online services to include real-time permitting. These permits do not require plan review and include residential, commercial and fire permits for work like rewiring or re-plumbing a house, modifying a sprinkler or alarm system or replacing electrical service. All online services were centralized and additional documentation provided for website visitors.

Online services are real-time. Applicants do not have to wait for permit review, but can apply online, pay, print issued permits and schedule inspections the very next day. This could save residents an estimated 3,000 trips annually to City Hall.

2. When and how was the program, policy or initiative originally conceived in your jurisdiction? *100 word maximum.*

The city of Phoenix strives to improve customer service and increase ease-of-use for our customers. As more people begin to look online for customer service, ways to complete projects and find information, we decided to create a more robust permitting system online. The city website recently underwent a redesign, and it was a perfect time to expand the online offerings for our customers. The new system will not only reduce wait times at our service counters, but improve our focus on sustainability.

3. How exactly is your program or policy a quantum leap of creativity? How has your innovation changed previous processes, products or services? *100 word maximum.*

Permitting typically required visiting City Hall, located in downtown Phoenix. Parking can be difficult and wait times can be frustrating. By enhancing the online permitting system, customers have the opportunity to work at their own location, on their own schedule. Because the system is self-service and real-time, customers can apply for a permit any time and have their inspection scheduled the following day, regardless of City Hall hours of operation. This saves time for customers and staff, who no longer have to process as many applications. The system is also mobile-friendly, so on-the-go customers have access anywhere from mobile devices.

4. Explain how the program or initiative substantially stretched or improved the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations. *200 word maximum.*

Government work is often done in department silos, with each team completing set tasks. This project brought together individuals from many different disciplines, teams and departments. Planning & Development (PDD) staff from multiple workgroups assisted with research and development, testing, training, implementation and providing information on current and previous permitting processes. The partnership between PDD Information Services and the central Information Technology web team was instrumental in upgrading technology, programming significant functionality changes, improving usability and reliability. Inspections staff also provided valuable input to improve functionality and test for red flags.

Although other jurisdictions and cities have online permitting capabilities, we haven't found any as comprehensive as the enhanced services provided by city of Phoenix. The online permitting, payment, and inspections aligns with recent efforts to streamline city services, reduce wait times at the permit counter and facilitate private development. Not only do these new permitting capabilities not require staff interaction, but they also encompass a wide-variety of permitting types for both residential and commercial work that is eligible for an over-the-counter permit with code compliance verified by the city inspector. By providing this service, city of Phoenix goes above and beyond what is expected of the typical governmental agency.

5. What individuals or groups are considered the primary initiators of your program? How does the innovation engage stakeholders or demonstrate high performance teaming? Were strategic partnerships and/or community networks developed as a result of the innovation? *200 word maximum.*

The original idea was conceived within the plan review and inspection teams, who then worked with information technology, inspection supervisors, counter staff, communications representatives, payments & submittal staff, and the fire protection team. PDD's technology staff and central IT staff conducted numerous brainstorming and design sessions to streamline and improve online service offerings. While the site was undergoing development and testing, research was completed to identify companies who obtained a large amount of permits who could benefit from online permits. Selected

companies were invited to participate in testing the website. Several companies were very enthusiastic to assist and provide feedback. A multi-disciplinary team also conducted testing and provided feedback. This feedback proved invaluable and resulted in additional efficiencies as well as improvements.

The companies that have provided feedback continue to be invested in the site and offer up suggestions about improvements and increasing the current online offerings. By reaching out to industry partners and including them in the development of the site they have been empowered and those that assisted are continuously among the highest users. Many fire protection companies and electrical contractors now regularly obtain the majority of their permits online.

6. If a private consultant was used please describe their involvement, identify the consultant and/or firm and provide contact information. *100 word maximum.*

N/A

7. To what extent do you believe your program or policy initiative is potentially replicable within other jurisdictions and why? To your knowledge, have any other jurisdictions or organizations established programs or implemented policies modeled specifically on this project? Please provide verification of the replication. *200 word maximum.*

The programming itself cannot be replicated because it is directly tied to multiple in-house systems. However, the concept of online permitting and types of permits available can be replicated by other jurisdictions who are willing to put in the same amount of effort to create a seamless service. An online search reveals that although other cities and counties across the nation have online permitting capabilities, they are often limited or vary greatly on the definition of "online." Some cities only allow monitoring progress of permits online; some permit applications can be completed online but then must be emailed to staff for review and approval. We have not found any cities with a system as robust as the one in the city of Phoenix or with the variety and quantity of permits offered in real time online.

