



BACKGROUND

The City and County of San Francisco has approximately 7,000 permitted retail food establishments and receives and processes approximately 850 applications annually. In order to obtain a permit in San Francisco a business owner would need to download or obtain a hard copy permit application. This application would then need to be completed and submitted either in person or by mail to the San Francisco Department of Public Health's Environmental Health Branch. The submission of an application along with the required fee was the first step in a long process that could involve months of back and forth correspondence with business owners. Significant delays were created by the submission of incomplete applications with missing or inaccurate information. This antiquated process resulted in many wasted hours of productivity along with frustration by the regulated community due to the amount of time it would take for a retail food facility to eventually open for business. This was problematic for business owners who were often paying a high monthly cost of rent before being approved to operate. Fortunately, the San Francisco Department of Public Health is in the process of incorporating the continuous improvement principles found in LEAN Management. Through the process of Value Stream Mapping, we discovered that our entire permit application process was not efficient and prone to user errors.

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION:

The challenge involved how to make a hard copy application process completely on-line with an on-line payment option in a time efficient manner that benefits both Environmental Health and the business owner.

The problem involved two main components:

The Paper Application

To begin the application process, the San Francisco business owner has to first obtain a business registration certificate by registering with the Office of the Treasure and Tax Collector. San Francisco has a consolidated billing process whereby the information from an applicant's business registration certificate is required for the submittal of an application. The paper application is reviewed by the inspector for accuracy; if information is incomplete, incorrect or missing then additional inspector time is required to contact the applicant for corrections, amendments or revisions. Hard copy referrals would also need to be correctly completed and routed, via interoffice mail, to other Department's like Fire and Zoning. In addition, the information from the application would need to be manually entered into an Access based database. The system was inefficient and prone to data entry errors. It was also a very time consuming process that could take months to complete.

The Paper Application Fee Payment

The only type of payments accepted for an application submittal were checks submitted either by mail, or in person. Credit card payment were accepted in person only. This process was void of customer service and was time consuming for all applicants but especially difficult for applicants operating in other parts of the country.

The next step was to set up the on-line application in collaboration with the Tax Collectors Office with the on-line application field's auto-populating information in both Department's databases. This link allowed us to standardize the business data between our two Departments and eliminate data entry errors.

The third step was to create a method for on-line payments and allow our permits to be issued through the Tax Collector's Office. The on-line payment option allows applicants to pay by e-check, credit or debit card. The DPH system collects the Application Fee, Planning Department Referral Fee and the San Francisco Fire Department Referral Fee. Each fee is directly deposited into accounts set up for each department. This has eliminated the costly and time consuming process of collecting checks, writing receipts and depositing payments.

By automating the entire permitting and payment system we can now track permits and payments through all of the steps in our review process. Below is an example:

Row Labels	Count of Application Number
Clerk Final	11
Complete	14
Initial Inspector Review	77
Inspector Final Review	25
Intake (Clerical work)	51
Pending Payment	4
Principal Review	10
Void due to no payment (blank)	8
Grand Total	200

ORIGINALITY

We believe that the San Francisco Environmental Health Branch now has the first and only on-line food permit application in the State, seamlessly linked to a Tax Collectors Office with the option to pay on-line.

COST EFFECTIVENESS

The San Francisco Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Branch budgeted \$35,000 which was used to cover the cost of programming and project management.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Setting up the on-line Retail Food Application with an on-line payment option required the collaboration and support of both government and business associations. The San Francisco Environmental Health Branch assigned a Senior Inspector to work full time with the Tax Collectors Office in order to ensure a

timely and functional application. Below is a list of some of the key agencies involved in this process:

San Francisco Tax Collectors Office
San Francisco Office of Small Business
San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development
San Francisco Business Portal
San Francisco Planning Department
San Francisco Fire Department
Golden Gate Restaurant Association

The on-line application was first presented at the Golden Gate Restaurant Associations Annual Conference where it was very well received.

RESULTS

After about 17 months of working in collaboration with the Tax Collectors Office, San Francisco now has a Retail Food Permit Application that is fully on-line which allows for customers to pay application fees on-line. This means that someone applying to open a restaurant in San Francisco can now apply from anywhere in the world and pay the application fee. Data entry errors have now virtually been eliminated by auto populating business registration data from the Tax Collectors Office. Staff no longer have the burden of manually processing checks and reviewing application which has greatly increased the efficiency of the program. In addition, clients applying for permits no longer have to wait weeks or months for their applications to be reviewed and approved. Also, we can now make referrals to other regulatory agencies electronically by email which has eliminated the need to send hard copy referrals which has also greatly improved the amount of time required to get a referral approved.

As a result, a permit application process that used to take around 1 year from the date paid to completion has been reduced to an average of 56 days.

NEXT STEPS

The first step was to pilot the on-line application for permits involving restaurants, retail markets, bars, bakeries, catering facilities and cafeterias. The next step will be to expand the on-line permit process to include all of the retail food permit programs which would include: cottage food operations, farmers markets, mobile food facilities, pop-up facilities and temporary food facilities. The ultimate goal will be to expand the on-line application process to include all of the permit programs currently in the Environmental Health Branch.

