Accela Spring 2023 Release

Introducing the Spring 2023 Release

With this release, Accela has balanced new features, tech modernization, improved administration, and usability enhancements. Accela's Spring 2023 Release was based largely on customer input and includes a combination of these aspects, all designed to ensure customers get the maximum value from their Accela implementations.

This document covers the new aspects of Accela's Spring 2023 product launch including:

> V23.1 of the Civic Platform (SaaS and self-hosted, and SaaS-only)

> Enhancements to Accela Citizen Access

> V23.1 of Accela Mobile

> Updates to several Civic Applications

Another key element of this release has been the focus on enhancements to ensure customers have a smooth migration path from on-premises and legacy solutions to Accela SaaS solutions. SaaS provides many benefits in supportability, feature enhancements, speed and cost of implementation, resource utilization, and performance, and Accela works hard to create an attractive path for agencies interested in the benefits of SaaS.

Accela Civic Platform V23.1.x: SaaS *and* Self-Hosted

Space Management Enhancements

Managing the number of open spaces is a key area of usability for agency employees who spend their days in the Accela back office. In the Fall 2022 release, Accela included a feature to maximize the spaces to display for agency at eight total, and maximum spaces to pin at four total. Also included was a setting to enable an auto-close of oldest space as a setting for five spaces. After this was released, several customers expressed productivity issues with these enhancements.

With V23.1.x, we have modified this setting to give agencies the ability to modify the product defaults for the maximum number of spaces, maximum number of pinned spaces, and the threshold number to automatically close the oldest spaces. This enhancement affects space management settings across the entire agency. Changes to these settings can be made by self-hosted agencies using our Admin Guides, and by SaaS/hosted customers through a Technical Support request.

This change illustrates how customer feedback consistently drives what goes into our roadmaps and releases, giving them more flexibility to enhance productivity and usability for agency employees.

Transaction Record Header Enhancements

Another usability feature requested by customers pertains to directional address suffixes. Examples of this include "123 Main Street **NW**" or "123 Main Street **SE**."

Previously, the record header would not include the directional suffix, only the address number, prefix, and street name, and users would need to drill into the record to see the full address. This has been changed with V23.1.x, and now the transaction record header displays the suffix alongside the existing address details as described above.

Licensed Professional API Enhancements

Accela offers a set of documented and supported REST APIs called Construct, which agencies can use to integrate their Accela system with other applications, data sources, payment systems, etc.

There is a set of APIs within Construct specifically used for licensed professionals, key for Business Licensing and Occupational Licensing solutions, ensuring education credits, certifications, and trade licenses are valid, current, and accurate. In V23.1.x we have made several enhancements to the REST APIs for professionals, including the ability to get or update the custom forms data and the people template data.

Accela Civic Platform V23.1.x: SaaS-only

Global Search Enhancements (SaaS-only)

With V23.1.x, the record list in global search will display the directional address suffix information alongside the existing address detail such as street #, prefix, and street name. Staff will no longer have to drill down into the record details to view the entire address, saving time and increasing productivity.

The image on the right shows the "Everything" search results with the directional address suffix.
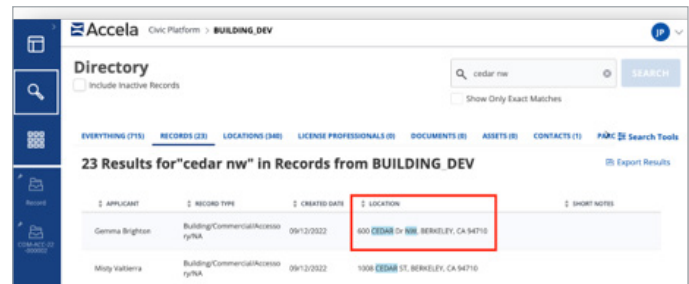
PayPal Commerce Integration (SaaS-only)

When processing licenses and permits or imposing fines, agencies need an effective way to accept payments from residents with a positive consumer-like experience. This can be difficult to implement, and many small cities and counties do not have the resources and skillsets to select and implement their own payment processing mechanism.

With V23.1.x, Accela is offering a no-code payment integration with PayPal Commerce to process electronic payments, providing the quickest time to market. With PayPal Commerce, agencies on Accela's SaaS platform can accept payment via Accela Citizen Access or Civic Platform using their PayPal account, or credit/debit cards for maximum convenience. This solution also includes a pre-negotiated rate of 2.4% + .10 per transaction, which is favorable to other payment providers and only for Accela customers.

The second image on right shows processing payment via PayPal.
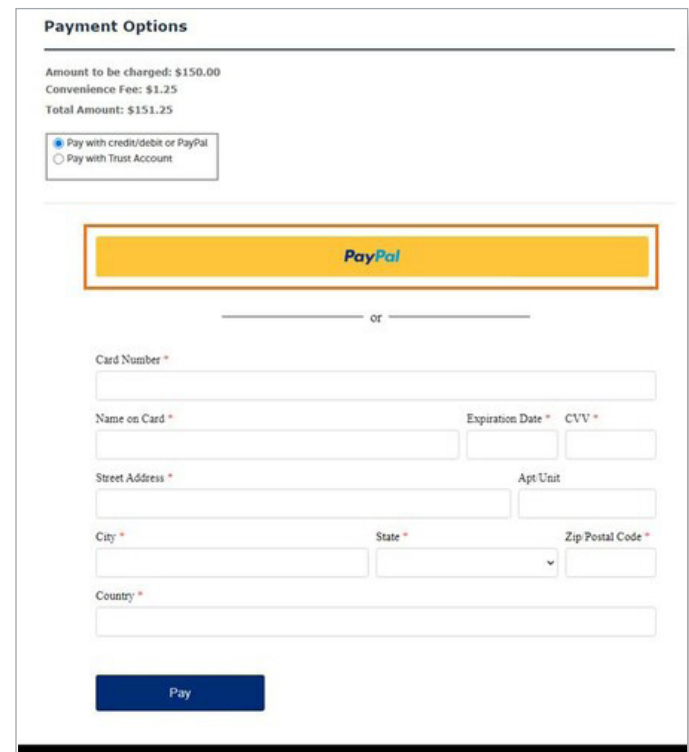
Making Crystal Reports Public or Private (SaaS-only)

