IdeaBox Playbook version 1.0

March 17, 2015

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

Background

IdeaBox aims to further the innovative and collaborative culture within the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) by leveraging the intellect and creativity of employees stationed across the country. It provides an online platform for all agency employees, regardless of level or geography, to share and build ideas on how to further the agency's mission of improving the financial lives of consumers, as well as enhance the Bureau's operations. The staff leading IdeaBox reviews the ideas for impact and feasibility, incubates the best ones into action plans, and navigates them through decision-making channels for possible implementation.

In the spirit of openness and collaboration, this Playbook shares information on how the CFPB created the IdeaBox initiative and poses questions organizations may choose to consider when developing similar programs. To facilitate replication at other government agencies, we've also shared the software source code for the IdeaBox platform on Github.

The content in this Playbook is illustrative and for discussion purposes only.

Table of Contents

Contents	Page
Section 1: Key Questions	4
Section 2: Building the Infrastructure	13
Section 3: Harvesting Ideas	20
Section 4: How to Initially Handle Ideas	25
Section 5: Incubation and Navigation	30

Section 1: Key Questions

- What are common questions to consider when building an innovation engine?
- How do you align the innovation engine with the organization's culture, planning process, and resource constraints?
- Scoping the project and launch

Several key questions help determine the shape of an innovation initiative

Purpose	How will this initiative add value to the organization?
Alignment with Planning	How do new projects arising from the initiative align with the existing planning process?
Resource Constraints	How will resources be allocated to projects and which offices ultimately own those projects?
Types and Methods of Idea Generation	What types of ideas are in the scope of the initiative, and how will they be solicited?
Timing of Launch	Is this the best time to launch an initiative such as this one?

Best practices research provided an understanding of the context and guided expected outcomes

Context

Best practices from the public and private sectors indicate that an innovation initiative can help to:

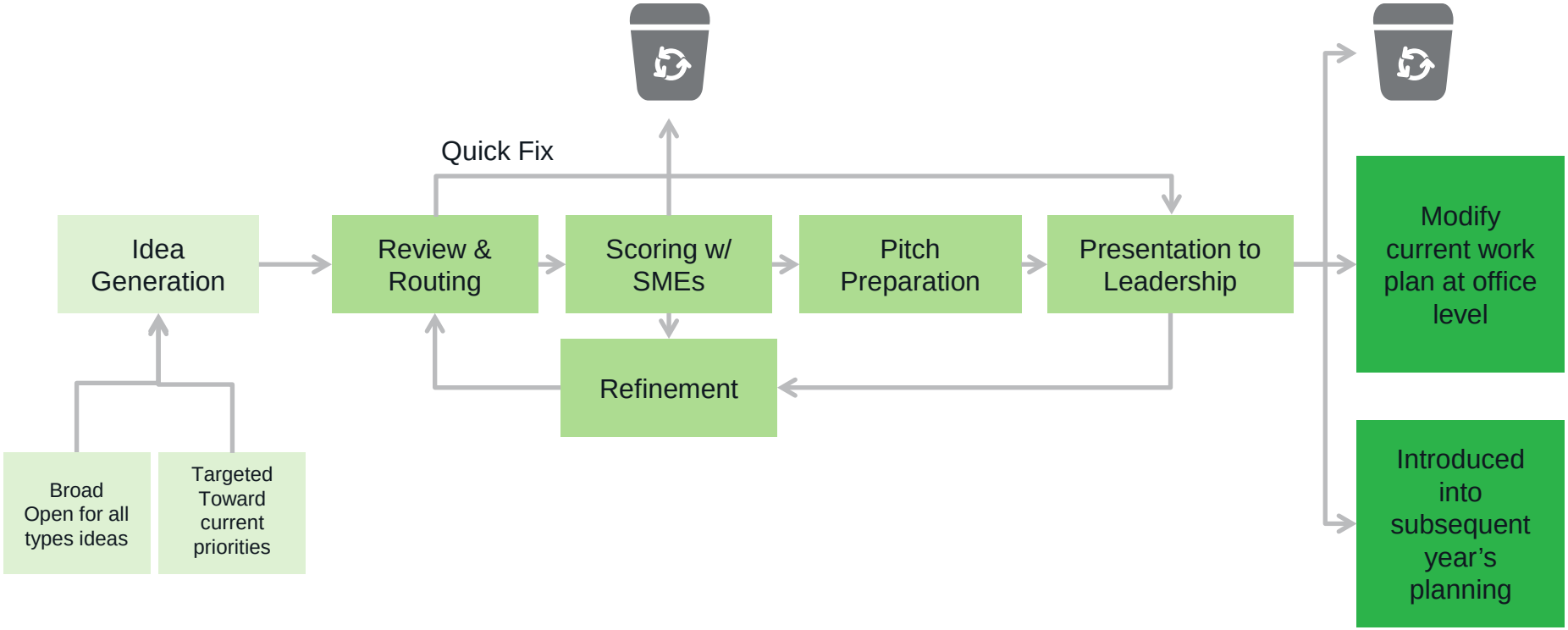
- Further an organization's culture of innovation and collaboration
- Engage geographically dispersed employees
- Help maintain agility and entrepreneurial spirit
- Continuously generate creative solutions

