Madison, Wisconsin

Enhancing Engagement and City Responsiveness to Resident Service Requests

As the capital and second most populous city in Wisconsin, Madison is a diverse and quickly growing community. The City prides itself on its strong emphasis on active good governance and providing high-quality service to residents and visitors. Its unique location on an isthmus and land surrounded by lakes, plus an extensive network of bike trails and parks, offers residents a variety of public spaces and amenities to utilize.

A resource that worked, but with room to improve

The City of Madison's Report a Problem website allows residents to easily alert the City to a variety of community issues and needs, such as pothole reporting, street clearing requests, and restaurant complaints. About 15,000 reports are submitted every year. Multiple City departments and services are accessible from this web portal, creating a user-friendly "one-stop shop" for residents to utilize.

While Madison residents could reliably find all the complaint and request forms they might need in one place online, the actual behind-the-scenes processing of Report a Problem submissions was less uniform. Email distribution lists delivered the text of each submission to department email accounts where the details were manually copied and pasted, line by line, into other systems.

This manual step relied on staff to nudge the issue forward and prevented ongoing and automated tracking of the report and associated activities. The public also had no visibility into the status of their requests or complaints, such as if their request was received, if it had been assigned, and when it might be addressed. This unsatisfying, one-way relationship hampered opportunities to improve the response process and better serve residents.

From an equity and engagement perspective, City officials knew that not everyone in the Madison community was taking full advantage of the Report a Problem service. This suggested an imperfect picture of the City's challenges and opportunities and illuminated the possibility that public services were potentially not being shared equally by residents.

Elevating the service request lifecycle

The City convened a 12-member cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary team, including colleagues from the Mayor's office and the City's Racial Equity & Social Justice Initiative (RESJI) team. In partnership with Accela, the project team selected five of the most highly used Report a Problem forms and upgraded them using Accela's Service Request Management Solution.

Population
273,469

Challenge
Upgrade service request system to streamline request management and improve service delivery and resident engagement

Solutions
Accela Planning
Accela Building
Accela Business Licensing
Accela Service Request Management

Results
Management and City leadership can monitor indicators and develop insights on the community

Reduction in City staff workload spent manually tracking and managing service requests

"Closes the loop" by providing submitters visibility into the results of their request

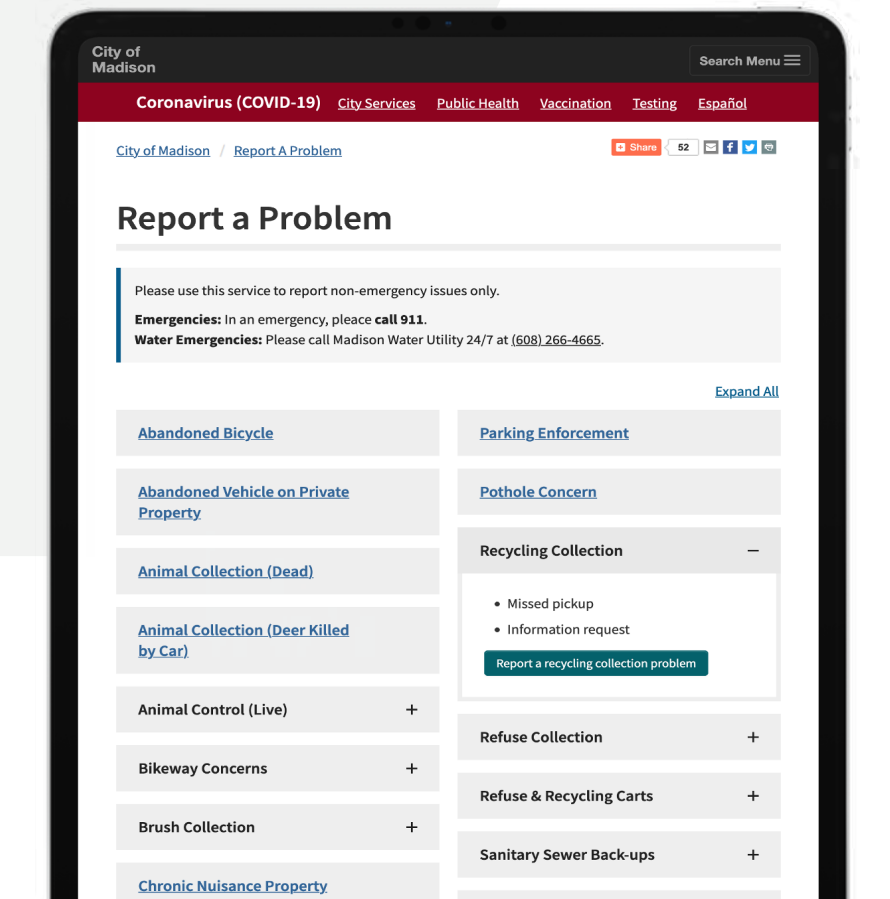Increases resident proactiveness and sense of ownership in their community
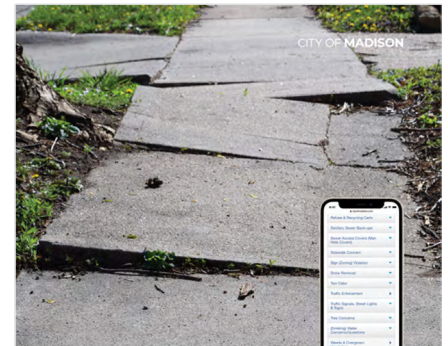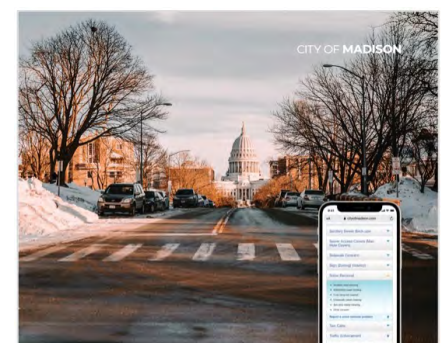
Today when a request is submitted through those forms, it flows into the Accela system and is automatically assigned for action; its status can be tracked as City staff investigate, act on, and work to close the request. An advanced interface routes submissions to and from external software systems where necessary, providing a comparable level of trackable detail for all departments. Residents can also log in to see the history and status of their submissions.