8. What were the costs? What were the savings? *100 word maximum.*

Costs to complete the online permits include staff time spent on planning, design, development, testing and outreach efforts. Costs are estimated at \$20,000.

Direct staff cost savings have been estimated at \$45,000 annually, based on an average of 30 minutes of staff time for 3,000 permits each year. The savings for our customers are much greater. They can save more than an hour for each permit, plus fuel and drive time. Even customers who don't use the online program can benefit from the shorter wait lines at City Hall.

9. Please describe the most significant obstacle(s) encountered thus far by your program. How have they been dealt with? Which ones remain? *200 word maximum.*

Determining which permits would be eligible for online issuance and developing standard permit descriptions was the most significant obstacle. Different permits were analyzed and collaboration among plan review and inspections was needed. We had to select permits that could be issued without plan review and describe them in such a way that online users could understand any limitations.

Another obstacle was ensuring appropriate permit is selected online and appropriate fees are charged. This was overcome by developing a table driven approach for permit specific information including required data by permit, descriptions/instructions, validation criteria, and fee specific information for a consistent customer experience. This approach also facilitates adding future permits. Additional questions are included for some permit types to ensure accuracy of fees.

Other obstacles included how to track historic properties, which require additional approvals, linking permits to a valid address and creating a system that monitored incoming permit requests for issues that would prevent a permit from being issued (outstanding violations, invalid address, etc.). Additional logic was added ensure applicants understand development requirements for historic properties.

10. What outcomes did this program or policy have? What baseline data did you collect? How did you measure the change based on the intervention, and why do you believe in the credibility of this assessment? *200 word maximum.*

Online services increased between 25 and 63 percent as a result of these improvements. In a comparison of online service activity for the same six month period prior to and after the change (July – December 2014 vs 2015), there are measurable results. Below is a summary by service:

Online Service	Count 2014 July-Dec (Before)	Count 2015 July-Dec (After)	% Increase
Permits	756	1,231	63%
Electronic Plan Submission	405	507	25%
Payments	758	1,259	66%
Inspections scheduled	13,394	19,310	44%

When customers acquire services online, it saves time and money and reduces in-person wait time. With continued outreach and increasing customer awareness, city staff estimate 3,000 trips to City Hall will be reduced. Staff estimate that customers save easily more than one hour, including travel time, parking, waiting in line, and over-the-counter service. City staff also save 30 minutes per transaction and are able to assist other customers, who can then experience shorter wait times. This has also allowed the department to address increased workload due to the improving economy without requiring additional paid staff. The average annual saving are at least \$45,000 for the city and significantly more for the community. These statistics are based on real measurable activities.

11. Has the program received any press or other media coverage to date? If yes, please list the sources and briefly describe relevant coverage. *100 word maximum.*

City of Phoenix issued a press release announcing the enhanced service.

12. Please provide web links where the innovation can be seen/tested (in the case of something that is web-based) *100 word maximum*.

A list of all online services is available at www.phoenix.gov/pdd/online services.

Customers do not need to register to view on-line permit information, lookup permit and plan review information, schedule inspections, research, and view maps.

Registration is needed to submit plans electronically, acquire permits online, make payments and print issued permits. Registration is as easy as entering a valid email address and contact information, activating your account via an email, and picking the desired online service. Registered customers can view their history, reprint permits, and manage their profile as needed.

13. Please provide any key references and their contact information who can be interviewed/called to discuss the innovation and its impact. *100 word maximum*.

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14. Anything else you would like to add? *200 word maximum*.

This collaborative effort between multiple development disciplines, multiple teams and across multiple departments has resulted in a robust online real-time system that allows customers to acquire services at their convenience. This project has consolidated all online services in one place to make it easier for staff and customers to find information, acquire services and perform their business more efficiently.

All Planning and Development staff have been trained in the online service offerings to be better prepared to direct our customers to self-service options and answer questions when they arise. An online manual and frequently asked questions were developed and are available online to assist customers with acquiring online permits. Customers can also reach our communications staff during business hours for additional assistance. We expect the use of the program to continue to grow as more contractors and residents learn about it and are directed to the site and as we continue to promote the program through various channels. We also anticipate that customers who may have been previously intimidated or frustrated with the in-person permitting process may get permits for work that had gone unpermitted in the past, which can increase safety for residents throughout Phoenix.