Expected Outcomes

A grassroots, cross-functional team of individuals dedicated to driving three workstreams:

1. **Idea Generation** – Create opportunities for all staff to build and share ideas
2. **Incubation** – Refine ideas to make them actionable
3. **Navigation** – Drive ideas to facilitate implementation

The innovation initiative should align with existing planning processes



Idea Generation – Uncover ideas

Incubation – Refine ideas

Navigation – Implement ideas

Question 1: Focus users on engagement or implementation of ideas?

Illustrative

	Option 1 Employee Engagement	Option 2 Idea Implementation	Option 3 Both
Description	▪ Platform will be a place for conversation with colleagues from across the organization ▪ Encourage ideas without detailed plans	▪ Platform will be a place for thoroughly developed idea postings ▪ Emphasize practical, impactful ideas	▪ Encourage idea generation and conversations to develop those ideas further ▪ Communicate progress on implementation
Pros	▪ Easier for users to get involved ▪ Facilitate new professional connections and conversations	▪ Fewer, more developed ideas ▪ Facilitates more in-depth consultations with subject-matter experts	▪ Encourages active involvement and collaboration ▪ Potential for idea to be implemented
Cons	▪ Larger volume of ideas to manage ▪ Users may expect implementation of ideas ▪ Conversations may wander	▪ More effort required to be an active user ▪ Less flexibility to develop ideas during consultations with subject-matter experts	▪ Team members invest more time in communicating updates on idea implementation to spur further engagement

Question 2: Solicit ideas continuously or periodically?

Illustrative

	Option 1 Continuous	Option 2 Periodic	Option 3 Both
Description	▪ Keep ideation platform open 24/7/365 ▪ Ensures an additional outlet to share ideas with colleagues	▪ Open and close ideation platform periodically (e.g. monthly, quarterly) ▪ Periodic opening may increase engagement and excitement	▪ Keep ideation platform open 24/7/365 so staff always have an outlet ▪ Increase engagement with periodic challenges/competitions
Pros	▪ Activity trends show current topics of interest for organization ▪ Ideas can discuss topics team has not considered	▪ Engagement: Employees may be more likely to set aside time ▪ Time-bound responsibility for team	▪ Enhanced engagement through challenges ▪ Open outlet to submit and share ideas
Cons	▪ Ongoing responsibility for team to enter ideas into process ▪ Need to steer users towards submitting well-crafted solutions	▪ Limited opportunities for staff to share ideas	▪ Ongoing responsibility for team to enter ideas into process

Question 3: Focus idea generation on internal process or mission areas?

Illustrative

	Option 1 Internal	Option 2 Mission	Option 3 Both
Description	▪ Limit idea generation to those that relate to improving internal processes, policies, and procedures	▪ Limit idea generation to those that impact mission-focused work	▪ Welcome all types of ideas that relate to both internal process improvements as well as those that are mission-focused
Pros	▪ Opportunities to increase employee satisfaction ▪ “Liking” can serve as poll for impact of idea	▪ Opportunities for more impact towards mission	▪ Opportunities for to improve organization operation and further the overall mission
Cons	▪ Ideas may be relevant only to certain offices	▪ Ideas may take longer to implement due to additional complexity	▪ Need to develop multiple paths for idea incubation and navigation

Question 4: Emphasize big ideas or small ideas?

