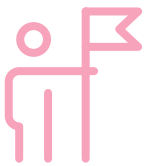# How Digital Services Revolutionized Santa Clara County Operations

Challenge

Complaints about bureaucracy are often the products of inefficient and roundabout workflows. Constituents don't understand why it should take days or weeks to process a simple request when car insurance companies can promise a quote in 15 minutes.

These lengthy wait times aren't only the nature of public service; they're also unnecessary.

In Santa Clara County, California, Chief Information Officer Ann Dunkin found the county battling a size and reach issue – authorization. Documents had to travel from office to office before reaching the final, necessary person to sign off on policies and start processing requests. Even after receiving a signature, documents often had to travel back to a central office to be processed and implemented. Employees spent much time just waiting.

"Pretty much the entire public sector is wrestling with how to be more responsive, to implement technology quickly, to respond to changing needs and demands and change in technology itself," Dunkin said.

Governments – federal, state and local – around the world struggle to streamline lengthy authorization processes. Citizen services are dependent on the post office and printers, and wait times reduce employees' productivity and seep into front-facing services.

As the 17th most populous county in the U.S., Santa Clara County serves nearly 2 million residents and sends various documents to many places. A document's cycle time, or the amount of time a document would take to receive all its signatures and be sent to the proper place, could be five days or more.

"It can be a lot more than that because we got things routed," Dunkin said.

The county has scattered offices, and papers are shuttled throughout. It's not uncommon for a document to physically travel from the county headquarters to the social security department to, finally, security.

Legacy costs and lack of technology often prevent agencies from acquiring new services that can transform the way they conduct business. Moreover, governments are overwhelmed with the amount of processes that need to be reinvented. Santa Clara County was no different.

Therefore, it had to find central solutions that transform workflows across departments and directly enhanced citizen service.
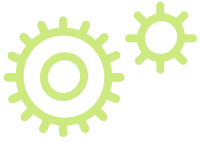
Solution

To unlock employee productivity and discover cost savings, Santa Clara County turned to e-signatures. E-signatures work by using unique online access keys to view, sign and submit documents – all online.

With e-signatures, forms are delivered digitally as opposed to through paper. Submissions can immediately be processed and sent to necessary offices, without compromising the security of the form throughout its many stops.

Dunkin's staff conducted a study on the savings Santa Clara County accrued by establishing digital workflows, and the results were "mind-boggling." The county saved hundreds of millions of dollars in costs avoided, hours reclaimed and digital capabilities implemented.

In the private sector, this would result in a better bottom line and all that comes with it – meaning a few holiday bonuses and some extra pocket-lining for the bosses. However, in the public sector, that time and money can be reinvested into serving a community and the technology can build on itself. In Dunkin's eyes, those benefits were reflected by reduced paper-related costs, greater manpower to tackle agency goals and newer digital services that the county could offer.

"In the public sector, the incentive to save time and money should be to allow us to deliver more services," Dunkin said.

One of those services that Dunkin's staff is building out is e-filing for permitting, licensing and compliance. Previously, filing for a business permit might require trips to the Environmental Health Office, Permit Office and possible others. Questions would have to be asked on site and the files themselves would have to be submitted in person.

Soon, this process will be digital. Using Agile development, the county is automating each process so constituents' only legwork would be preparing and submitting the files. Then, they don't have to follow up with in-person trips. Meanwhile, Santa Clara County employees will no longer have to receive, comb through or process the documents manually.

Dunkin can see the direct influence of a digital government in her employees' impact. Digital signatures and services allow eligibility workers to spend more time in the field and caseworkers to spend more time with children who are at risk.

For citizens, the county has online portals so that citizens can pay property taxes online. Because of that capability, people can make partial property tax payments, which is especially important for accommodating lower-income communities.

Moving to digital signatures has unlocked new capabilities for Santa Clara County and improved citizen services. With more digital services, employees' work has become more centered around the mission, Dunkin said.

Stats

100 million
documents a year are processed by Santa Clara County.

2 million
people live in Santa Clara County.

5 hours
is how long it takes documents to cycle, as opposed to days or weeks beforehand.

Tips for Success

1. Go Mobile
Enable a citizenry and workforce that can operate remotely, saving time and costs associated with in-office work.

2. Go Agile
Incorporate Agile development to ensure that you can customize newly acquired services to fit your needs.

3. Go Together
Don't think of e-signatures as just improving life for employees or citizens – they do both when used correctly.