

OPAL

Ohio Permitting and Liquor Licensing

From paper and mainframe to a modern, cloud-native digital experience for **27,000+** Ohio businesses

Project Title

OPAL – Ohio Permitting and Liquor Licensing

Project Dates

Initiation: June 2024

Go-Live: June 5, 2025

Hypercare through October 2025

Public URL

[Home - Ohio Permit & Liquor Licensing](#)

Award Category

Digital Experience: Agency/Program Solutions

Submitting state

Ohio

Submitting agency

**Ohio Department of Commerce,
Division of Liquor Control**

Award contact

Name – Venu Pallerla

Email – venu.pallerla@com.ohio.gov

Phone/Address – 614-728-3913



State of Ohio

Ohio Department of Commerce ·
Division of Liquor Control

Promoting prosperity by protecting what matters most



**Department of
Commerce**

Division of Liquor Control

Executive Summary

The Ohio Department of Commerce's mission — promoting prosperity by protecting what matters most — has long guided its responsibility to ensure safe, fair, and efficient liquor licensing across the state. OPAL (Ohio Permitting and Liquor Licensing) directly advances that mission by transforming the entire licensing lifecycle into a modern, cloud-based digital experience.

Before OPAL, Ohio's liquor licensing processes, which support a multi-billion-dollar market, ran on paper applications, mailed checks, and a tightly coupled set of legacy systems anchored by a decades-old mainframe (CICS), supported by more than six older applications, and Content Manager. These constraints slowed business openings, limited regulatory visibility, complicated compliance monitoring, and added growing technical and cybersecurity risk.

OPAL replaces those processes with a unified, 24/7 self-service digital platform serving more than 27,000 active licensees and 150,000 active permits. Through [Home - Ohio Permit & Liquor Licensing](#), businesses apply, renew, transfer locations or ownership, upload documents, make secure electronic payments, and track application status in real time. Behind the portal, OPAL integrates Microsoft Dynamics 365 Finance and Sales, the Power Platform, Power Pages, and a modern data architecture on Azure Synapse and Data Lake. More than seven million historical documents were converted into accessible digital records, and 24 cross-agency systems are integrated through the new platform.

OPAL also retired Ohio's liquor-licensing mainframe footprint. Decommissioning CICS — along with five additional legacy systems — is a milestone for the state: it removes substantial technical debt, shrinks the cybersecurity attack surface, and frees the agency from a shrinking pool of mainframe specialists. That technical achievement underwrites the business outcomes Ohioans actually feel: faster permits, clearer status, and a more responsive regulator. OPAL strengthens regulatory oversight, accelerates business operations, supports public safety, and positions Ohio as a national model for digital permitting — a single line-of-business solution whose pattern can be applied to any state-administered licensing program.

OPAL: A unified, 24/7 self-service digital platform

- Serving more than 27,000 active licensees and 150,000 active permits
- Businesses use [Home - OPAL](#) to manage their licenses and track application status in real time
- A roadmap for any state-administered licensing program



Serving more than 27,000 active licensees and 150,000 active permits



Businesses use OPAL website to manage their licenses and track application status in real time



A roadmap for any state-administered licensing program

Idea

What problem did we solve, why did it matter, and why is it universal?

The Problem

Ohio's liquor-licensing environment was built on six disconnected legacy systems — CICS, ABCS, LL, OPS, PALS, and Content Manager — and on manual, paper-intensive workflows. The systems were difficult to maintain, limited regulatory visibility, and slowed economic activity for every Ohio business that depends on a liquor permit to operate.

Why it Mattered

The problem extended far beyond technology:

- **Economic prosperity** was constrained when businesses waited weeks or months for licenses to be issued, transferred, or renewed.
- **Public safety** suffered when regulators had to navigate multiple systems to assess a single licensee's compliance posture.
- **Constituent experience** did not match modern expectations for digital government — paper applications and mailed checks felt out of step with the way Ohioans transact today.
- **State risk** increased as critical licensing functions continued to run on aging mainframe infrastructure with shrinking vendor support and a shrinking pool of specialists.

These challenges stood in direct conflict with Commerce's mission to promote prosperity by protecting what matters most, increasing outreach and education for licensees and stakeholders, and promoting positive community impact. OPAL was conceived to resolve them decisively.