Illustrative

	Option 1 Big ideas	Option 2 Small ideas	Option 3 Both
Description	▪ Limit idea generation to only those that have a significant impact on the organization or the mission area	▪ Limit idea generation to incremental improvements that are simple to implement	▪ Keep idea generation open to all types of ideas regardless of their size, scope, or impact
Pros	▪ Potential for positive impact with unconventional methods ▪ Further enthusiasm and empowerment	▪ Quickly demonstrate value ▪ Easier to implement	▪ Quick wins in the short term, major impact in longer term
Cons	▪ Implementation may take longer and be more complex	▪ Must be mindful of limited resources	▪ Managing multiple incubation & navigation paths across portfolio of ideas

A phased approach mitigates concerns regarding timing of launch

Illustrative

	Recruitment	Team Selection	First team meeting	Launch Pilot Phase	Full scale launch
Time	Week 0	Week 2	Week 4	Week 16	Week 28
Actions	▪ Launch recruiting materials ▪ Open application period ▪ Target diverse representation of roles and backgrounds	▪ Determine criteria ▪ Review volunteer applications ▪ Select initial team	▪ Introduce team to concept and goals of project ▪ Explain roles & responsibilities of members ▪ Set initial tasks for team	▪ Launch platform with minimal promotion ▪ Review and route initial ideas ▪ Navigate initial batch of ideas	▪ Wider promotion of platform ▪ Communicate results of initial idea navigation ▪ Improve process based on feedback from team and partner offices
Deliverable	▪ Recruitment materials	▪ Final team member list	▪ Initial agenda ▪ Introductory presentation	▪ Launch platform	▪ Promotional materials ▪ Team engagement on platform

Section 2:
Building the Infrastructure

- Infrastructure overview
- Designing and building the team
- Designing and building the technology

The innovation engine has two key infrastructure components; the team and the platform

The Team

- The innovation engine is staffed by a cross-functional team
- Team members come from all offices
- Team members were recruited using an open approach
- Team members navigate ideas toward implementation and deploy communications within the organization

The Platform

- IdeaBox, the CFPB's ideation platform, was developed in-house using an agile approach based on frequent user feedback
- CFPB has shared the source code for IdeaBox openly at http://cfpb.github.io/ideabox/

Open recruitment process complemented with targeted communications created a diverse, enthusiastic team

Illustrative

	Option 1 Targeted approach	Option 2 Open approach	Option 3 Hybrid approach
Description	▪ Reach out to specific staff members who participated in previous organization-wide initiatives	▪ Widespread communication within organization seeking team members through application process	▪ Organization-wide outreach complemented with targeted communications to encourage applications
Pros	▪ Team members have experience with these types of initiatives and can quickly start working	▪ Participants can show enthusiasm and interest in application ▪ Diverse perspectives can improve operations	▪ Focus on clearly interested participants ▪ Ability to engage experienced team members
Cons	▪ May miss out on potentially strong candidates	▪ Possibility of receiving too few or too many applicants ▪ If no one from a particular office applies, it will lack representation	▪ More time-intensive process to recruit team and ensure representation of various offices

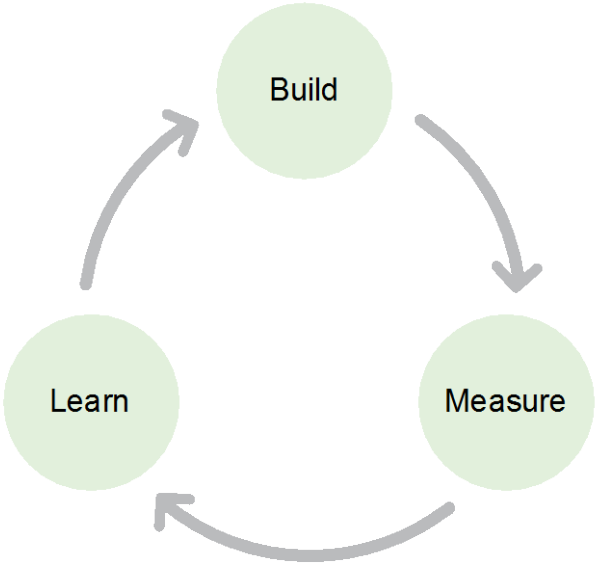
The innovation engine is managed by a cross-functional team with representatives from various offices and regions

