

Q&A: Building Better Democracies with Open Government Services

Accela's Civic Platform Expands Capabilities to Build Bridges between Citizens and Government

Government works best when there are no boundaries between agencies and the citizens they serve. In the past, cumbersome paper-based processes created a wedge between government and its citizens. Technology is bridging the gap and Accela, through its expanding Civic Platform, is helping lead the way. Accela CEO Maury Blackman talks with *Government Technology* about new Civic Platform capabilities and Accela's open data ecosystem.

Q: Accela's Civic Platform has been revolutionizing how citizens connect with government. Can you tell us about Civic Platform's new capabilities?

MAURY BLACKMAN: We have expanded our legislative management capabilities, which enable online public meeting and town hall activities. Citizens can participate or reference what took place at their convenience — all online. This furthers Accela's goal of building better democracies by providing open government services.

We have also added a functionality that better coordinates right-of-way management. Many times, road repairs or sidewalk replacements can be a nuisance. This solution coordinates improvements among agencies, utilities and highway departments to minimize disruptions and allow citizens and government to monitor improvements. It can be used for non-construction activities like events or parades to help reroute traffic while providing real-time information updates.

We're using our platform capabilities to provide citizens with a 360-degree view of the activities in their communities and empower them to better participate in the decision-making process.

Q: What makes Civic Platform unique in terms of providing government agencies with a comprehensive approach to citizen engagement?

MAURY BLACKMAN: Accela's Civic Platform is the only platform that addresses all of the needs of government inside the vertical we serve, which is primarily around how to open a business, develop land, manage assets or participate in decision-making around those services. We provide a platform to build these solutions, to enable and encourage third-party integrators to implement our services, and to allow developers to deploy additional applications. When we add these businesses and capabilities, the architecture is open so our entire ecosystem has access to it.

Q: How is your CivicData.com platform an integral part of bridging the divide between citizens and government?

MAURY BLACKMAN: Government is great at collecting information, but it can be difficult to open data up and share it. The information that revolves around our products — like construction

activities and new business requirements — is very important to citizens.

Platforms like CivicData.com can bring in data not just from our platform, but from other areas like public safety, transportation, and health and human services. This can all be rolled into one data portal to provide a single view for the citizen looking for information about his or her community and for the civic-minded developer looking to build innovative apps to serve agencies and citizens.

Something very important and exciting is the integration between public-serving applications — like permitting or licensing — and private applications like Yelp. Yelp does a great job of reviewing restaurants, and government does a great job of inspecting restaurants. Through open data, we can bridge those services to allow a citizen to access a restaurant review and also see inspection information.

Q: What do you see for the future of government and citizen engagement and how do you see Accela contributing to that?

MAURY BLACKMAN: We are going to see more applications that use public data in open data containers, and transactional data in platforms like ours to integrate with private applications. Creating these data points offers a powerful view of what it takes to build a building or open a business. It's almost like a business wizard that looks at government requirements, but also helps individuals find properties to open their business or helps them establish banking relationships. We'll start to link multiple services into one complete application.