

Building the Foundation: California Launches Cannabis Licensing Under Tight Deadlines

California has been a trailblazer in marijuana policy since 1996 when it became the first state to legalize medical cannabis. In November 2016, California voters approved Proposition 64 making California the fifth state in the nation to legalize adult use cannabis.

Challenge

That milestone in history came with a new challenge: California needed to launch a cannabis licensing system to protect consumers quickly with a tight deadline looming. With 9 months to go, they **needed both subject matter expertise and rapid execution** to deliver by their deadline.

The administration and enforcement of cannabis regulations and policy **initially fell to 3 individual departments**: the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA), and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), each operating with different licensing systems. The State of California later consolidated this responsibility and created a new governing state-level cannabis body: the Department of Cannabis Control (DCC), with **plans to unify all three departments under a single platform**. This department's mission is to ensure the cannabis industry operating within the state's borders follows a set of standard rules and regulations.

On top of the departmental coordination, the state also faced **complex alignment issues with multiple stakeholders** including the Governor's Office, the Department of Technology, and steering committees. Their new system would need to integrate with external platforms while being scalable enough to manage **7 general and 35 specific license types across a database of 20,000 + cannabis license records**.

Case Study for California Department of Cannabis Control (DCC)

Prior to the consolidation and implementation of a unified agency, 3 independent departments were responsible for state-level governance and general cannabis administration: the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA), the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), and the Department of Public Health (CDPH).



Delivered complex licensing system ahead of schedule and under budget



Manages 7 general and 35 specific license types



Processes 20,000+ license records across all application types and statuses



Integrated multiple state agencies and 100+ project staff

With high stakes like **consumer protection, cannabis business compliance, and public trust**, they needed a partner to advise their needs, stand up their systems, and train their staff, and do so quickly.

Solution

The state selected Visionary Integration Professionals for our proven ability to combine technical expertise with agility and responsiveness.

VIP delivered the key advantages they required:

- An **established program with proven execution** (over 1300+ projects completed)
- The **flexibility to handle moving targets, deadlines, and shifting priorities**
- A **staff of first-class professionals** with deep expertise (as a Platinum Accela partner)



Equally important was selecting the right platform, the Accela Civic Platform. DCA and CDFA had chosen Accela for their licensing systems, while CDPH operated separately with its own solution. When the state consolidated these three departments, **the strategic decision was made to unify all operations under the Accela platform**. This was crucial for allowing the state to reuse existing workflows and systems in place while scaling easily. Sustainability was a key element when considering the different tools.

VIP's scope included implementing Accela systems for DCA and CDFA, providing ongoing maintenance and support for those systems, and subsequently converting CDPH's cannabis licensing data into the Accela platform to **achieve a unified system under the newly formed DCC**.

In terms of project methodology, the VIP team took an Agile Scrum approach to the software implementation. That meant that instead of a large end of project roll out, **VIP utilized 2-4 week sprint cycles**. This allowed California to have **full visibility into project progress** by demonstrating the software after every sprint and gain confidence with each cycle. The flexibility of the Agile Scrum approach also allowed the multiple stakeholders and project managers to make changes and customizations as priorities changed.

Results

With Team VIP, the State successfully launched its cannabis licensing system ahead of the 9-month deadline while **staying under budget and meeting all legislative mandates**. The project **empowered State staff through comprehensive training**, knowledge transfer, and a strong, reliable partnership.

The system's success is demonstrated by its scale:

- **7,900+ active cannabis licenses** managed across 7 general and 35 specific license types
- **20,000+ total license records tracked** in comprehensive statewide system
- **4,500+ cultivation licenses and 500+ manufacturing licenses** administered, plus commercial

The successful launch delivered lasting value:

- **Reduced processing time** through well-integrated systems
- **Improved service** for citizens, consumers, and state employees
- **Enhanced public protection** through regulatory compliance
- A **scalable foundation** for continued program expansion

This project positioned California as a leader in cannabis licensing technology, delivering a scalable platform for the state's expansive legal cannabis market.

Facing a similar implementation challenge? Connect with our team at solutions@trustvip.com