



Community Demand-Sensing Platform

IT builds a digital platform for crowdsourcing ideas for IT projects. Any member of the campus community can submit ideas, vote ideas up or down, or leave comments. IT staff participate in the discussion. Every proposal receives a response from IT, regardless of feasibility or desirability, to encourage broad participation. As a result, IT more clearly understands the technology needs of campus and can proactively allocate resources. Users understand what steps are being taken to address their needs, and discussion often reveals an existing solution or a workaround.

IT groups who have centralized processes for understanding campus technology needs report mutually reinforcing benefits:

- Improved awareness within IT of campus technology needs
- Decreased number of services that fail to meet user needs or to attract substantial usage
- Increased appreciation among users of IT's contributions to campus
- Improved ability to forecast IT resource and budget needs

Included in this Intensive





This practice implementation intensive provides a template to help IT Forum members accelerate adoption of more sophisticated and repeatable processes, including:

- **Platform Design Specifications:** Key Features of the Platform to Drive Community Participation
- **Pump-Priming Toolkit:** Three Tactics to Generate and Maintain a Critical Mass of Submissions
- **Community Engagement Strategy Guide:** Channels to Increase Community Involvement
- **IT Rules of Engagement:** Activities to Ensure Users Find Value in Participating
- **Submission Processing Flowchart:** Steps to Ensure a Rapid, Transparent Resolution of Users' Ideas
- **Demand-Sensing Platform Value Scorecard:** Questions to Gauge Your Success

Digitized Demand Sensing Increases Breadth, Efficiency

Single Online Platform Centralizes Conversations About Technology Needs

Historically, CIOs have relied on personalized feedback gained through ad hoc conversations and IT governance committees to maintain a sense of campus's technology needs. That one-on-one approach to demand sensing is not able to provide as complete or rich a view of campus needs as is necessary. Now, progressive CIOs are leveraging contemporary technology to centralize conversations about campus technology needs in a single, transparent platform.

	Typical Demand Sensing	Leading-Edge Demand Sensing
 <p>SCALABILITY</p> <p>Flexibility of the demand sensing mechanism to accommodate increased interest from users</p>	<p>✘ <i>As uses of technology increase, in-person conversations are too few and too slow to provide the CIO a complete view of campus needs</i></p>	<p>✔ <i>The demand sensing platform can handle a flexible number of participants, and submissions are shared with IT in real time</i></p>
 <p>ACCESSIBILITY</p> <p>Availability of the demand sensing mechanism when, where, and how users want to access it</p>	<p>✘ <i>Demand-sensing conversations typically happen face-to-face or during scheduled committee meetings. Substantial planning and coordination is required</i></p>	<p>✔ <i>Conversations happen asynchronously and remotely, allowing participants to engage at their convenience</i></p>
 <p>BREADTH</p> <p>Percentage of the campus community whose needs are detected by the demand-sensing mechanism</p>	<p>✘ <i>Because figuring out how to share an idea is so difficult, only the most dedicated users bother telling IT what they need</i></p>	<p>✔ <i>Careful marketing and attention to user experience makes the demand sensing platform welcoming and intuitive to even casual IT users</i></p>
 <p>DIALOGUE</p> <p>Engagement of IT and users in a two-way conversation about technology needs, with on-going discussion as needs surface</p>	<p>✘ <i>Because needs are shared in a distributed, haphazard fashion, having a sustained conversation about user needs is challenging. Multilateral discussions, with multiple users, are nigh impossible</i></p>	<p>✔ <i>Anyone can chime in at any point, once an idea has been submitted. The CIO can verify that every idea receives some response, strengthening IT's engagement with users</i></p>

Platform Design Specifications

Key Features of the Platform to Drive Community Participation

Whether you license an existing platform or build the platform in-house (potentially an excellent capstone project for a CS major!), keep the following three guiding principles in mind to ensure the platform provides a complete understanding of technology demand on campus.

