



Tips and Tricks: Simplifying Your CDR App Search

What Every Community Development
and Regulation Application or
Vendor Should Have



The objective of this white paper is to help building and planning departments understand advances in CDR applications, identify valuable characteristics in the solutions, and provide guidance in selecting the right CDR software vendor.

Introduction

Government community development regulation (CDR) provides safety for citizens and communities. This is accomplished by planning, implementing and enforcing codes and regulations specific to a region. Keeping these communities safe and viable is a major challenge that often requires the assistance of software solutions. This is especially true in a digital age in which communities are constantly developing and evolving with new demands from citizens. However, with so many CDR applications on the market today, how can one decipher the best solution for their agency?

The objective of this white paper is to help building and planning departments understand advances in CDR applications, identify valuable characteristics in the solutions, and provide guidance in selecting the right CDR software vendor.

The Advancement of Community Development and Regulations (CDR) Applications

Historically, CDR applications have been mostly tailor-made specifically for government agencies. While it is desirable to have a solution that meets the exact needs of an agency, these applications have been hard to support as platform vendors typically struggle to determine if a potential problem in the solution is part of the software platform or part of a client's customizations. Attempts to recreate these problems during

diagnosis have also been problematic. Further, these vendors have been challenged to make updates when their platform technology is upgraded. When changes take place, what happens to all of the customizations? Will they break?

Nearly 40% of government technology professionals say their existing investment in legacy systems hinders them from moving more rapidly to the cloud.

Finally, custom applications have been difficult to integrate with other applications due to their non-standard nature. This is on top of the fact that it takes a much longer time to implement at a much higher cost.

Over time, these applications have become more complex, offering advanced feature sets and functionality. Today, public sector software vendors have worked to align their solutions to support modern digital governments. As a result, CDR applications have become more about configurability rather than customization. This removes much of the pain government agencies experience when managing and supporting solutions built for them alone.

As CDR applications have advanced, there has been a shift in solution deployment models. Software vendors are moving from the traditional on premises deployment model to Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) deployments due to the many benefits cloud technology offers, including increased agility and reduced costs. Government agencies understand these benefits and want in on the action. In fact, research firm Gartner foresees double-digit growth in government use of public cloud services, with spending forecasted to grow on average 17.1 percent per year through 2021. Bain Research also predicts that 78 percent of government entities will be predominantly buying SaaS by 2022.

The benefits of SaaS solutions include:

- ➔ **Increased focus on citizen services** – When a cloud vendor is hosting the software, an agency doesn't need to maintain a full datacenter, which allows IT resources to focus more on innovation and citizen services.
- ➔ **Increased security** – Cloud solutions help you stay up-to-date on all security patches to reduce virus attacks.
- ➔ **Decreased overall costs** – SaaS solutions have lower operating costs compared to on-premises solutions that require additional spending for technology, IT maintenance and support.
- ➔ **Easy upgrades** – A SaaS solution automatically ensures you're always on the latest version so you can enjoy upgrades as they're released.

Even with the transition from on premises to SaaS, many government agencies struggle to make the move. Nearly 40 percent of government technology professionals say their existing investment in legacy systems hinders them from moving more rapidly to the cloud.¹ However, as demand for digital services increases, more agencies will find the need to migrate.

What to Look for in a CDR Application

With so many CDR-type options available today, it isn't always easy to understand what a true CDR application should encompass. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

Out-of-the-Box

Pre-packaged CDR applications reduce the time it takes to start achieving goals and initiatives, helping agencies become successful faster at a lower cost. It's important to identify technology that includes industry standard configurable fields, specific permit types, defined inspection types, prepackaged workflows and pre-built reports and citizen notifications. When an agency can purchase a more packaged solution, they get the domain expertise of a vendor in defining the process flows and often end up with a more optimized and efficient process.

Along with the pre-built configuration elements, packaged solutions support optimized processes such as parallel plan reviews, mobile inspections, online payment processes and more to ease the burden of agency staff. This backend automation reduces the amount of time it takes to process requests and applications, ultimately helping agencies be more productive to generate increased revenue and accelerate economic growth within their community.

Pre-built applications also make it easy for agencies to implement, maintain and support their solutions. Heavy customization requires a lot of resources and attention from software vendors. In comparison, pre-packaged solutions help focus these resources providing increased support. Out-of-the-box solutions also require far less from an implementation and delivery standpoint to help agencies get up and running faster.



Packaged, But Highly Configurable

It is tempting to want a highly customized solution that will meet the exact needs of a particular agency. But, as mentioned earlier, too much customization can be a problem down the road. Each agency will have some elements that are unique, but most share many common elements.

A quality CDR application should include packaged functionality preconfigured into the solution using industry standard best practices, but should also be flexible enough to fit the individual needs of an agency through configuration, not customization.