Meeting cadence		
Every 6-8 weeks	**Executive Sponsors** 3-5 senior executives	**Key responsibilities:** ▪ Set overall purpose and scope ▪ Receive updates ▪ Engage to support idea implementation
Every 2 weeks	**Team** (15-18 members) Members from various offices and regions (1-4 hours per week)	**Key responsibilities:** ▪ Assess options and formulate approaches ▪ Execute a holistic plan for idea generation and implementation ▪ Adhere to project timelines ▪ Act as idea navigators
Ongoing	**Coordinators** 1 program manager (partial time) 2 analysts (partial time)	**Key responsibilities:** ▪ Propose options and approaches ▪ Articulate plans and timelines ▪ Facilitate team meetings ▪ Gather and analyze team inputs

The program and the technology was developed using 'lean' and 'agile' principles

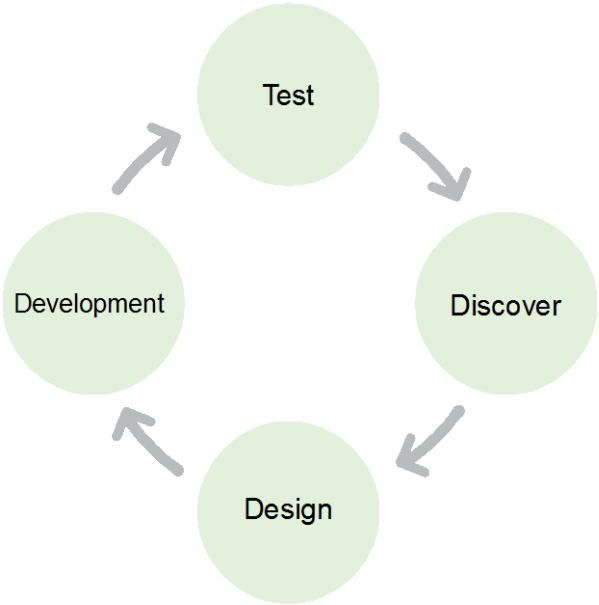
Lean approach

to building the program and process



Agile approach

to developing the software



Technology team designed an internal ideation platform based on best practices

Part of the Intranet 1

Sorting 2

"Like" an idea 3

Comments 4

Hi, Monte Desai | Search

Intranet | Staff | Social | Resources | Tools | cfpb

IdeaBox

Help improve the work we do for consumers and the way we do it. IdeaBox is a place to collaborate with colleagues across the CFPB to build and share innovative ideas. All ideas and associated comments will be reviewed at least quarterly. Read More

TRENDING | LIKES | RECENT

4 LIKES — Liked

Open Source IdeaBox

Urban developing nations pride, natural resources thinkers who make change happen. Catalyze education, disrupt; political equity honor interconnectivity effectiveness, social. Read more

0 Comments | Suggested on Oct 16, 2014

3 LIKES — Liked

Collaborating with external agencies

Efficiently unleash cross-media information without cross-media value. Quickly maximize timely deliverables for real-time schemas. Read more

0 Comments | Suggested on Oct 16, 2014

3 LIKES — Liked

Consumer Protecting

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Submit an Idea

CURRENT CHALLENGE:
How to best use Idea Box

View Challenge Ideas

Browse by Challenge:

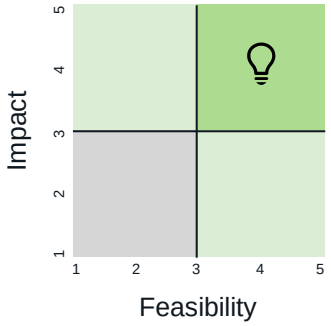
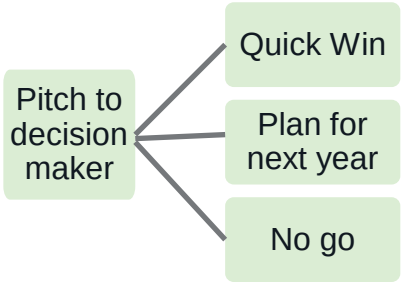
View past Challenges

Browse by Tag:

- INTERNAL (7)
- PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (6)
- CROSS-POLLINATION (4)

4 Tags

The overall process is built around user experience, collaboration, and transparency