- 1 Frame the platform as benefiting the university community, not just IT. Doing so conveys that the platform is open and relevant to as broad a swath of campus as possible, maximizing the representativeness of your view of campus technology demand.



Institutional branding:

language and visual cues reflect that this effort is on behalf of the university community. This is not just an "IT initiative."



Automatic enrollment:

every member of the university community can participate without signing up for anything, thanks to single sign-on.



High-profile FAQ section:

FAQs should communicate a welcoming, inclusive, open-minded tone to convince readers they can make a valued contribution.

The FAQ should address:

- The campaign's purpose and audience
- Different ways to participate
- Privacy concerns (who can see my ideas, votes, comments)
- Whom to contact with further questions

- 2 Make the platform intuitive and enjoyable to use. A smooth user experience helps ensure that visitors to the site turn into participants and that participants keep returning. Taking the time to do some pre-launch user testing (e.g., with summer interns) can pay off.



Communication à la Silicon Valley:

platform leverages familiar features of social media (comments, etc.). Updates can be pushed to users via multiple channels.



Gamification:

submissions "compete" for up votes; down votes are available too. Proposals move up and down the leader board as votes come in. Users accrue points for participating in various ways.



Search functionality:

making it easy to peruse all existing submissions avoids a situation where only popular submissions get attention.

Categorize submissions ("cost savings"; "teaching and learning"; "student experience") to ease navigation and analytics.

- 3 Design the platform to be a live, interactive environment rather than a static bulletin board. Give participants reasons to keep coming back and engaging on a regular basis.



Knowledge-sharing mechanisms:

beyond votes, users can use comments to provide feedback on proposals and tips for using existing resources as a workaround.



Unobtrusive oversight and monitoring:

Ideas are vetted by IT experts before going live to maintain an appropriate tone (and to weed out incorrect information).

To provide this functionality, UAB licensed IdeaScale's platform for about \$20K. UAB cites the platform's flexibility and reusability for campaigns outside of IT as helping justify the investment.

Pump-Priming Toolkit

Three Tactics to Generate and Maintain a Critical Mass of Submissions



Soft Opening for IT Staff

Prior to launching the platform to the general campus community, invite IT staff (including leadership) to submit ideas, votes, and comments. Prepopulating the platform:

- Communicates a norm of participation
- Models the kinds of ideas community members should submit
- Builds engagement with the platform within the IT team



One-on-One Platform Demonstrations

The CIO and IT directors should set the platform as their browser homepage. In conversations with community members, IT leaders should submit ideas to the platform in real time, describing the process. Ensure users understand how to submit future ideas and how to track their progress. This tactic:

- Provides an on-going flow of ideas to the platform
- Illustrates your commitment to users' input
- Surfaces any common questions users have about how the platform works



High-Profile Numbers

Quantify your successes, and publicize them as they happen. Present usage statistics in prominent places (on the platform homepage, on IT's homepage in tandem with a link to the platform). Raising the profile of this initiative:

- Demonstrates that other campus members are actively engaged
- Conveys the impact that participating can have
- Emphasizes that users can meaningfully contribute in many ways; there are far more votes than submissions

Usage Statistics at UAB

125

Submissions

4,000

Votes

800

Comments

60+

Ideas Posted to
Other UAB
Campaigns

Community Engagement Strategy Guide

Channels to Increase Community Involvement

The Great Demand-Sensing Platform Roadshow!

Present the platform's purpose, functionality, and successes to-date to as broad an audience as possible. Convey why your audience should care—how will they, personally, benefit from improving IT's knowledge of campus's technology needs?



