



## Best Practice: One-Stop Shop for Event Organizers

REPORT UPDATED: JANUARY 30, 2012

**CITY: OTTAWA**

**POLICY AREAS: CITY PLANNING; CULTURAL AFFAIRS;  
FIRE & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

### BEST PRACTICE

**Event Central** is the City of Ottawa's first point of contact and one-stop shop for organizers of events in the nation's capital, offering assistance in facilitating permit approvals and coordinating meetings with relevant City officials and other levels of government to ensure the highest level of communication in regard to events. Event Central also chairs meetings of the City's Special Events Advisory Team (SEAT), which meets with event organizers prior to events and conducts post-event reviews.

Event Central enables the City to coordinate emergency preparedness for events, to schedule events so that they do not conflict with similar ones, to communicate with internal and external stakeholders in advance regarding the event's possible impact, to arrange for re-routing of traffic and buses, and to help prepare the event organizer to meet federal, provincial and municipal compliance standards. It also allows the City to track in-kind services provided by the City for such events.

### ISSUE

In Ottawa, whether events are international, national, provincial or municipal in scope, each City department is involved in small to large-scale event planning and has its own policies, processes, procedures, contact people, resources, approval processes and fees. For external event organizers, this has caused confusion and delays in obtaining the necessary information and approvals. In some past instances, an event organizer would have to contact 12 different branches of government to get approval for events and permits. Event Central has helped eliminate confusion, allowing for events to be planned more efficiently, and enhancing community relations.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Event Central's objectives are to:

- Attract special events to the Ottawa area by creating an efficient and transparent atmosphere for event planners to access City services and permits.
- Coordinate all City services and track in-kind City services provided to event organizers.
- Support programming that displays high merit and quality, and reflects Event Central's mandate.
- Present the distinct, diverse and vibrant character of Ottawa and its citizens.
- Assist in promoting Ottawa's local identity to both residents and tourists.
- Provide social and cultural benefits to the residents of Ottawa by enhancing their quality of life through community participation, social interaction and the contribution of the local arts, cultural and heritage sectors to the local economy.
- Provide logistical services for film production organizations such as the Ottawa-Gatineau Film and Television Development Corporation.

## Best Practice: One-Stop Shop for Event Organizers

- Recognize the role that events play in building community pride and creating enjoyment for residents of Ottawa and visitors to the City.
- Support local community organizations by promoting collaboration and volunteer opportunities.
- Encourage local partnerships among non-profit organizations in the provision of free community events for local residents and visitors.
- Recognize events as a core business within City structure (economic impact).
- Schedule events so that they are not in competition with other similar events.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of Event Central is to create a single point of access to City services for people planning to host events in the City of Ottawa. Depending on the type and size of an event, organizers can work with Event Central staff to obtain funding and licensing approvals as well as to obtain marketing, logistics and promotional assistance from various City branches. These processes are currently being evaluated and documented to form the basis of a City of Ottawa Special Events By-Law. This by-law will establish Event Central as a “one-stop shop” and set up legal requirements for holding an event in Ottawa pertaining to traffic needs, security officials, vending requirements, noise exemptions, waste management, public health requirements, and other event planning regulations for both City and private property. In January 2012, successful public consultations were held on the by-law. The by-law is scheduled to go forward to Council on February 15, 2012.

Also, Event Central receives daily updates on events from enforcement agencies. This information provides any complaints or information related to the current event. Event Central would then immediately follow up with the event organizer and suggest modification.

Event Central coordinates SEAT, which consists of representatives from the following City agencies: Public Health, Corporate Security, Traffic Management, Ottawa-Carleton Transportation municipal bus service, Waste Management, Environmental Services, Economic Development, Fire Services, Ottawa Paramedic Services, Building Services, Parking Enforcement, City Wide Allocations, representatives from the Ward Councillor's office, Para Transpo (bus/shuttle service for residents with accessibility requirements), Corporate Communications, By-Law Services and external agencies such as the Ottawa Police Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Department of National Defence, National Capital Commission, City of Gatineau, and Alcohol Gaming Commission of Ontario.



Dragon boat teams race in the 2011 Tim Horton's Ottawa Dragon Boat Festival, held every June. 70,000 people attended the festival in 2011.

SEAT participates in pre-event meetings with the event organizers to discuss the logistics of the event, to identify permits and public safety requirements, and to prevent duplication with other events. In addition, event reviews are carried out for all events to provide SEAT with the opportunity to discuss and note what about the event had worked well and what had not. Ultimately, this allows the organizer to make corrections for their next event.

### Development

Gaining support from all City agencies to establish Event Central was critical in the development stage. First, each staff member's role within the office was clearly defined. Meanwhile, internal and external stakeholders were identified. All processes were mapped out for each event type, such as festivals, fairs, film industry events, one-time corporate events,

## Best Practice: One-Stop Shop for Event Organizers

sporting events, community events and special events. Once processes were mapped out, these maps were shared with all relevant City agencies for consultation and input. An inventory was taken of all event sites, and information regarding site description, use and fees was recorded to form guidelines for Event Central.

In addition, Ottawa researched best practices at other cities regarding centralized event services. As a result, Ottawa continues to develop and improve the following elements:

- Communications plan
- Marketing plan
- Work tools for special events applications and the Event Central Office
- Policies to support process
- Policy for granting in-kind City services
- Financial policy with the Financial Services Unit
- City-wide event calendar
- Mechanism for elected representatives to handle community requests
- Defined process for managing requests from elected representatives
- Memorandum of Understanding for Events
- A standard operating procedures document for SEAT

A City-wide event calendar is being developed to house information for all events, including minutes of meetings, debrief notes from staff, and permits that have been approved. The calendar will be used by internal stakeholders and SEAT. The calendar will be populated by the stakeholders, and agreements will be put in place defining the role of the calendar administrator and the responsibility of the stakeholder to populate the calendar. This calendar will be critical in that it will enable staff and emergency responders to know which events are taking place and where. The calendar will be launched in March 2012 as one component of the Service Ottawa Event Central software system.

