

A background image of two construction workers on a building site. One worker, wearing a white hard hat and a light green shirt, is pointing towards the wooden framing of a building. The other worker, wearing a blue shirt and jeans with a tool belt, is holding a red level. The image is partially covered by a dark blue diagonal overlay on the left side.

GUIDE TO DELIVERING DEVELOPMENT APPLICANT EFFICIENCY

In today's fast-paced environment, efficiency has become a top priority for local government. Faced with increasing demands from City Council, constituents, and developers, **economic and community development officials** are contending with mounting challenges in the current municipal environment.

By streamlining the applicant experience, agencies set the foundation for a successful plan review process from the start. In this guide, we explore strategies for boosting applicant efficiency with a focus on practical solutions that will help departments enhance processes, improve transparency, and create better experiences for both staff and citizens.

Why Do Community Development Departments Need Further Efficiency?

Government departments are under tremendous pressure to balance the permitting and plan review process with the demands of meeting mandated timelines and maintaining safety standards.

Traditional plan review processes, often manual and paper-based, create bottlenecks that frustrate both applicants and staff. Without efficient, digital processes, plan reviewers spend valuable time managing incomplete submissions, solving versioning issues, or locating plans, rather than conducting reviews, while permit technicians get bogged down with status inquiries instead of processing new applications.

Efficiency isn't just about speed; it's about creating scalable processes that enable departments to maximize their existing resources. Efficient departments can better demonstrate their value to city leadership, justify resource requests with data, and maintain high service levels for citizens even during staffing challenges or workload spikes.

Benefits of Enhancing Applicant Efficiency

Streamlining the applicant workflow pays dividends across the entire plan review process, both at City Hall and in the community.

Citizen Satisfaction

Modern citizens expect government services to match the convenience they experience in their daily lives. Efficient digital processes deliver this by enabling 24/7 online submissions, eliminating the need for trips to City Hall and removing the costs associated with printing and delivering physical documents.

This constant accessibility coupled with increased transparency into application status, creates a smoother process for applicants.

“One of the biggest benefits of an efficient application process is that it decreases frustration from community members and applicants,” said Tyson Florence, Senior Director of Sales Engineering, Avolve Software.

When community members can independently access the information they need with ease, without constant phone calls or interminable email exchanges, it leads to a positive interaction between the constituents and the local government.

For some jurisdictions, like the City of Memphis and Shelby County, the promise of more satisfied applicants was the driving force behind technological investments to boost efficiency. “Our primary objective in investing in ProjectDox was to improve the customer’s experience through the development process.”

Nidia Logan-Robinson, Deputy Director, Memphis and Shelby County Division of Planning and Development.

Greater Opportunity for Investment

Modern citizens expect government services to match the convenience they experience in their daily lives. Efficient digital processes deliver this by enabling 24/7 online submissions, eliminating the need for trips to City Hall and removing the costs associated with printing and delivering physical documents.

Cities and counties develop reputations for how easy they are to work with, which directly influences commercial companies when looking at locations for investment and development. “When projects can move quickly from application to occupancy, businesses are more likely to choose that location for investment—even sometimes over jurisdictions with otherwise more favorable conditions,” said Christine Brakefield, Director of Partner Management and Enablement at Avolve Software.

With more efficiency agencies can reduce costs for developers while ensuring departments can process more permits, ultimately generating additional revenue for the jurisdiction. “Having an applicant-facing technology which allows customers to easily interact with the jurisdiction can be a significant consideration in the decision to invest,” Brakefield added.

Better Staff Retention

Many local governments are chronically understaffed and recruiting skilled workers is becoming increasingly harder, which makes it crucial to keep existing workers engaged and fulfilled. When departments streamline their applicant processes, they eliminate many of the aggravating elements that tank staff morale, like endless back-and-forth communications and cumbersome document handling. **“A more efficient application process doesn’t just reduce applicant frustration, but that of staff, too,” said Florence.**

This allows employees to focus on higher-value work that better leverages their expertise. Instead of spending hours managing incomplete submissions or answering application status inquiries, plan review staff can dedicate more time to analyzing plans. In turn, they are more engaged, happier and likely to stay.

Importance of Digitalization with a Purpose-Built Electronic Plan Review

ePlan review drives the transparency, insights, and experience needed to deliver a more efficient applicant experience.