	Idea Generation Creating opportunities for all employees share and build ideas	Incubation Refining ideas to improve them and make them actionable	Navigation Advancing ideas throughout implementation
User Experience	▪ Intuitive platform that is part of the intranet – no separate login required IdeaBox	▪ Users receive customized updates via comments on the idea's page ▪ Author is kept involved to prevent a 'black-box' feeling	▪ Projects kept on-track by regular check-ins with offices & updates to staff ▪ Idea contributors have a role in the project
Collaboration	▪ Organic cross-pollination of ideas across offices and regions ▪ Ideas judged on merit and built upon by peers	▪ Cross-functional team develops the idea for pitch to decision-makers ▪ Open discussion allows colleagues to identify flaws and suggest improvements	▪ Interest in an idea creates momentum for continued implementation ▪ Involved users become resources for the project
Transparency	▪ Names are attached to all ideas, comments, and likes ▪ Common pain-points are identified and escalated via "likes"	▪ Scoring impact & feasibility 	▪ Clarity on outcomes 

Section 3: Harvesting Ideas

- Launch schedule and channels of communication
- Platform activity by program phase
- Focusing idea generation through “Challenges”

Communications aim to engage four key audiences within the agency through targeted value propositions

Audience	Expected action	Value proposition	Value proposition details
Staff	Share and build ideas through collaboration	Have your ideas heard and shared	▪ Contribute to innovation ▪ Think about topics different from your everyday work ▪ Build relationships with colleagues across the organization
Program Team	Keep offices & teams engaged through implementation	Drive innovation within the organization	▪ Further a culture of staff engagement and empowerment ▪ Further develop skills in project management and execution ▪ Gain cross-organization insight
Subject-matter experts	Improve and advance ideas	Interact with ideas outside your normal routine and build more relationships across the organization	▪ Cultivate innovative ideas ▪ Build relationships with colleagues outside your office ▪ Contribute expertise towards diverse ideas
Senior leaders	Encourage implementation of ideas	Further the culture of innovation and collaboration	▪ Create new opportunities to build and share innovative ideas ▪ Engage the workforce ▪ Connect with geographically dispersed colleagues

The team drives engagement through a variety of communication channels

Illustrative

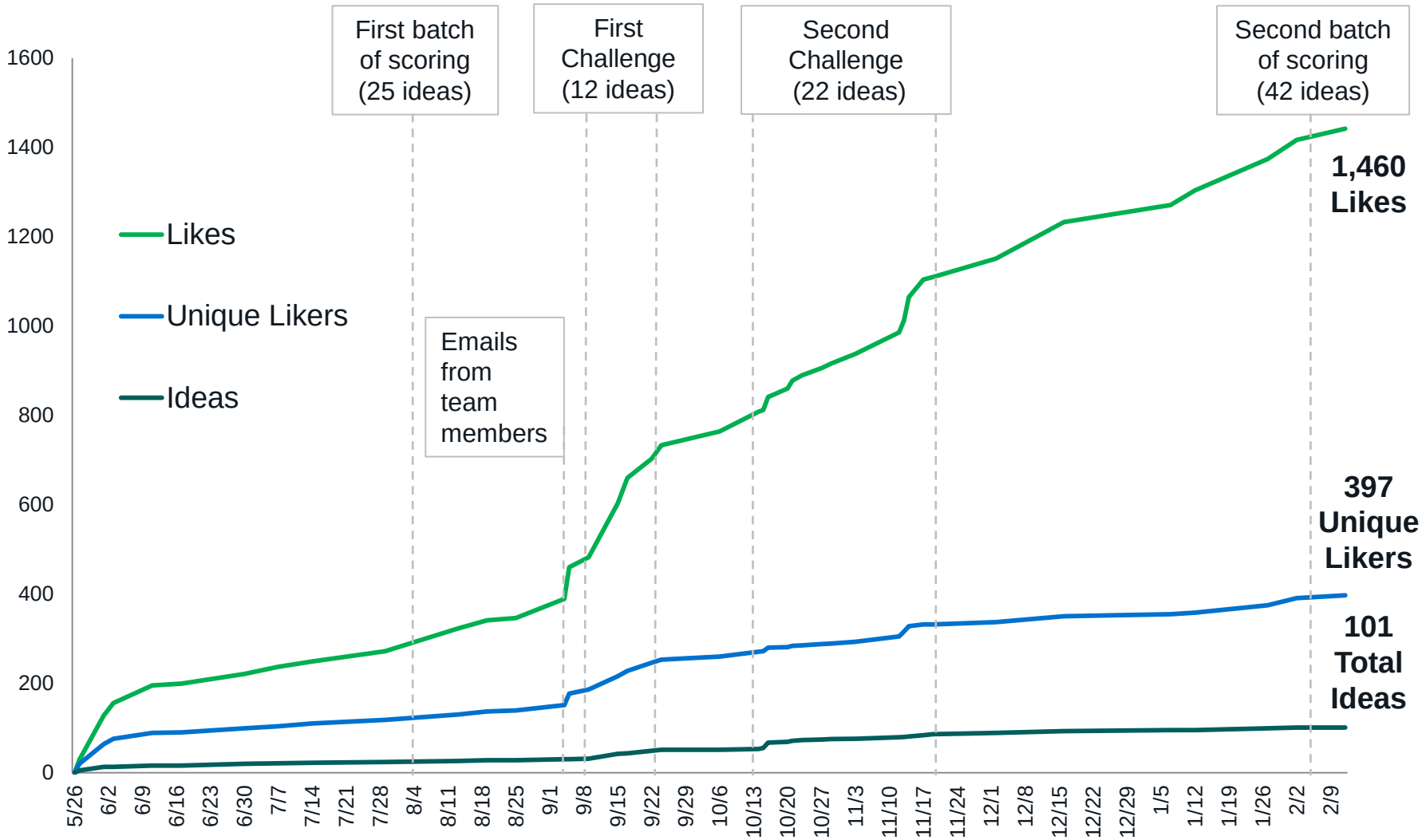
Phase: Platform Launch → First Challenge