A Transformational Idea – Not an Upgrade

OPAL was envisioned as a ground-up reinvention of Ohio's liquor-licensing experience, not a refresh of legacy screens. Its design rests on six deliberate moves:

- One unified, cloud-native digital platform replacing six legacy systems.
- A secure, mobile-friendly OHID-based login experience aligned with statewide identity standards.
- Self-service portal - [Home - Ohio Permit & Liquor Licensing](#) for applications, renewals, transfers, payments, and uploads.
- Real-time data exchange with 24 external systems across the state and its partners.
- Enterprise analytics on Azure Synapse and Power BI to support risk-based oversight.
- Digitization of more than seven million historical documents to create a true digital system of record.



Why the mainframe story matters

Decommissioning a mainframe is rare in state government — and rarer still without disrupting service. Ohio's liquor-licensing core ran on CICS, mainframe technology that has powered government workloads for decades. CICS skills are increasingly scarce, the platform carries growing cybersecurity exposure, and every year of continued operation accrues technical debt that competes with mission spending.

OPAL retired CICS along with five additional legacy systems. The headline for Ohioans is faster permits and a better experience; the headline for the state is that the underlying risk is gone.

Why the Idea is Universal

Every state government faces the same compound set of challenges: aging mainframe infrastructure with shrinking specialist support, paper-bound legacy processes, fragmented data across siloed systems, and rising public expectations for transparent digital services. OPAL is a documented response to that pattern — not a generic licensing platform, but a reference implementation of how those challenges can be addressed together, in a single execution, against a regulated line-of-business problem.

What is broadly reusable is architectural and operational: a Microsoft cloud reference; an OHID-aligned identity model; a 24-integration interoperability fabric; a documented Agile delivery cadence with layered governance; and a paper-to-digital change-management playbook designed for a regulated industry that could not tolerate downtime.

The OPAL pattern also maps directly onto the NASCIO 2026 State CIO Top 10 Priorities:

- **Modernization** — replacement of six legacy systems with a single cloud-native platform
- **Digital Government / Digital Services** — 24/7 self-service replacing paper across 86 permit types
- **Identity & Access Management** — OHID single sign-on aligned with statewide standards
- **Data Management & Analytics** — Azure Synapse and Power BI enabling risk-based oversight
- **Consolidation / Optimization** — six retired systems and a unified data foundation
- **Cloud Services** — elastic, scalable Microsoft cloud architecture replacing on-premises infrastructure

It is a single project that advances six priorities at once — the kind of compound, cross-cutting work state CIOs are looking to scale.

Implementation

How we delivered it, who was involved, and why the approach mattered.

Project Roadmap

OPAL followed a disciplined Agile delivery roadmap grounded in cross-agency partnership. The program committed to a single same-day cutover – no parallel systems, not phased rollout – and managed risk through rigorous readiness checkpoints across the sprints, an intensive hypercare window after launch and a controlled transition into managed services.

- Initiation: June 2024.
- Seven Agile development sprints from August 2024 through March 2025, with readiness checkpoints across business, technical, and security tracks. Delivering a full regulated-industry replacement at this scope in eight months is, by itself, an outlier in state government modernization.
- Production cutover: June 5, 2025. Paper applications and mailed checks were no longer accepted from that date forward.
- Hyper-care support through October 2025, with continuous improvement spanning three full annual licensee renewal cycles.
- Ongoing managed services and a Microsoft update model sustain the platform after hypercare.

A Modern, Modular Architecture

OPAL is built on the Microsoft cloud ecosystem, configured for the scalability, accessibility, and security expected of statewide systems. Each layer of the architecture was selected so that capability could be extended without re-platforming:

- **Dynamics 365 Finance & Sales (Customer Engagement)** for financial alignment, OPAL-specific accounts payable/receivable, general ledger, licensing case & customer management, and workflow.
- **Power Platform (Power Automate, Power BI) & Power Pages** for automation, business rules, and self-service analytics and the public-facing digital experience at [Home - OPAL](#), secured via OHID.
- **Azure Synapse and Azure Data Lake** for governed analytics, cross-agency reporting, and audit-ready data retention.