Reference the platform in **one-on-one conversations**, showing that IT values everyone's input



Reach out to specific constituencies who have previously felt left out of or ill served by IT decisions. Position the platform as a way to elevate their voice



Hold **town hall meetings**. Come ready to enter attendees' ideas in real-time



Carve out a **section of IT's home page** to share usage stats and upcoming projects initially identified via the platform



Share recent trends and current high-scoring submissions through **monthly email updates**



Use the panache of **infographics** posted on campus bulletin boards to highlight how and why to participate

SPARK idea leads to new UAB app tile for writing center



The UAB app now has a tile on the student profile linking directly to the UAB Writing Center. An idea posted to the SPARK crowdsourcing campaign about the app led to the creation of the new tile. What app tools or tiles would make your life easier on campus? [Submit your idea to the SPARK campaign, and vote and comment on other ideas.](#)

Sharing recent changes made at platform users' behest helps get potential participants excited about the platform.

IT Rules of Engagement

Activities to Ensure Users Find Value in Participating

A fatal flaw in some demand-sensing campaigns is that submissions disappear into a black hole, leaving submitters confused and disenchanted when they get no response. Here are three principles to keep in mind.

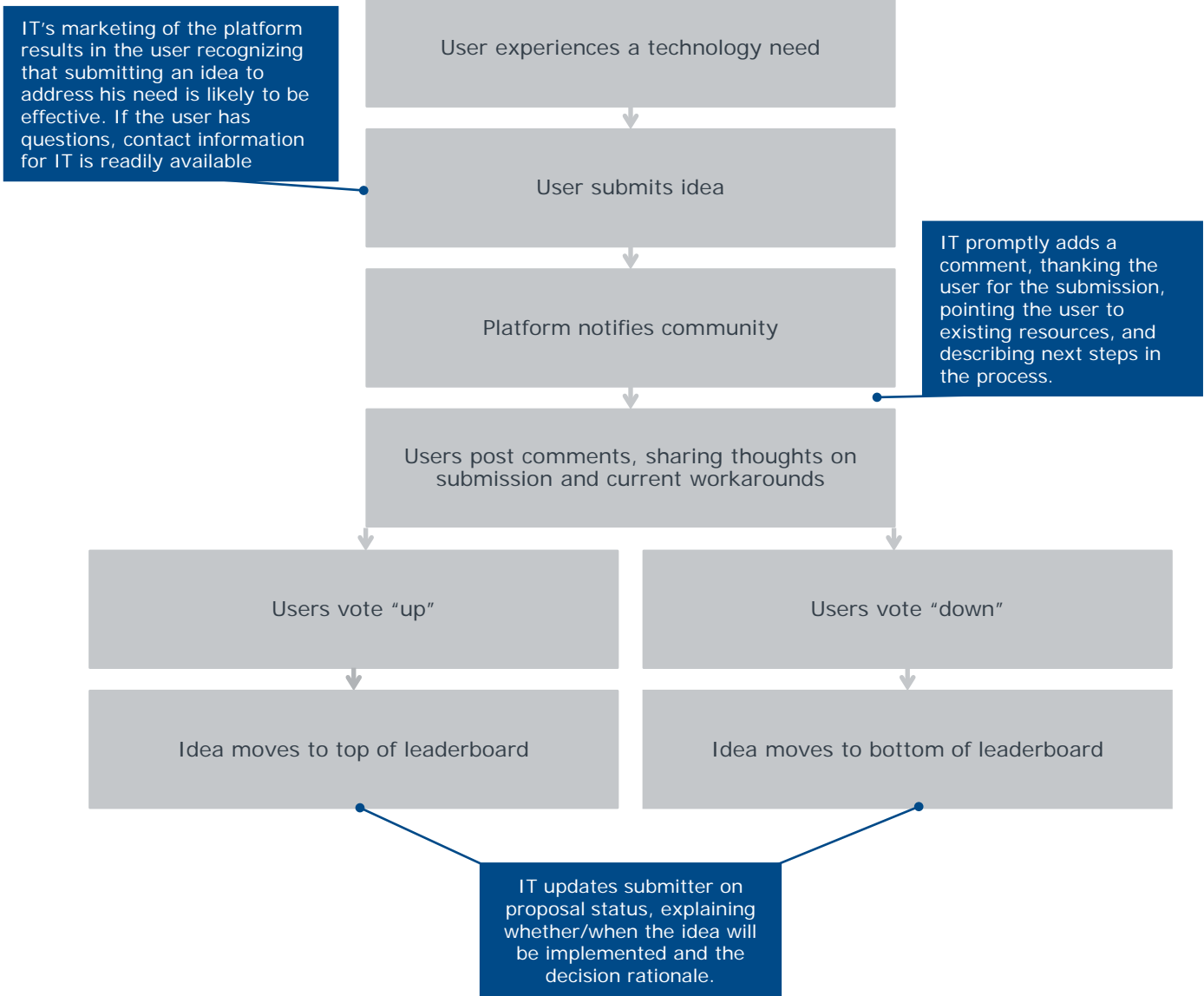
Three IT Steps for a Five-Star User Experience