ATTACHEMENT

STEP 1:

To get started log on to:
<http://www.sfdph.org/dph/eh/>

STEP 2:

ONLINE FOOD PERMIT APPLICATION

for restaurants, bars, retail food markets, bakeries, caterers, catering facilities, school and employee cafeterias, commissaries

Go to: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/EH/Food>

3 Steps to complete the online application:

1. Complete online form
2. Sign electronically when prompted (a DocuSign function)
3. Pay fees by eCheck, debit or credit card



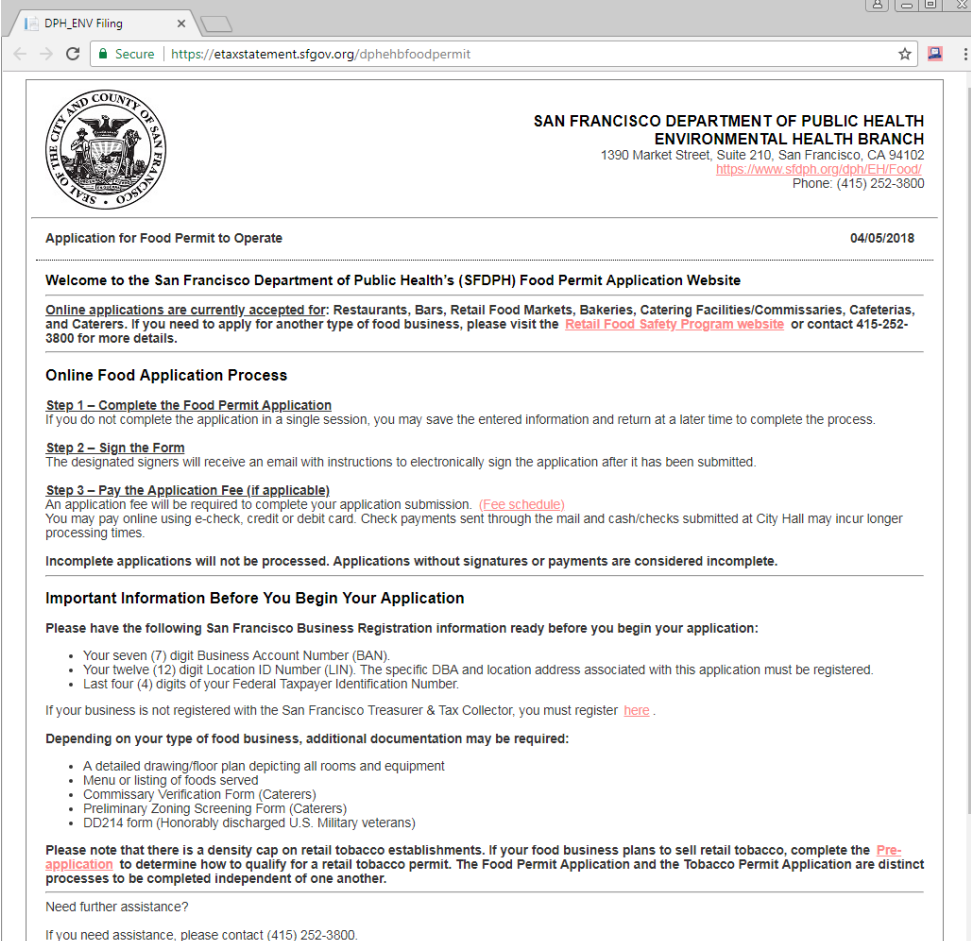
**FOOD SAFETY
PROGRAM**



These instructions are also available in the following languages: Spanish, Chinese and Tagalog.


STEP 3:

Then follow the simple application instructions



DPH_ENV Filing x

Secure | <https://etaxstatement.sfgov.org/dphehbfoodpermit>



**SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH BRANCH**
1390 Market Street, Suite 210, San Francisco, CA 94102
<https://www.sfdph.org/dph/EH/Food/>
Phone: (415) 252-3800

Application for Food Permit to Operate 04/05/2018

Welcome to the San Francisco Department of Public Health's (SFPDH) Food Permit Application Website

Online applications are currently accepted for: Restaurants, Bars, Retail Food Markets, Bakeries, Catering Facilities/Commissaries, Cafeterias, and Caterers. If you need to apply for another type of food business, please visit the [Retail Food Safety Program website](#) or contact 415-252-3800 for more details.

Online Food Application Process

Step 1 – Complete the Food Permit Application
If you do not complete the application in a single session, you may save the entered information and return at a later time to complete the process.

Step 2 – Sign the Form
The designated signers will receive an email with instructions to electronically sign the application after it has been submitted.

Step 3 – Pay the Application Fee (if applicable)
An application fee will be required to complete your application submission. ([Fee schedule](#))
You may pay online using e-check, credit or debit card. Check payments sent through the mail and cash/checks submitted at City Hall may incur longer processing times.

Incomplete applications will not be processed. Applications without signatures or payments are considered incomplete.

Important Information Before You Begin Your Application

Please have the following San Francisco Business Registration information ready before you begin your application:

- Your seven (7) digit Business Account Number (BAN).
- Your twelve (12) digit Location ID Number (LIN). The specific DBA and location address associated with this application must be registered.
- Last four (4) digits of your Federal Taxpayer Identification Number.

If your business is not registered with the San Francisco Treasurer & Tax Collector, you must register [here](#).

Depending on your type of food business, additional documentation may be required:

- A detailed drawing/floor plan depicting all rooms and equipment
- Menu or listing of foods served
- Commissary Verification Form (Caterers)
- Preliminary Zoning Screening Form (Caterers)
- DD214 form (Honorably discharged U.S. Military veterans)

Please note that there is a density cap on retail tobacco establishments. If your food business plans to sell retail tobacco, complete the [Pre-application](#) to determine how to qualify for a retail tobacco permit. The Food Permit Application and the Tobacco Permit Application are distinct processes to be completed independent of one another.

Need further assistance?
If you need assistance, please contact (415) 252-3800.