Transparency to Democratize Information and Reduce Bottlenecks

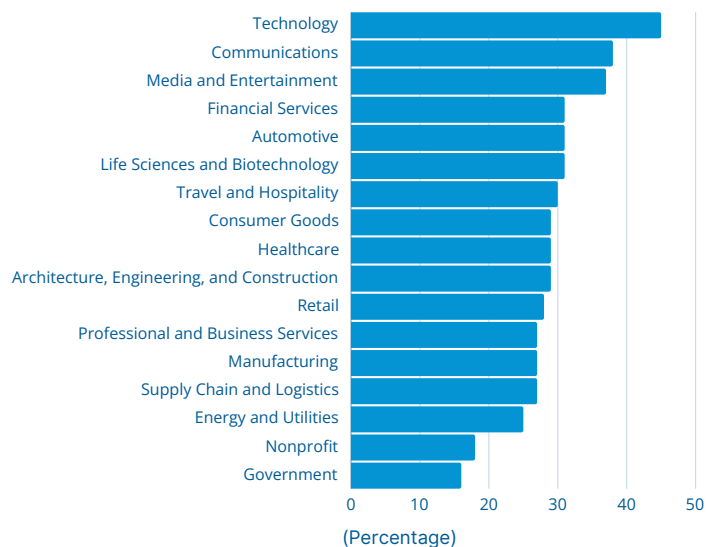
Electronic plan review transforms the traditionally opaque permitting process into a transparent workflow. Both reviewers and applicants can track status in real-time, with the ability to share departmental review stage.

This visibility not only reduces status inquiries but also helps departments identify and address bottlenecks. When economic and community development leadership face questions about review timelines or efficiency, they can access data rather than relying on anecdotal evidence.

Moreover, cloud-based document storage helps eliminate duplication by ensuring all stakeholders work from the same version.

Digital Consumer Experience Applicants Expect
Modern citizens, accustomed to seamless digital experiences in their daily lives, increasingly expect the same from government services. Yet, government ranks last among 17 industries in leveraging digital services to provide positive customer experiences, with only 16% of citizens rating their digital experience positively, according to [a report by Salesforce](#).

Respondents who view the following industries as **Successful at using technology to create great customer experiences**



Source: [Connected Government Report: The Future of Digital Service, 2022, Salesforce](#)

Electronic plan review provides a streamlined experience that mirrors the efficiency of everyday online transactions. These modern-day tech features are critical, especially as the same [Salesforce](#) report found that 47% of citizens believe government employees lack the proper tools to serve them effectively.

By implementing ePlan review solutions, municipalities can build trust, improve citizen satisfaction, and provide the digital experience constituents deserve—all while empowering staff with the right tech stack.

5 Things to Consider When Looking to Maximize Your Applicant Experience

1 Centralize applicant access with a dedicate digital solution
A single system for applicants to access allows them to glean status updates, as well as view comments and corrections. Conversely, when agencies operate non-integrated separate systems, applicants struggle to find the right information and submit applications correctly, especially since requirements vary between jurisdictions. A central portal with clear guardrails and comprehensive guidance serves as a single source of truth, benefiting both occasional homeowners and seasoned developers.

2 Grant staff more visibility with a centralized system
A centralized online hub eliminates the confusion of navigating multiple portals across different departments—whether it's planning, building, code enforcement, or utilities. This decreases turnaround times for reviews by providing visibility that prevents conflicting comments which otherwise result in additional communication and review cycles. Instead, applicants receive clear, concise, and accurate information related to changes, the first time.

3 Focus on UX
A well-designed user interface (UX) isn't just about aesthetics—it's about reducing staff administration and improving service delivery. "Up to 30% of a department's workload can be answering phone calls and helping applicants find information," said Brakefield. An intuitive, user-friendly ePlan

review interface addresses this challenge by making information readily accessible in an intuitive platform. When applicants can easily find what they need and understand what's required, departments field fewer support calls, and benefit from reduced back-and-forth communications, and more complete submissions.

4 Use completeness checks as guardrails
Electronic plan review software with built-in completeness checks transforms the traditionally error-prone submission process into a smooth experience for applicants. With automated prescreening, real-time feedback, standardized submission requirements, and improved file management, you can catch common issues—like incomplete applications or incorrect file formats—before beginning the review cycle. This proactive approach means applicants get instant feedback and guidance, leading to correct submissions the first time.

5 Pull in external stakeholders for feedback on your process
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How Technology has Helped Jurisdictions

St. Paul, MN

Slashed their time-to-permit by 40% even as permit volume for projects between 500k to 2M increased by 20% after implementing ProjectDox.

Chesterfield County, VA

DigEplan delivered an efficient applicant experience, which encouraged applicants to submit digitally. In turn, the County cut their review time in half, from 7-10 days to 3-5.

Clark County, WA

Estimates their permit approval time dropped 20% after onboarding ProjectDox.

Greenwood Village, CO

Thanks to auto reminders that streamline communication, Greenwood Village, Colorado experienced a 20% decrease in turnaround time from application to issue after implementing ProjectDox.

Adams County, CO

Slashed review times to three-and-half days after implementing ProjectDox, despite having just three plan reviewers.



Avolve specializes in electronic plan review software that enhances efficiency throughout the permitting process - from submission and review, to approval. With almost 350 global customers, Avolve's significant investment in research and development ensures that its plan review solutions meet the needs of jurisdictions of all sizes. Its well-known solutions ProjectDox, DigEplan Pro, and DigEplan, automate and streamline the permitting process, removing the inefficiencies of paper or non-integrated plan review solutions, while boosting productivity and economic growth.

For more information visit: www.avolvesoftware.com

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