
Making AI Work for Government

4 pillars for effective, sustainable and responsible civic automation

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The Takeaway:

The promise of AI is being limited by fragmented, niche tools. A broader strategy around embedded AI helps governments leverage its full potential.

Mission-critical domains like permitting, inspections and service requests create some of the most promising AI possibilities for state and local governments.

But much of AI's potential remains scattered among narrow tools that do a few things well but lack key attributes needed to sustain broader adoption. A better approach builds AI into workflows and applications across a technology stack — putting AI wherever people need it.

Accela embraces this broader approach. The company builds its CivicAI solution on four pillars to meet the unique needs of government agencies.

1 End-to-End AI, Embedded Everywhere

Too many products and services treat AI as a bolt-on feature instead of a system-level capability designed specifically to improve government workflows.

“These tools may look impressive in demos, but they are hard to defend in real operations because of limited workflow context, inconsistent outputs across departments, unclear data boundaries and weak auditability when decisions are challenged,” says Evan Dobkin, senior product marketing manager with Accela.

Accela integrates AI throughout its CivicAI platform and engineers the solution to meet government safety, accountability and usability requirements. AI simplifies and accelerates important civic workflows such as intake, review, approvals, inspections, renewals and enforcement.

“Agencies need partners that design AI to work across the process lifecycle, with built-in transparency and oversight — so staff can move faster without creating new risk,” Dobkin says.

2 Safety-First, Government-Ready

Agency leaders need clear accountability and transparency from their technology partners when deploying AI tools. That starts with understanding how these systems are built, how they operate, and how they meet security and compliance standards. Civic automation should be designed to augment staff capabilities and improve efficiency — not replace human workers. Just as important, AI systems must include human oversight to ensure critical decisions remain in the hands of people.

Accela's CivicAI platform uses governed models, controlled prompts and full audit trails for transparency. A human-in-the-loop design reduces the risk of machine-generated errors by requiring staff involvement in key actions. “No AI capability can approve, deny, route or take enforcement action without human staff action,” Dobkin says. These safeguards help agency leaders maintain responsibility and avoid deferring critical decisions to automated systems.

Accela's CivicAI platform also incorporates task-specific controls and governance frameworks that define how AI can be used. These guardrails determine which models are authorized for specific tasks while setting boundaries around data usage, inputs and outputs, and performance monitoring. Beyond improving oversight, these controls address “shadow AI” by making sure that all AI use is visible, managed and aligned with organizational policies.

The Pillars in Practice:



See how Accela's CivicAI platform can transform permitting.

www.accela.com

Features to look for in safe, government-centered AI software include:

Trusted automation. Core systems of record include embedded AI with enforceable guardrails.

Defensible AI. Regulated environments like permitting and licensing have defensible AI across audits, public records requests and legal challenges. Audit tools must deliver full traceability from AI output to records, workflow steps and staff action.

Model governance. Applications establish clear controls over which models are used for specific tasks, with strict data boundaries and persistent audit trails linking AI outputs directly to staff actions and case context.

Human oversight. Tools support runtime use of agency rules and configurations without training on customer data. Controls explicitly prevent autonomous approvals, denials, routing or enforcement.

3 AI Built on 30 Years of Civic Expertise

Accela builds AI models based on three decades of experience supporting state and local governments. The company has a deep understanding of civic workflows, regulatory processes, operational patterns and best practices.

Accela's work with Citrus County, Florida, to modernize permitting, licensing and other essential services shows how the approach works in practice.

"The county faced severe permitting delays, high staff burnout and strained relationships with contractors — not because staff lacked expertise, but because existing systems created friction and reactive work," Dobkin says. The county's

deployment of Accela's CivicAI Platform emphasized transparency, user engagement and training, which promoted staff buy-in and acceptance.

"The result is not just faster permit processing but also durable adoption that agencies can confidently extend to AI without destabilizing operations or accountability," Dobkin says.

4 Trusted Partnerships for the AI Era

Agencies need vendors that go beyond implementing solutions and serve as genuine partners devoted to leaders' mission and priorities. Over three decades, Accela has helped governments navigate significant technology changes, like the move to mobile applications and cloud environments. "We learned that adoption succeeds when technology change aligns with operational reality, staff trust and institutional accountability," Dobkin says.

Critical elements include:

A deliberate, phased approach. Projects should start with a tightly scoped pilot operating inside real-world workflows. Organizations should demonstrate observable, defensible outcomes before scaling up.

Realistic automation expectations. Automation must demonstrate meaningful operational results such as fewer bottlenecks, less rework, higher staff capacity or faster turnarounds — while ensuring sound governance and preserving human decision-making.

Measured growth. Trust grows when vendors help agencies drive value incrementally, measuring impact against baseline performance. AI usage expands only after establishing confidence, controls and institutional readiness.

The Bottom Line:

Accela's CivicAI platform helps governments shift from disconnected AI pilots to enterprisewide systems that reduce friction, ensure transparency and foster public trust.



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Explore how your agency can apply these four pillars to prioritize workflows at www.accela.com.