Communication Channel / Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Email message to all employees		◆				◆				
Wiki page update		◆				◆				
Intranet news feed post w/link		◆				◆				◆
Internal blog				◆		◆				
Moderators advance conversations on the platform		◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	
Announcement at team members' meetings		◆	◆			◆				
Intranet news story "Featured Idea"		◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	◆	◆	
"Challenges" box appears on platform						◆				
Flyers in buildings						◆	◆	◆	◆	
Progress update on wiki page					◆			◆		◆
Emails from team members							◆		◆	

◆ Messages to staff

Channels for grassroots communication

The overall level of activity is closely linked to the level of promotion from the team



The ‘Challenge’ feature is a resource for offices to generate diverse perspectives related to focus areas

What is a Challenge?

- A question to target ideation towards a specific area
- A time-constrained campaign to drive engagement

How would an office benefit from hosting a challenge?

- Generate a diverse range of solutions from colleagues across the organization

What is the responsibility of a host office?

- Frame the challenge statement and scope
- Engage with users on platform to provide guidance
- Provide a response at the end of the challenge summarizing the decisions and reasoning on implementation of ideas

How does the innovation team help?

- Design and deliver a communication campaign
- Assist with implementation planning

Challenge Proposal Form
(EXAMPLE)

Challenge Host
Office:
Contact name:

Challenge Details
Focus statement:

Challenge question:

Additional guidance:

Goals of Challenge:

Urgency of Challenge:

Section 4:
How to Initially Handle Ideas

- Principles and phases of scoring
- Sorting ideas into actionable buckets
- Scoring ideas for team prioritization

The scoring and sorting process assesses ideas with an emphasis on transparency

Key Process Principles

- Ideas will be scored using uniform criteria
- The team will be transparent about how ideas are sorted
- Ideas will be scored separately by multiple team members

The Scoring and Sorting Process

Initial Review and Sorting

- Ideas must follow Terms of Participation to be sorted
- Ideas are sorted based on the best initial path forward for each

Scoring

- 4-6 Team members score certain ideas as an initial screen
- Scoring criteria assess two major factors:
  - Impact
  - Feasibility

SME Consultation

- Subject-matter experts are consulted to develop ideas and further assess impact and feasibility

Ideas are sorted into actionable categories to best manage and utilize the team's bandwidth

Team Involvement Level	Idea Type	Idea Description
Greater Involvement	**For scoring**	Complex ideas that will be assessed for impact and feasibility and incubated by subject-matter-experts. After further incubation, the best ideas are pitched to appropriate leaders.
	Quick fix	Incremental improvement that can quickly generate value for the organization. Team advances the idea to appropriate leadership .
Lighter Involvement	**Matchmaking**	Team connects idea contributors and subject-matter experts across the agency so they can develop the idea together. This process encourages transparency on decision-making.
	Grassroots	Idea contributors have used the platform to design implementation themselves. Team identifies resources available to such groups.
	Already exists	An idea that discusses an issue that is being addressed by an existing project. Team identifies the project and point of contact and connects them with idea contributors.

