



Filling Resource Gaps

Managed application services enable agencies to innovate.

In an era when public agencies struggle for technology talent, managed application services (MAS) offer an innovative way to augment existing IT teams and move faster on modernization.

MAS vendors take on the day-to-day responsibility of running, maintaining and optimizing an application — which can be an attractive option for short-staffed agencies under pressure to expand digital services.

Why MAS Matters

For all the benefits of modern digital government software, these application suites also create new demands on IT staff. Somebody has to onboard users, update passwords and respond to support requests.

Center for Digital Government surveys of city¹ and county² IT leaders confirm these challenges. Conducted in late 2022, these surveys show agencies' most pressing priorities (after cybersecurity) include improving constituent experience and hiring and retaining skilled IT personnel.

"We're seeing quite a few pain points converge for our public sector customers," says Brenda DeGregory, vice president of North American professional services for Accela, which offers managed application services for its planning, permitting and licensing software platform.

These are the benefits MAS can provide to public agencies:

Day-to-day system administration. MAS providers manage support requests, administer accounts and update user permissions. They also can offer after-hours assistance. For instance, Accela provides MAS customers with 14 hours of support on weekdays.

"Let's say there's a trouble ticket that needs immediate attention and requires configuration changes to resolve," DeGregory says. "Our MAS team takes that on."

Service enhancements. MAS makes it easier for agencies to add functionality like mobile access to licensing and permitting services. In addition, MAS providers can implement best practices developed from thousands of real-world use cases.

"When an individual interacts with an agency's online service, there could be 20 steps in a process," DeGregory says. "We can look at it carefully and reduce it to five steps that happen over a matter of days instead of months."

Stronger security and more staff bandwidth. MAS vendors often have the resources to employ top cybersecurity talent and deliver protections that are beyond the capabilities of most local governments. They also handle configuration upgrades to ensure applications remain up to date.

"MAS really is a force multiplier for our customers," DeGregory says. Time that agencies once lost to manual tasks can be devoted to making public services more responsive. Moreover, agencies can deploy advanced digital services that were never on the menu because they lacked the time, staff and expertise.

Offloading routine tasks to a MAS vendor can also help agencies become more attractive workplaces.

"About 30% to 40% of government workers are eligible to retire within the next two years," DeGregory says. The new hires who replace them will expect modern services and crave the freedom to launch creative digital solutions to public problems.

Adoption Issues to Address

MAS is typically simple to adopt. Vendors may offer MAS options that can be added to existing software-as-a-service subscriptions. Even so, there are a few points to work through.

"You have to figure out how to integrate MAS into your existing IT team," DeGregory says. This means identifying processes that are good candidates for simplification and automation. "It's about realigning your organization," she says.

Once you've offloaded tasks from your IT team, you need to make the best use of new staff bandwidth. Take the time to update your priorities and craft a realistic assessment of what you can accomplish.



A managed application services provider can handle day-to-day system administration, strengthen security and help agencies implement best practices.

If you're in a high-growth city or county with strong demand for new building permits, for example, you may start by streamlining approvals. "It really needs to tie into your mission and what you're seeing in your locality," DeGregory says.

Also avoid redundancies. Large jurisdictions may have multiple implementations of the same software platform. Before adding MAS for one department, make sure the service isn't already up and running in another part of the organization.

Improving Experience and Resilience

MAS makes it easier for jurisdictions to modernize essential public services, which improves everyday constituent

experience and strengthens resilience during disruptive events.

At the height of the pandemic, for instance, agencies with modern digital services quickly shifted to remote work and digital permitting and licensing. On the other hand, jurisdictions with legacy processes struggled to implement virtual services and suffered from backlogs that imposed long-term costs.

"Real estate developers ended up moving projects to other jurisdictions where they could get permits approved," DeGregory says. "That was a loss of real dollars in future tax revenues."

Managed application services aren't a cure-all for IT leaders, but they do provide opportunities to move faster on

modernization despite limited IT staff. An effective MAS strategy augments agency IT teams and helps jurisdictions move forward on critical digital transformation.

This piece was written and produced by the Government Technology Content Studio, with information and input from Accela.

Learn more about Accela's managed application services at <https://www.accela.com/services/managed-application-services/>

1. <https://www.govtech.com/dc/digital-cities/digital-cities-survey-2022-winners-announced>
2. <https://www.govtech.com/dc/digital-counties/digital-counties-survey-2022-winners-announced>

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