
Clark County Bets Big on a Unified Platform

Nevada's largest local government transforms permitting and licensing with a user-centered approach.



Along with welcoming more than 50 million visitors a year, Clark County, Nevada, serves a growing resident population that will soon reach 3 million. In addition, county officials support big-name economic drivers that include NFL and NHL franchises, Formula One racing and the 2024 Super Bowl.

To meet the needs of these diverse stakeholders, the county government recently moved six major departments to a single cloud-based permitting and licensing platform managed by Accela. The software-as-a-service (SaaS) technology simplifies workflows and speeds approvals for major projects, including the transformation of the iconic Las Vegas Strip into a Formula One racetrack in 2023.

Clark County's experience demonstrates how jurisdictions of all sizes can rethink their internal processes and leverage technology to become more responsive to the needs of residents, businesses, government employees and elected officials.

"It's important for us to provide a seamless and frictionless experience for residents and business owners," says Shurnice Coleman, the county's manager of IT application services. "It's causing us to rethink how people access the services we provide and how we organize them, so we can think about the resident not just as one transaction, but across the breadth of all the services they may need from us."

The Challenge

Clark County, Nevada's largest local government jurisdiction, handles a massive volume of permitting and licensing requests. During some months, more than 6,000 building permit applications are filed, each requiring approval from multiple departments. The county also manages more than 400 types of business licenses. This activity includes one-of-a-kind construction projects like the Sphere, the huge entertainment complex that opened in 2023, and major stadium projects associated with professional sports franchises that require accelerated permit approvals.

"These property owners have extreme expectations of timelines, so it's a tremendous pressure on us because we still have to follow all the appropriate processes related to issuing permits, doing inspections and supporting the work in a way that meets code requirements," Coleman says.

The scale and pace of permitting and licensing activity severely strained the county's siloed legacy systems, some of which were 25 years old. "As an IT team, we were constantly busy supporting them," Coleman says.

The Response

The county took a human-centric approach to modernizing its technologies and processes. The goal was to organize services by constituent, not department, and provide a better experience for residents and businesses. "We're transitioning into a user-centered design approach where we talk with the actual users of our services," Coleman says.

These conversations prompted the county to focus on simplifying the user experience, particularly for stakeholders who conduct transactions across multiple departments. That required the county to "move away from a more historic method of design and development where we do one transaction really well," Coleman says.

"It's important for us to provide a seamless and frictionless experience."

— Shurnice Coleman, IT Application Services Manager, Clark County, Nevada

Clark County ultimately selected Accela's Civic Platform to manage permitting and licensing transactions. The platform, which went live in 2022, supports the building department, fire prevention, public works, comprehensive planning and zoning, code enforcement, and IT services. The county's business licensing department is also slated to move to the platform.

"We want a one-stop shop," Coleman says, "and Accela's helping us build that out."

Accela manages the cloud-based platform, which is flexible enough to meet the needs of both midsize governments and big jurisdictions like Clark County. Accela's software is also highly configurable to accommodate unique workflows and processes.

The ability to configure workflows was important to Clark County, given its sprawling stakeholder base and diverse business activities. "As big as Clark County is and with the processes we have, we couldn't go with an out-of-the-box solution," Coleman says.

Along with improving constituent experience, the platform enables data sharing across departments, as well as sophisticated reporting for analysis and decision-making. Application programming interfaces (APIs) also allow the county to share information with outside organizations, including utilities and other government agencies.

The new technology streamlined internal workflows and reduced the time needed to approve permits and respond to constituent requests. Stakeholders have found the platform's interface easier to navigate than previous solutions — a critical factor for Clark County, where many out-of-state businesses manage government transactions remotely. "They can now do that work online and be prepared to handle their actual business instead of their licenses," Coleman says.

The Results

The Accela platform has proven capable of supporting the county's largest projects and events. "The entertainment of Nevada is all managed within Accela," Coleman says. "I don't think we could have delivered that outside of the system."

In addition, the platform provides comprehensive data to quantify the impact of construction projects and special events. County staff have created dashboards and monthly reports for county commissioners to show how well the county is operating and how different activities drive the local economy. "We understand the impact that is needed, and we want to make sure staff can deliver so we can keep employment coming to Clark County," Coleman says.

The Accela Civic Platform is transforming permitting and licensing in Clark County. And the platform's flexibility and scalability will enable the county to meet growing and changing needs for years to come.

"In my opinion, it's the best thing we have ever done," Coleman says. "We knew that a rapid return on investment would be coming, but honestly, we didn't know it was going to be that fast."

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



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