# What Should Your Community Access Solution Include?

For local government, one of the key lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic was that resident self-service applications are valuable and popular. Despite city hall closures, access portals allowed residents to pay bills, monitor utilities, apply for permits and licenses, and much more. Providing secure online access to applications was critical to keeping government open and community needs met.

And, looking ahead, resident access solutions will remain a technology priority, according to e.Republic's survey of local government IT goals.[1] The benefit proposition is simple — residents are busier and are seeking convenient, easy access to government services. They don't want to stand in long lines at city hall or wait on hold to complete business tasks. Functioning as user-friendly, digital front porches, resident access solutions make it simple to connect with city hall 24/7 with the click of a mouse or the tap of a screen.
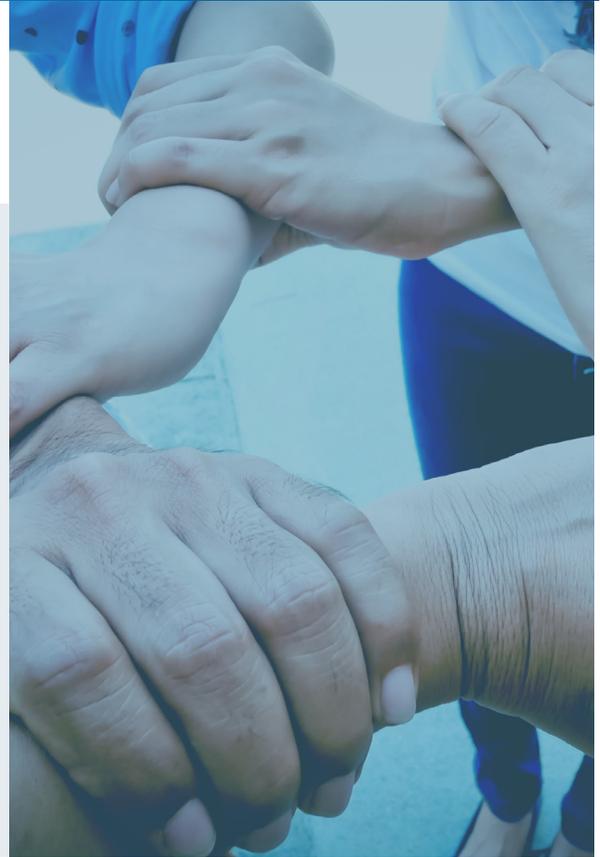
Resident access is benefiting both community members and local government operations:

- Residents save time performing tasks, which they perform at their convenience 24/7 from their device of choice.

- Local governments reduce time spent answering phone calls, taking payments at office windows, and keying in data taken during one-on-one interactions.

As Rick Usher, assistant city manager of Kansas City, Missouri, explains, "The convenience of online access and the range of city services that can be utilized is something all local governments should be interested in bringing to their customers and residents."

To maximize the benefits of resident access, local governments should be asking the following questions when evaluating access solutions.

Is the resident-facing interface easy to use?

A successful resident access solution begins with ease of use. The 2020 Government Engagement Across Generations study highlights the importance of usability: "Clear, easy-to-use technology" was a top-ranked way to improve online interactions with local government.[2]

Navigation should be straightforward, and the logic should seem commonplace to anyone familiar with online shopping. From shopping cart functionality to selecting bills and payment types, the process should be simple to use. A vendor's product demo should demonstrate ease of use and show use-case workflows for typical users. The solution should:

- Be intuitive with easy-to-follow navigation

- Be mobile responsive to allow on-the-go functionality

- Be American Disability Act (ADA) compliant to meet the needs of the entire community

[1] e.Republic. First Look: 2021 Local Government Tech Priorities & Budget Outlook. December 2020. webinars.govtech.com/First-Look-2021-Local-Government-Tech-Priorities-Budget-Outlook-133041.html

[2] Tyler Technologies and the Center for Generational Kinetics. (2020). National Study of Government Engagement Across Generations

ERP-EERP-II-19667-22302-BE-0322

- Feature single logins for access across an organization

- Enable direct payments without a login for visitors who don't want to commit to signing up for a login

What is the solution's payment functionality?

Providing electronic payment methods makes life easier for community members and reduces the time that overburdened staff spends taking and processing checks and cash payments. In addition, local governments recognize that timely, easy-to-use payment options in a modern system for taxes, fines, and fees encourage and support faster compliance.

To make the online process attractive to the community, a successful access solution provides a unified dashboard for all payment tasks, making it easy to find and pay bills.

The solution should:

- Be paired with a proven, full-service payment solution that maximizes efficiency and control

- Link accounts such as multiple parcels for tax payments on one screen

- Include a shopping cart

- Accept multiple payment methods

- Support payment automation and scheduling

How does the solution streamline community development tasks?

A resident access solution should be able to eliminate multiple trips to city hall for residents, contractors, and business owners who want to complete community development tasks, such as business license or permit applications. The solution should:

- Enable completion of permit and licensing applications

- Allow residents and business owners to schedule inspections

- Let residents follow the process of their application

- Provide community and business members with the ability to upload licensing and permitting documents.

Expanding Community Access to Improve Efficiency

In addition to resident access, software solutions can also provide convenience for vendors and employees.

- **Vendor access:** Can empower vendors by providing a place to view bids, submit required forms, review invoices, check information, and more

- **Employee access:** Can empower employees to access, update, and review information such as payroll details, emergency contacts, benefits, time-off requests/approvals, and more

How does the solution support security?

Online security is rightfully top of mind for communities and local governments. Providing both access and security must go hand in hand. To maximize security, a solution should:

- Support client branding to align the look of the self-service access application with the rest of a client's website. This unified look helps build trustiworthiness for visitors.

- Be paired with an electronic bill payment and presentment (EBPP) solution that is compliant with the Payment Card Industry Level 1 Payment Application Data Security Standard (PCI/PA- DSS)

- Be cloud-based to maximize security, eliminating the onus on local government IT workers responsible for keeping on-premises servers secure

How is the solution integrated with utility billing?

Self-service applications are particularly suited to making it easier for residents to interact with their utility providers. From signing up for service to paying bills, a resident access solution makes it easy to complete tasks and find answers about an account without the need for a phone call. The solution should:

- Support views of historical billing

- Allow residents to track consumption

- Enable residents to schedule services

Is the solution cloud-based?

To maximize access benefits, the solution should be cloud-based. This provides a better citizen engagement experience by decreasing downtime, reducing security vulnerabilities, and ensuring that the most up-to-date technology is always in place. A cloud-based solution:

- Enables resident payments and interactions from anywhere at any time

- Frees up local government resources by eliminating the onus of overseeing on-premises servers

- Ensures the solution always has the most recent functionality

- Keeps accounts current by supporting real-time financial updates

Providing convenience and efficiency

In the end, a successful resident access solution will make life easier for your community and help you optimize your operations. Brady Prestwich, utility billing and collections supervisor for Boulder City, Nevada, has witnessed the benefits of electronic bill payment first-hand: "The number of our customers going online to pay bills and sign up for automatic payments increases each month. It will cut your expenses and free up your time, creating more productivity."

If you'd like more information about ERP solutions, contact us at info@tylertech.com or visit tylertech.com.