1 Acknowledge every submission. IT must demonstrate that participating is valued and worthwhile.

2 Explain the process. At every step, users should know what will happen next and when it will occur.

3 Close the loop on every submission, explaining to submitters if, when, and why ideas will be implemented.

The Life Cycle of an Idea Shared Via Digital Demand-Sensing Platform



Submission Processing Flowchart

Steps to Ensure A Rapid, Transparent Resolution of Users' Ideas

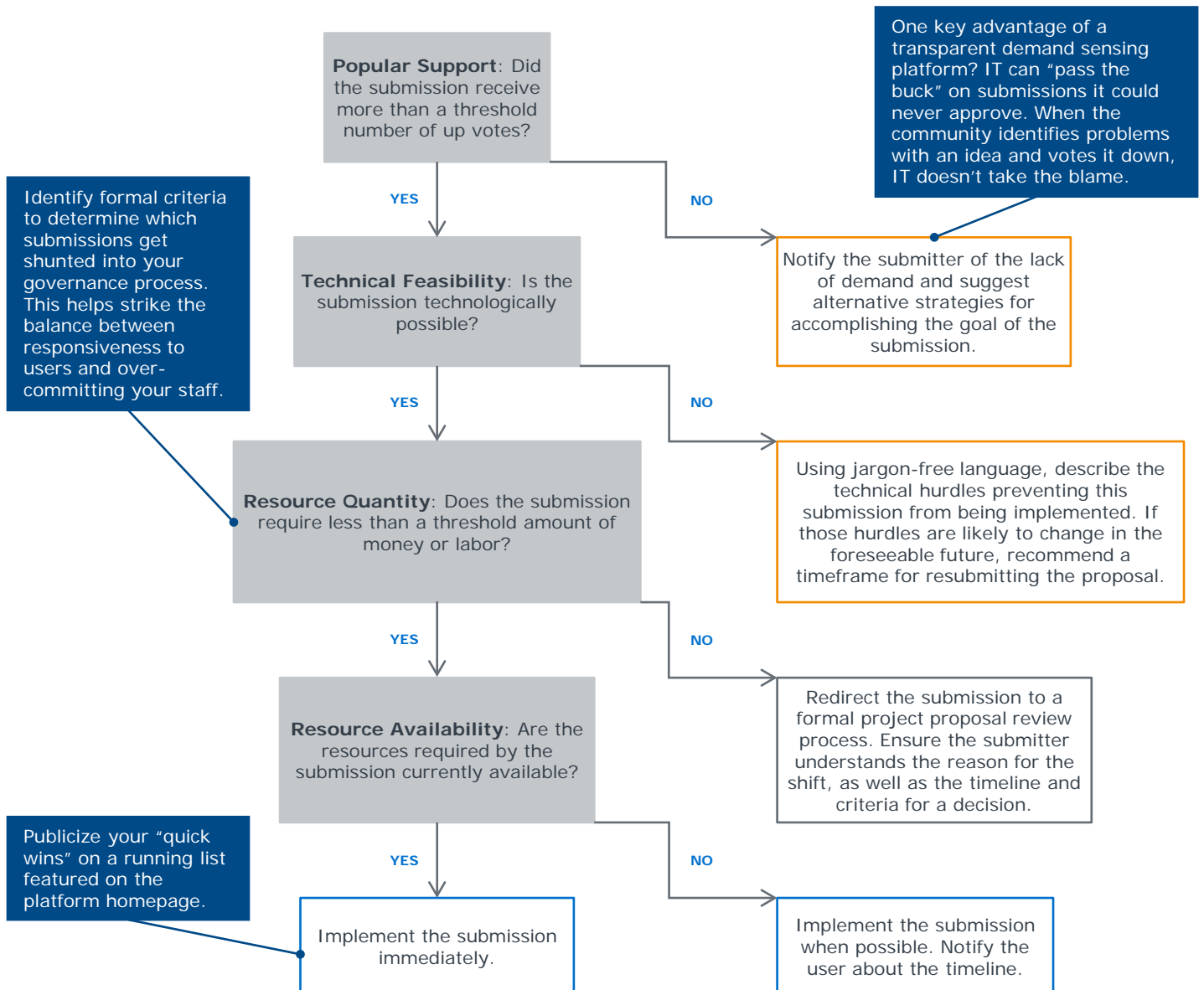
The Forum recommends using the following process to triage submissions. Post this framework publicly to help platform users understand how they can expect their submission to be evaluated.