Data Migration and Legacy Decommissioning

OPAL migrated the foundation of Ohio's liquor-licensing record system into the new platform:

- More than 115,000 contacts.
- More than 7,000,000 historical documents.
- All active licensing and permit data, plus recent years of transaction history.

Six legacy systems — CICS, ABCS, LL, OPS, PALS, and Content Manager — were successfully retired. Their decommissioning removed substantial technical debt and cybersecurity exposure from the state's estate.

Cross-Agency Integration (24 systems)

OPAL exchanges data with 24 systems spanning payment processing [Convergent Business Operation Support System – (CBOSS)], statewide financials [Ohio Administrative Knowledge System (OAKS)], liquor-license compliance and inspections (Matrix), statewide identity (OHID), product registrations (Pro Sovos), tax holds and liens (Taxation), Census/population data [Department of Development

(ODOD)], liquor operations (D365 F&O), OPAL financials (D365 Finance), and historical document repositories (SharePoint). This interoperability is what makes seamless permit issuance, renewals, and compliance oversight possible.

Who was Involved

Delivery was shared by Commerce, the Division of Liquor Control, statewide IT, regulators and integration partners across 24 systems, and the implementation partner. Governance was layered to match the work:

- Monthly Executive Steering Committee meetings on KPIs, change requests, risk, and contract management.
- Weekly project committee status reporting on milestones, deliverables, decisions, and escalation.
- On-demand technical and functional working sessions for design, requests, incidents, and deliverable review.
- Azure DevOps for issue and task management across the entire delivery.

On the agency side, dedicated product owners for licensing, finance, and analytics ensured the end product aligned with business intent. Workstream leads owned timeline and budget. Subject matter experts from licensing, finance, OAKS, Matrix, CBOSS, OHID, Pro Sovos, Taxation, ODOD, and SharePoint validated requirements and design throughout.

Change Management and Stakeholder adoption

OPAL launched into a regulated industry where uninterrupted permitting is essential to thousands of Ohio businesses. The agency invested heavily in preparing licensees and staff for the transition:

- Statewide onboarding with how-to guides, instructional videos, and portal walkthroughs published on [OPAL - Ohio Department of Commerce](#).
- Ongoing [Home - Ohio Permit & Liquor Licensing](#) support content for new and existing permit holders, including FAQs and renewal-cycle guidance.
- Coordinated public communications, including the June 4, 2025, launch announcement and proactive media outreach.
- Controlled production support and a managed-services transition into hypercare to keep day-one issues containable.

Impact

What improved? How do we know? Why does it matter?

Impact carries the highest NASCIO scoring weight — and OPAL delivers across every audience the agency serves: businesses, regulators, citizens, and the state itself.



OPAL – Before and After

Promoting prosperity by protecting what matters most

Ohio Department of Commerce | Division of Liquor Control

BEFORE OPAL Paper-Era Liquor Licensing	AFTER OPAL Cloud-Native Digital Licensing
Mainframe at the core CICS plus ABCS, LL, OPS, PALS, Content Manager/S3 – 6 disconnected systems & growing technical debt	Mainframe retired CICS & 5 other legacy systems decommissioned, removing technical debt & shrinking the attack surface
Paper applications & mailed checks Permit holders mailed forms & physical payments; staff sorted envelopes before review could begin	24/7 self-service portal at Home - OPAL Apply, renew, transfer, & pay online via secure credit card or EFT – paper applications no longer accepted
Black-box status Applicants had no real-time view of where their permit stood; Phone calls & emails replaced visibility	Real-time status & document upload A personalized dashboard, instant filing confirmation, & in-portal uploads replace mail-and-wait
Fragmented compliance data Regulators jumped between systems to build a single view of a licensee, slowing enforcement & oversight	Unified compliance picture 24 cross-agency integrations bring inspections, identity, tax, products, & financials into 1 view
Documents trapped in silos Millions of historical records sat in legacy repositories that were costly to maintain & hard to search	Searchable system of record 7M+ historical documents digitized; a data lake supports modern discovery, audit, & reporting
Limited analytics Reporting was retrospective; risk-based oversight was hard to operationalize at scale	Risk-based, data-driven insight Power BI dashboards on Azure Synapse enable proactive enforcement & continuous improvement