Integrated

An integrated solution is key for a good user experience. If not properly integrated, too many technologies, years of acquisitions and a lack of investment can leave a solution disjointed and siloed at best. This can happen easily with some software vendors reaching nearly 30 acquisitions. A solid CDR application should work in tandem with common third-party solutions and also encompass APIs and tools that can integrate with less common third-party solutions.

Apples and Oranges — Comparing CDR Vendors

Now that we've covered a few important components of a CDR application, it's vital to understand who can deliver on them. Here are some things you might want to consider in a top-notch CDR vendor:

Domain Expertise

Identifying a vendor whose domain expertise is in community development and regulation will ensure you get the most cutting-edge technology. You may consider asking questions such as: Where is the vendor's focus – is it truly CDR or elsewhere? What are other agencies primarily using the technology for? Is CDR where all the innovation and investment are going, or does the vendor let its CDR solution take a back seat to its other offerings? Understanding the answers to these questions will not only provide you with the latest innovations but will also make sure your solutions are supported and maintained long term. In many cases, choosing a more specialized vendor provides the best solution in a particular area.

Software Architecture — Single-Tenant vs Multi-Tenant

Government agencies should choose a SaaS vendor whose software platform was built for the cloud from the ground up. This means knowing the differences between single-tenant and multi-tenant structures, and why it is important. Single-tenant cloud requires a vendor to run all SaaS customers in separate data environments, which may sound better, but is actually a work-around when a solution was not initially built to run in the cloud. The reason is single-tenant environments are costlier due to the time and resources it requires when it comes to customizations and maintenance, and the extra hardware involved. These extra costs are generally passed on to customers hosted in those environments.

Multi-tenant architectures are built for SaaS; they are designed to be highly secure across all users and often provide lower per user costs because more resources are shared, increasing maintainability and efficiency. This type of environment is also easier to set up, onboard and deploy. Updates applied to the system affect all customers, not just the individual customer in their own database instance and possibly server instance. Again, the benefits and efficiencies of multi-tenant architectures are achieved without losing any of the security or compliance as they were designed to function this way. SaaS vendors would like to provision customers on multi-tenant platforms but transitioning a platform from single-tenant to multi-tenant requires a significant rewrite, so it's important to know what type of architecture your potential CDR vendor offers.

Market Experience

Software vendors often cater to specific markets. Before making a move, be sure to understand the tiers they serve. Are they working with smaller agencies, enterprise-sized agencies or both? It makes a difference. If a vendor's sweet spot, for example, is a population of 500,000 citizens or less, an enterprise-sized agency may not be the best fit. Identify their customers and see where you align, because their solutions most likely scale to fit those they serve.

Conclusion

Government agencies constantly strive to deliver the highest quality of service possible to their citizens. Selecting the best CDR application for your agency makes that happen.

That's why it is important to choose a vendor that supports your initiatives by providing expertise, solution architecture and market experience to help you reach your goals. By identifying and sharing the components we consider significant to an agency's success in community development regulation, we hope you have the tools you need to effectively select a CDR application and vendor to best fit your needs.

Accela Delivers

Accela serves government agencies of all sizes with solutions built specifically for community development and regulation. We maintain and support this focused set of CDR solutions with an agile strategy that is heavily invested in pre-built solutions that encompass industry standard best practices to ensure government agencies achieve success faster. Civic Applications for Building and Planning help communities build and grow safely as they were intended with zoning, plan review and approval, permitting, and code enforcement automation. In addition, Accela technology offers government agencies:

- **Community development and regulations domain expertise** – With a major focus on building, planning and regulations, Accela is committed to providing agencies and citizens with the latest technology packed into every solution.
- **True SaaS solutions** – Accela’s Civic Applications were built from the ground up for the cloud and are hosted on a Microsoft Azure infrastructure to easily support and maintain solutions, which passes lower costs onto the consumer.
- **Expansive market experience** – With customers in government agencies of all sizes around the world, Accela has the experience and knowledge to help you be successful.
- **Integrated technology** – Platform-wide APIs, SDKs and open data allow developers to integrate data and processes across complementary technology for a more robust solution.
- **Fully supported solutions** – Experience high functioning solutions that are fully supported by Accela’s Technical Support team.
- **Highly configurable applications** – Meet the unique needs of your agency with configurable components and no need for custom code.

Ready to take the next step?

Speak to your account representative: (888) 722-2352



accela.com | (888) 722-2352

Accela provides market-leading solutions that empower state and local governments to build thriving communities, grow businesses and protect citizens. Powered by Microsoft® Azure®, Accela’s open and flexible technology helps agencies address specific needs today, while ensuring they are prepared for any emerging or complex challenges in the future. Accela is headquartered in San Ramon, California, with additional offices around the world.