KEY

■ Questions to ask to categorize submissions.





Submission Categories

- Some submissions shouldn't or can't be implemented. The key in these cases is to ensure the user doesn't feel like participating was a waste of time. After all, it wasn't—you now know about an unmet IT need, even if it can't be met immediately.
- Some submissions will be large undertakings. It's neither appropriate nor feasible to commit to implementing a major new enterprise system (e.g.) through this platform, however popular the idea may be. Subject these submissions to the added scrutiny of your IT governance committee or project evaluation team.
- Some submissions are light lifts with heavy rewards. Keep a weather eye out for these. Acting quickly to make small changes (e.g., increasing email storage quotas) can have outsize benefits in terms of IT's reputation—not to mention community members' ability to do their work.



Demand-Sensing Platform Value Scorecard

The IT Forum has created the following worksheet to assess the success of your demand sensing efforts. We suggest two possible uses of this scorecard: first, when you are considering replacing an old system, use this scorecard to determine if a change is needed. Second, once you've implemented a new system, use this scorecard to periodically assess if the system continues to meet your needs.

	Breadth of Community Engagement	
	<i>Are We Engaging the Whole Campus Community?</i>	
	What percentage of active user IDs have logged on to the platform?	__ / 100%
	Are there active student participants on the platform?	Yes / No
	Are there active staff participants on the platform?	Yes / No
	Are there active faculty participants on the platform?	Yes / No
	Platform Throughput	
	<i>Are We Generating Sufficient Input?</i>	
	Do we receive at least 30 idea submissions per semester?	Yes / No
	Do we receive at least 5 comments per idea?	Yes / No
	Do we receive at least 10 votes per idea?	Yes / No
	Responsiveness to Users	
	<i>Are We Engaged in Dialogue with Platform Participants?</i>	
	Does IT staff acknowledge new ideas and thank submitters?	Yes / No
	Within 12 hours of posting?	Yes / No
	Do we encourage IT staff to share helpful tips or workarounds?	Yes / No
	Within 24 hours of posting?	Yes / No
	Once ideas have been discussed, do we inform submitters of next steps?	Yes / No
	Approx. 1 week after posting?	Yes / No
	Forward Demand Awareness	
	<i>Are We More Accurately Forecasting Downstream Resource Needs?</i>	
	How many proposals submitted for review does IT know about in advance?	__ / 100%
	How many new IT projects meet or exceed their predicted number of users?	__ / 100%

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