### Team Composition

The Event Central team consists of a Manager, two Special Event Senior Event Advisors, a Coordinator, a Policy / Project Officer and an Assistant. Departmental and branch representatives provide expertise and content from their respective areas. Members of SEAT and representatives from legal services and Information Technology Services also contribute.

The city agencies that support Event Central include:

- The SEAT partners
- Ottawa Police Services
- Ottawa Paramedic Services
- Ottawa Fire Services
- OC Transpo
- Para Transpo
- Ottawa Public Health
- By-Law Services
- Traffic Management
- Ottawa-Gatineau Film and Television Development Corporation
- Corporate Communications
- Mayor's Office
- Economic Development
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
- Corporate Security
- Environmental Services
- Waste Management
- Respective Business Improvement Association (BIA)



Approximately 42,000 participants raced along the Rideau Canal in downtown Ottawa during the 2011 Tamarack Homes Ottawa Race Weekend.

## Best Practice: One-Stop Shop for Event Organizers

- Respective Councillor (depending on location of event)

### COST

The cost of the program can be calculated in terms of the cost of the salaries of the full-time staff members, which is \$549,558 CAD (\$495,479 USD).

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The development of SEAT has had a powerful effect on how events are processed at the City by facilitating the flow of information to internal and external stakeholders. This has provided consistency and continuity, while giving the City a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of events and the nature of in-kind requests coming to the City. As a result, Ottawa can easily track its costs so that the City can now identify annual costs for in-kind services for special events. The program has resulted in the ability of the City to attract special events to the Ottawa area by offering an efficient and centralized service and by ensuring a fair and transparent application process for all special events organizers.

Cooperation between the City and event organizers has allowed events to become safer, given that the event organizer must register their event with the City. This guarantees that Emergency Services is aware of the event and will assist in the development of an event emergency plan, aid in traffic flow control and crowd control, and help ensure the overall safety of the event and of neighboring communities. Registering ensures that safety measures such as an emergency plan and a site plan are put into place and that all federal, provincial and municipal compliance standards are met. Further, event staff has been trained in emergency planning and will be conducting emergency training for event organizers and volunteers. This spring, Event Central – in cooperation with the Ottawa Police Service – will hold a mock emergency training session for festival and event organizers. Following this, later in the year, there will be a training session for festival and event volunteers.

Success has been measured by the large number of events that are now registered with Event Central and by the level of membership within SEAT. The high level of cooperation has helped facilitate a positive relationship between the City and event organizers.

Support for Event Central and for internal and external stakeholders has been a major contributor to the development of a vibrant event industry in Ottawa. Citizens can engage in events year-round, and more visitors are attracted to the National Capital Region.

### TIMELINE

2011	Conducted research across North America to identify the current processes for event management among large municipalities in preparation for drafting Ottawa's Special Events By-Law. Twelve municipalities were researched, including New York City, Washington D.C., Toronto and Vancouver.
February 2012	Event Central and SEAT members will participate in a one-day session to develop an integrated risk assessment tool for measuring risk levels of events.
February 15, 2012	The City of Ottawa Special Events By-Law will be brought forward to the Mayor and Council for consideration.
March 2012	The Event Central software system will be launched.

### LEGISLATION



## Best Practice: One-Stop Shop for Event Organizers

Several laws and by-laws pertained to this best practice, including those related to Emergency Planning and Responses, Encroachment, Fire Routes, Fireworks, Noise, Parks and Facilities, Signs on City Roads, Signs (Posting), Solid Waste, Traffic and Parking, Sales Persons Licenses, Ottawa Public Health Standards, Alcohol & Gaming, Building Codes / Tents, Environmental Services and Corporate Security Standards.

In February of 2012, the City of Ottawa will bring the Special Events By-Law forward to the Mayor and Council for consideration. As mentioned, this by-law will establish Event Central as a "one-stop shop" and set up legal requirements for holding an event in Ottawa pertaining to traffic needs, security officials, vending requirements, noise exemptions, waste management, public health requirements and other event planning regulations.

### LESSONS LEARNED

The greatest obstacle in establishing Event Central was the lack of adequate resources. Initially, finding resources to support Event Central proved difficult. In time, as other departments recognized the advantages of Event Central's support, these departments were more than willing to provide resources when and where needed. Ensuring that adequate resources are available from the start of the project is necessary for its success.

### TRANSFERABILITY

In considering the implementation of a similar best practice, the City of Ottawa suggests establishing a one-stop shop website for relevant information, including an event calendar and an in-kind tracking system. The city should also consider a coordinating body similar to SEAT consisting of representatives from appropriate agencies. Event Central is currently developing an on-line tool kit for event organizers.

Municipal representatives and representatives from other provinces such as Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have traveled to Ottawa and have identified Ottawa's Event Central as a leader in events coordination, processing, support, communication, political astuteness and in-kind tracking.

### CONTACTS

Delores MacAdam  
City of Ottawa  
[eventcentral@ottawa.ca](mailto:eventcentral@ottawa.ca)

Event Central  
101 Centrepointe Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K2G 5K7  
Tel: 613-580-2424, Ext. 41279

Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners.