

Pima County, Arizona

Pima County Modernizes Planning, Permitting and Inspection Processes with Accela Community Development Solutions

Located in the south central region of Arizona, Pima County is the second most populous county in the state, and home to 1.023 million residents. The county covers 9,189 square miles and encompasses cities such as Tucson with its surrounding urban and suburban areas. Its unique geography features the Saguaro National Park flanking the city, welcoming citizens, visitors and businesses alike.

Pima County utilizes Accela Building and Planning for all permitting and planning functions including inspections, code enforcement, record searches and more. Each year, a total of 35,000 building inspections are conducted within the county limits, presenting processing challenges for the agency.

Planning and Permitting Transformation – Paper to Digital

Before leveraging Accela solutions the citizen experience was disjointed and manual. Customers had to come into the office to apply for permits. The review process was linear, and each building permit moved down a virtual conveyor belt from station to station seeking approval.

Today, Pima County is working towards its goal to continually implement efficiencies to reduce turnaround times for plan reviews and permitting processes. The agency is committed to moving all of their building and planning functions online and deliver complete transparency to the customer, from application submission to completion of the project.

The Perks of a Digital Solution

Implementing Accela solutions helped the transition from a manual paper-based approach to a digital one that simplified processes for both citizens and agency staff. Today, 90 percent of applications are submitted online.

Mary Wright, Operations Coordinator for Pima County Development Services Department had first-hand experience with the transition. Concerning the permitting process she said, “Everything is electronic, there are no more paper plans. We’re not shuffling back and forth. We email notes back to the customer. They are able to make the changes right away and send them back to us. It is now a one-stop shop. You send in your application to the same people who are going to be reviewing and approving it as well as the people who are going to be issuing out the building permit.”



Population

1.023 million

Challenge

Implement efficiencies in planning, permitting and inspection processes to fast-track the customer experience while delivering complete transparency into the project status

Solution

- Accela Citizen Access
- Accela Building
- Accela Planning
- Accela GIS
- Accela Mobile

Results

90% of applications submitted online

Helped reduce plan issuance turnaround times from 20 days to 3-5 days

Every employee saves eight hours a week by not needing to stamp plans

Reduced inspector expected time of arrival (ETAs) by 62.5%

Decreased office foot traffic and phone inquiries



Reducing Turnaround Times, Office Foot Traffic and Inspection ETA's

Moving to a digital process has proven effective by reducing office foot traffic while allowing customers to self-serve from their home or office. In addition, going paperless has **helped to save every employee eight hours a week** from just the physical stamping of plans. Today, agency staff is freed up to focus on value-add tasks, such as plan review. Pima County hopes this will just be the tip of the iceberg in improving their customer experience. The ultimate goal is to provide even more web services to the public to give customers the tools they need to successfully develop their property. It is part of the County's strategic vision to deliver customers an exceptional experience.

The agency is able to leverage Accela data to stay on top of projects by pulling reports to see what's next in the queue, what's coming due, and what's assigned to every person for better workload management. They also use Accela to send out customer satisfaction surveys, which they were not able to do previously.

A Mission to Improve Inspector Efficiency

Shortly after selecting Accela technology for inspections, the agency launched a "Pima County Building Inspection Routing and Tracking" project to more efficiently group and order inspections for each day based on the number of available inspectors, inspection location, and the starting point for each inspector. The inspection routing was just the first step. One of the project goals was also to provide expected times of arrival (ETAs) to customers to improve customer satisfaction and inspector productivity.

With 9,189 square miles to cover and taking up to two hours to drive to some locations, along with a limited number of field inspectors, the county struggled to route and provide accurate ETAs for inspections within the county.

According to Tracey Gutheim, Operations Manager for Development Services, "Prior to Accela, no arrival window was provided. Customers needed to be onsite the entire day, or hope to touch base with the inspector by phone to get their best guess of when they'd arrive."

After implementing Accela for building inspections, customers now have an **arrival window with a buffer of 45 minutes on either side** of the expected start time.

In an effort to further streamline the inspection process the county posts routes to the web every evening for the following day. The inspectors download their assigned inspection list into Accela Mobile Office (AMO) each morning, and then go. Customers can track progress along the route throughout the day. As field inspectors submit results within the solution, each inspection's status updates on the website in real time to notify customers and staff when an inspection is complete, along with the results.

In addition to information on an inspection, having a list of the full route enables customers to see how many stops away the inspector is at any time. This allows the customer to spend less time sitting idly at the job site waiting on the inspector.

Pima County Development Services Department is now 100% digital in the field. No paper is left at the job site and customers are directed to the web for their results.

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Tracey Gutheim
Operations Manager for Development Services



A Place Where People Want to Come and Build

Accelerating Economic Growth Within a Community

Reducing permit turnaround times, improving efficiencies and processing more permits faster has made Pima County a place where people want to come and build. With a strong commitment to facilitate economic development, the county is in a better place to provide its citizens what they need. Among many improvements made, plan issuance turnaround times have now gone from **20 days to 3-5 days** and these efficiencies are just the beginning.

About Accela

Accela provides market-leading SaaS solutions that empower state and local governments to build thriving communities, grow businesses and protect citizens. 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.

Learn More

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