To ensure resident awareness of the services, the City and Accela also created a compelling communications campaign through which the City, its departments, and Public Information Officers will drive more resident engagement to utilize the Report a Problem website. City staff took extra care to rewrite the materials in "plain language," a style of writing that makes it easier for the public to read, understand, and use government communications.

Empowering residents and leadership

For Madison residents, the Report a Problem page continues to provide the same pathways for reporting community issues and remains accessible via any modern web browser and device. On the other side of every transaction, however, Accela's powerful automation is at work ensuring that the right data gets to the right team for efficient and timely resolution.

These strategic, data-driven enhancements deliver several key benefits. Automation alleviates staff workload previously spent manually tracking and managing submissions. Managers can better monitor performance indicators and shift resources as needed, in alignment with the City's Performance Excellence initiative, a municipality-wide mission to provide high-quality public services. City leaders are likewise empowered to leverage this data to develop insights on and solutions for issues affecting underserved communities. More accessible language and the system's ability to "close the loop" with visibility into results also reinforces a positive resident/municipal relationship.

Perhaps most importantly, an improved and effective Report a Problem service increases residents' sense of ownership in their community by empowering them to take the first step in addressing issues the City may not otherwise be aware of, possibly before the issue worsens.

Overcoming a number of technical challenges and a short timeline, the City delivered a significant cross-departmental effort to bring this project from vision to reality. "We had our experts in IT, web development, and each of the teams represented by these forms working collaboratively and eliminating challenges one by one," says Eric Olson, Web Development Manager at the City of Madison. "The lessons learned drove improvements at every level. These processes will now serve as the model to upscale each of the remaining forms."

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About Accela

Accela provides a unified suite of cloud solutions trusted by governments across the globe to accelerate their digital transformation, deliver vital services, and build stronger communities. More than 275 million citizens worldwide benefit from Accela's government software solutions. The company offers agile, purpose-built solutions and the power of a platform that provides users with a consumer-like experience, shares data across departments, and ensures world-class security.

With Accela, government agencies experience rapid and effective digital transformation. Accela's government software meets agencies wherever they are on their modernization journey, while also helping them prepare for whatever comes next. The company is a 2021 Microsoft US Partner Award winner for its innovative SaaS solutions to help governments respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and was named as one of the Largest East Bay Tech Employers by San Francisco Business Times. Accela is headquartered in San Ramon, California, with offices around the world. For more information, visit **www.accela.com.**

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