OPAL by the numbers — scope of the modernization at go-live, June 2025

27K+ Active licensees served	150K Active permits managed	115K+ Contacts migrated	7M+ Documents digitized
24 Cross-agency integrations	6 Legacy systems retired	86 Permit types supported	24/7 Online self-service

Outcomes since launch — Division of Liquor Control operational reporting

75%+ Reduction in new license wait time	70%+ Renewals auto issued	95%+ Reduction in application backlog	10K+ Supplier registrations digitized
---	-------------------------------------	---	---

Impact on Businesses

OPAL reshapes the way 27,000+ Ohio businesses interact with their regulator. Previously, opening, transferring, or renewing a permit meant paper applications, in-person visits, mailed documents, and weeks of uncertainty. After OPAL, businesses receive 24/7 online access to applications, renewals, and transfers; secure electronic payment via credit card or EFT; real-time application status; in-portal

document uploads; and digital management of safekeeping, expansions, and location changes. New license wait time has been reduced by 75%+, and roughly 10,000 supplier registrations moved online.

“It is a transformational for the permit holder. It was built with the permit holder in mind. It is a transparent system that allows permit holders to log on to their account and see the status of their permit anywhere along that process.”

— Jackie DeGenova, Superintendent, Ohio Division of Liquor Control

Impact on Regulators

Consolidated licensing records improve auditability. Analytics dashboards support proactive enforcement and risk-based oversight. Automated validations reduce manual review for every transaction — today, approximately 75% of renewals are auto-issued through rules-based processing, and the application backlog has been reduced by roughly 95%. Real-time data exchange with 24 external systems strengthens compliance monitoring without forcing inspectors back to disconnected screens. Together, these shifts let staff spend more time on the work that protects Ohioans, and less time managing paper.

“Switching to a fully paperless system allows staff to focus more on reviewing applications for compliance, rather than handling the administrative tasks involved with paper-based processes.”

— Paul Kulwinski, Deputy Superintendent and Director of Licensing, Ohio Division of Liquor Control

Impact on Citizens and Communities

Stronger licensing oversight contributes directly to safer communities. Public reports and the modernized permit-lookup tool give Ohioans transparent access to permit and ownership information. A fully paperless workflow also reduces the agency’s environmental footprint, and OPAL handles charitable-fundraiser receipt submissions for qualifying nonprofit and political organizations — a small but meaningful improvement to community-level compliance.

Impact on the State of Ohio

The retirement of CICS and five additional legacy platforms eliminates risk that had been growing for years. Cybersecurity and operational risk both decrease; ongoing maintenance overhead drops; the platform is cloud-native and elastic; and OPAL becomes a model architecture other Ohio licensing programs can learn from.

How We Know

Adoption metrics speak directly to the size of the change: 27,000+ active licensees and 150,000 active permits served on day one; 115,000+ contacts migrated; 7M+ historical documents digitized; 24 cross-agency integrations live in production; six legacy systems retired; 86 permit types supported across 13 licensing business processes; and a 24/7 self-service portal that replaced paper and mailed checks at cutover. Public confirmation from agency leadership and statewide media coverage of the launch reinforces the underlying business case.

What Now

OPAL was designed to be sustained, not just delivered. After hypercare, the platform moved into a managed-services model with break-fix support, the Microsoft update cadence, and continuous improvement spanning three annual licensee renewal cycles. Future investment will extend the platform with additional self-service features and deeper analytics — all without the technical debt the legacy stack imposed. Because OPAL is built on configurable Microsoft components rather than bespoke code, the same pattern can be applied to other Ohio licensing programs and to other states facing the same problem set. That reusability is the long-term return on the initial investment.

Conclusion

OPAL demonstrates how a clear vision, modern technology, and committed cross-agency collaboration can transform a critical statewide function. More than a new system, OPAL is a new digital experience for Ohio — improving economic vitality, strengthening regulatory oversight, and delivering a more transparent, accessible, and responsive government service to the businesses and communities that depend on it. Most importantly, OPAL directly advances the Commerce mission: ***promoting prosperity by protecting what matters most.*** When agencies align mission, technology, and execution, they create lasting, scalable value for the entire state.

Learn more at [Home - Ohio Permit & Liquor Licensing](#) and [OPAL - Ohio Department of Commerce](#)