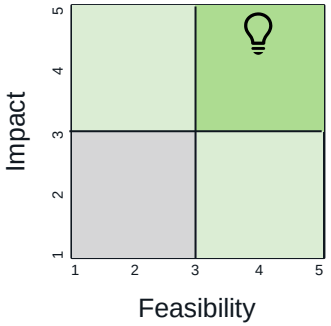
The scoring rubric assesses critical variables that determine an idea's potential impact and feasibility

Illustrative

Impact score	Score
The success of this idea is clearly measurable.	4
This idea would reach a significant number of citizens or employees.	5
The impact per citizen or employee of this idea would be significant.	4
This idea aligns with current priorities.	5
Average impact score	4.5

Feasibility score	Score
The idea does not appear to raise any significant authority, legal, security or privacy issues.	4
This idea requires little to no new technology.	5
This idea requires little to no funding or employee time.	4
This idea does not rely on the participation of outside entities.	3
Average feasibility score	4.0

Ranking for number of likes	7

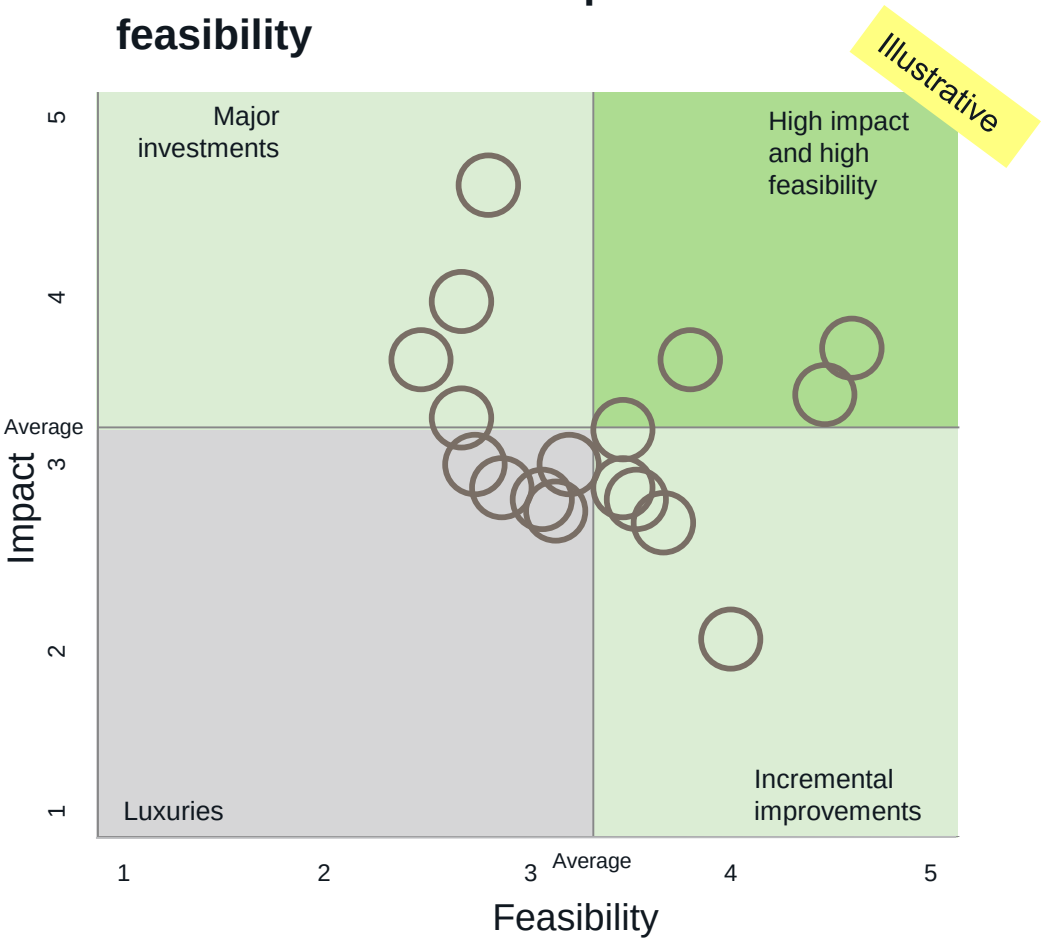


The more complex ideas are scored for impact and feasibility to guide discussion of next steps for each

What does scoring accomplish?