Many of our customers use Crystal Reports to capture the data within their Accela systems and provided feedback they would like to restrict access to these reports. With V23.1.x, Accela is enhancing the permissions and access control on Crystal Reports so that administrators can mark their Crystal Reports as either public or private, and private reports are only accessible to users with adequate permissions.

Accela Citizen Access (ACA)

Mobile User Experience

Accela is committed to continue improving and modernizing the look and feel of ACA and providing an accessible experience on both desktop and mobile.

The release of V23.1 has triggered the end-of-life (EOL) of a product called Accela Mobile Citizen Access. This product was designed to create a more "friendly" mobile experience for residents using ACA. It was needed prior to Accela's efforts to create a mobile-friendly version of ACA.

With recent releases, ACA and its newly designed pages are now mobile friendly, making Accela Mobile Citizen unnecessary.

ACA Registration Enhancements

Within ACA, residents can choose "contact type" in a drop-down field. Sometimes, agencies may decide to provide their residents with only one contact type if it is not necessary for processing. To simplify the data entry for residents, the new version of ACA removes the contact-type section for the resident if only one is allowed and takes them directly into contact details, removing any potential for confusion or questions when inputting this data.

ACA Admin Usability Updates

Another useability enhancement with V23.1.x is with Form Designer. Previously, Form Designer would show all fields within the designer, requiring the administrator to identify the relevant fields to be shown in ACA. With the new version, Form Designer only exposes the fields the agency wants displayed in ACA, making it cleaner and more efficient for the forms administrator.

Accela Mobile

ESRI Federated Authentication

Map capabilities are very important for users of Accela Mobile, and the product has a deep integration with ESRI's ArcGIS for managing map images and geospatial data to maximize productivity for users.

ESRI has implemented a new Federated Enterprise server model for user authentication. With V23.1.x, customers using Accela Mobile who have adopted, or plan to adopt this model can enable field workers to use their ESRI federated login with the in-app login prompt.

JavaScript Maps

With the new release, Accela will now allow the JavaScript SDK to be used within Accela Mobile, replacing the native map SDKs. The benefits of this change include the enablement of OAuth 2.0 user authentication, and a shared code base for Android, iOS, and Windows, making the system safer, more scalable, easier to maintain, and reduces the time and cost of implementing new features.

Customizable Features in Accela Mobile

Customers have requested observational and appended checklists. This feature is often associated with Environmental Health inspectors, allowing them to perform "observational inspections" with checklist items that are not predefined, but result from observations coming from the inspection process.

Accela had provided this capability in the Civic Platform and Accela Mobile Office (AMO), and with V23.1.x, we are achieving parity in Accela Mobile.

Inspection Grades

Food inspections often require an inspection grade to be determined and included in the inspection report. These grades are useful, especially for residents to make informed decisions as food consumers.

An inspection grade function has now been added to Accela Mobile to allow inspectors to easily or automatically assign a grade directly to an inspection. When configured, inspection status and grade can be generated based on inspection score and/or number of major violations. This auto assignment can be overridden by the inspector if desired.

Time Duration of Inspections

Agencies need an easy way for inspectors to enter the time they spent on each inspection quickly and easily, outside of the normal system-generated time accounting. This adds clarity to agency management about team and individual productivity and can also be associated with fee assessments. This capability was implemented in Accela's Inspector product and is now implemented in Accela Mobile.

Localization/Internationalization

The ability to support multiple languages is critical for agency field workers, and Accela Mobile has received its first phase of multi-language support with support for Arabic, and other languages are to follow.

Windows 11 Solution Updates

Accela Mobile was extended to Windows 11 in May 2022, with the OS's new capabilities to support Android applications. The installation, however, was cumbersome as it required sideloading of an APK file. Accela has now made Accela Mobile available for download in the Amazon Appstore, which makes the installation process much easier and faster.

Civic Applications

Civic Applications are pre-built configurations used by customers to shorten implementation time, leverage best practices in configuration and design, and ensure customers always know how the solution will look and behave when taken live.

Premium Citizen Experience

Premium Citizen Experience (PCE) is Accela's graphical interface for department-level or enterprise agency websites. It provides a highly intuitive and attractive interface for residents to find agency information, learn about requirements for specific licenses and permits, pre-qualify for permits and licenses, and it integrates with ACA for in-depth form fill activity. It is a virtual "digital front door" for residents requesting services.

For V23.1.x, we now have extended our pre-built and domain-specific resident interfaces and "user journeys" across a broader set of solution areas. These packaged assets are now available for the Building, Planning, Public Works (part of Building), Code Enforcement (part of Building), and Service Request Management (SRM) Civic Applications.

The configurations include content, such as descriptions, pictures, and links for each of the record types within these modules. The benefit is agencies can set up and deploy their Civic Applications much faster, but also create a very attractive and intuitive resident interface.

For More Information

For any questions about Accela's Spring 2023 release, please contact your Accela Account Executive.