

Washington, D.C.

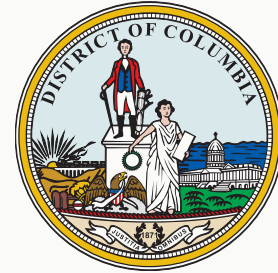
Responsive, Innovative Alcohol Licensing in the Nation's Capital

As the liquor licensing agency for Washington, D.C., the Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA) feels a unique sense of responsibility. Regulating alcohol in the nation's capital carries a dual responsibility to uphold the historic character and reputation of the District while still meeting the entertainment expectations of millions of tourists and residents. Combining fast customer service with innovative education and compliance programs, ABRA manages to satisfy both aims.

Washington, D.C., hosts more than 22 million visitors every year. Along with seeing top destination sites like the Smithsonian, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial and the White House, visitors also expect to enjoy fine dining, fun clubs and exciting nightlife during their stay. Preserving the city's unique character while delivering a memorable experience to millions of visitors is a delicate balance ABRA walks every single day.

With a staff of nearly 60 full-time employees and an annual budget of \$8.3 million, ABRA handles licensing for more than 3,000 licensees in the District. Staff members must understand and correctly apply the regulations in order to issue licenses for multiple liquor license types, including wallet-size manager cards, wholesalers, manufacturers, retailers, small mom-and-pop restaurants, large multi-location chain restaurants, and short-term events such as fairs and festivals, weddings and pub crawls.

In conjunction with its licensing function, the department is also responsible for monitoring licensee compliance. Last year ABRA conducted more than 10,000 compliance inspections, which yielded more than 500 citations. The department's Double Check 101 program, which combines education and enforcement to prevent underage drinking, received the "Innovative Alcohol Law Enforcement Program of the Year" award from the National Liquor Law Enforcement Association in 2017.



Population

713,000

Challenge

Balancing the city's historic character with responsive, compliant liquor licensing

Solution

Accela Alcoholic Beverage Control

Results

Quick license approval times

Able to satisfy licensing requirements for a new, large-scale development project

Favorable hosting environment with SaaS hosting

Improved visibility into department operations through system reporting



Delivering Quick Customer Service with Accela Alcoholic Beverage Control

Since 2009, ABRA has relied on the Accela Civic Solution for Alcoholic Beverage Control to manage its licensing, inspection and enforcement duties. The Accela licensing system simplifies the task of reviewing liquor license applications, obtaining and reviewing licensee documentation and scheduling compliance inspections. Using Accela to manage licensing review helps eliminate unnecessary manual tasks and keeps all staff members informed and aligned on next steps in the review process. “Accela is absolutely pivotal to our licensing operation,” said Sean Gordy, Licensing Program Manager.

Handling, reviewing, processing and approving license applications accounts for an estimated 90 percent of ABRA staff workload. The Accela Alcoholic Beverage Control solution simplifies or eliminates many of the routine tasks in licensing review, thus increasing staff members’ productivity. Once a new application is entered into the system, all supporting documentation is digitally attached to the license record, providing

every staff member with convenient, online access to the application record and supporting documents. Multiple staff members can work an application concurrently, helping to speed applications through the review process. As customer payments are received, they are automatically attached to the license record. Once all licensing requirements have been met, a license is generated from the system and issued to the applicant.

Using Accela allows the department to meet lofty goals for quick turnaround times on reviewing and issuing licenses. Simple license types, such as a manager license, are frequently able to be issued the same day the application is received. For a temporary license, the department aims to issue a license within two weeks of receiving an application – and boasts a 100 percent achievement rate in meeting that goal. For license types that require a public comment period, such as a new retail license, the department goal is to issue a license within 30 days after the public comment period has closed (assuming all other requirements have been met).



District Wharf Development: High-profile, High-volume Licensing

ABRA's responsiveness was challenged with the opening of the District Wharf development in October 2017. The District Wharf is a large-scale redevelopment project along the Potomac River, near the National Mall. As a mixed-use development, the project includes a mix of condos, apartments, five-star restaurants, fast casual restaurants, nightclubs, rooftop dining and shops.

With the initial development phase heading toward a grand opening, ABRA was tasked with processing and reviewing an unusually large number of applications in a short amount of time. Adding to the complexity, the requested licenses comprised a variety of different license types including manager licenses, hotels, restaurants, nightclubs and summer gardens. The fast pace of the development even required an emergency city zoning change to allow the planned businesses to open on schedule. With pressure mounting, city leaders, developers and business owners all counted on ABRA to issue the needed licenses on time, without cutting corners on regulatory requirements.

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Fortunately, the Accela Civic Solution for Alcoholic Beverage Control kept the department on track. “Everything in Accela made this project easier,” Gordy said. “We worked every application from within the Accela system, all our enforcement inspections were entered and scheduled, with the inspection results recorded back into Accela. Finally, all the licenses and reports were generated out of the system. Accela was our essential application resource to complete all this work – and it still is.”

Thanks to ABRA’s quick work, the businesses in the District Wharf development were able to open as planned, with all required licensing in place. With a successful launch of Phase I – and a positive response to the development from community leaders, residents and visitors – Phase II of the project is already underway.

Looking to the Future

Despite their significant accomplishments, ABRA is not content to simply maintain the status quo. They plan to use Accela Alcoholic Beverage Control to drive further improvements, such as enabling more self-serve options for licensees, creating additional scripts to automate even more tasks and building deeper integrations into systems used by other agencies to make information sharing easier across departments.

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About Accela

Accela provides market-leading SaaS solutions that empower governments worldwide to build thriving communities, grow businesses and protect citizens. From planning, building, licensing and permitting, to asset and service request management, environmental health and more, Accela’s offerings accelerate efficiency and transparency in governments of all sizes. 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 challenge in the future. Accela is headquartered in San Ramon, California, with additional offices around the world.

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