- Informs how the team might move an idea forward into navigation
- Standardizes, to the extent possible, initial evaluation
- Creates a documented metric to understand past decisions and improve team processes

Ideas are scored for impact and feasibility



Each circle represents an idea. Quadrant thresholds are determined by this batch's average scores for impact (3.2) and feasibility (3.3).

Section 5:
Incubation and Navigation

- The process of incubating an idea
- Navigators and pitching leaders

Idea incubation takes place in a variety of forums

Engagement on Platform

- Colleagues comment on idea to further develop them and propose alternatives
- Team members prompt further conversation by anticipating potential concerns and asking relevant questions
- Possible implementation routes becomes more readily understandable

Team Scoring & Discussion

- The scoring process lends itself to team discussion about the development of ideas
- Scoring raises a set of questions that need to be addressed through SME consultation
- Combination of discussion and creating numerical assessments makes team members think deeply about an idea, and in turn, encourages them to improve an idea's potential impact and feasibility

SME Consultation

- Relevant subject matter experts are consulted after engagement and scoring are complete
- SMEs provide insight to improve an idea or suggest alternatives
- The process is meant to be flexible and iterative
- As SMEs are consulted and an idea is developed, team members post updates on the idea's page to maintain transparency

After ideas are developed into preliminary plans, they will be pitched to the appropriate decision makers

Present to appropriate manager or point of contact

Possibly agency leader	▪ Reserved for a few, well-developed ideas that have been thoroughly analyzed ▪ For high impact ideas that would involve multiple parts of the organization and large resource investments
Multiple office leaders	▪ For ideas that would involve multiple parts of the organization ▪ Multiple ideas and updates can be presented during one meeting
Office leader	▪ For ideas with a more narrow focus that can be implemented within a team ▪ Presented in a more private meeting with decision-maker and relevant idea contributors

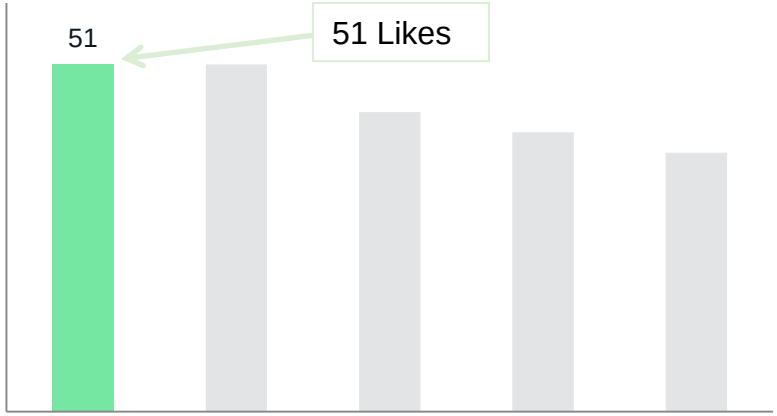
The team summarizes the idea and the activity surrounding it

Illustrative

Idea Summary

- Discuss original post and subsequent comments from colleagues
- Outline potential implementation paths
- Incorporate potential collaborators and stakeholders
- Identify related projects ongoing

Feedback and Reactions



Comments in Support:

- "I love this idea!"
- "This is an excellent idea…an opportunity for employees…to share their role and objectives in fulfilling the mission of the organization."

Questions:

- "How would this idea relate to existing projects in that space?"
- "Perhaps this should start off as a small pilot project to assess and improve the approach."

The team consults SMEs to understand and document benefits and questions around an idea

Illustrative

Benefits

	Details	Realization	Probability
Benefit 1	Details about the first benefit	What actions should be taken to realize benefit 1?	◑
Benefit 2	Details about the second benefit	What actions should be taken to realize benefit 2?	◔
Benefit 3	Details about the third benefit	What actions should be taken to realize benefit 3?	◑

Questions

	Details	Options	Probability
Question 1	Details about the first question	How can the first question be addressed	◑
Question 2	Details about the second question	How can the second question be addressed	◔
Question 3	Details about the third question	How can the third question be addressed	◔

Thank you for reading the IdeaBox Playbook version 1.0.

For more information, contact Monte Desai at monte.desai@cfpb.gov or Peter Gross at peter.gross@cfpb.gov.