



Case Study: Using Kaizen to Streamline a County Building Permit Process

A large county agency's permitting process had grown to unwieldy proportions. When builders needed to apply for a permit, they knew it would require logging an average of nine trips to the county agencies and trekking nearly 9/10 of a mile within the building. At each point, applicants were dealing with different concerns, as well. One department may be most concerned with upholding building codes while another may be more concerned with environmental oversight and a third only considered the structure and how it fit into a master plan. Worse, an applicant may spend significant time in the process only to find out that a single requirement made it impossible to get a permit. Because each department was charged with adhering to varying priorities and agendas, there was no cohesive, team-based approach to helping permit applicants get the information and direction they needed.

Guidon Performance Solutions worked with a 15-person team with representatives from various departments in the county. The team also included two "customers"—builders familiar with the permit application and approval process—which provided critical input from those who would directly benefit from improvements to the system.

The scope of the project included: review payment of fees and deposits; plan check and plan change steps; inspections; cashing; grading; and condition satisfaction. The goals were to reduce the customer's number of trips to the county's permitting headquarters and reduce wait time. This would be done by establishing a single point of contact for the customer, reducing in-building wait-time and hand-offs, and developing a team-based project review process that would identify deal-breakers upfront.

Through a five-day Kaizen event, the team identified a number of areas for streamlining and improvement. As a result, a "Quick Business" counter was introduced. At this counter—open from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., five days a week at one of the county's offices—customers with simple, quick questions and issues that take 15 minutes or less to resolve can get immediate help, preventing delays. Review of the process revealed duplication of effort and opportunities to reduce decision-making and hand-offs without any negative impact to the process. Having a single point of contact helped applicants identify problems with their projects upfront, allowing them to address those issues prior to investing significant time in a permit that would ultimately be rejected.

Other improvements included:

- 47 percent reduction in decisions
- 80 percent reduction in electronic hand-offs
- 66 percent reduction in physical hand-offs
- 80 percent reduction in waits between steps
- 55 percent reduction in loop-backs

In addition to these improvements and the amount of time saved, customers report greater satisfaction with the process—especially with the single point of contact, who can help them navigate between departments. And, the county also benefits from improved relationships with community members who were previously frustrated with the process.

Client: San Diego County's Department of Planning and Land Use

Industry: Government

Service: Kaizen event

Challenge: When real estate developers needed to do business with this county, it required:

- An average of nine separate visits to various agency departments
- Walking a total of nearly 9/10 of a mile between various agency counters
- Navigating a mix of different departments with varying requirements, fees, and priorities

Solutions: Guidon Performance Solutions helped the client:

- Create a single customer-facing point of contact
- Streamline permitting requirements
- Reduce the amount of time permit seekers needed to spend

Results: The Kaizen resulted in the following improvements:

- Cut the amount of time necessary for granting a permit in half
- Reduced the amount of walking between departments by 55 percent
- Eliminated many of the interim trips to the county offices the customer was forced to make



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