

## **Accelerating Innovation Larry L. Sautter Award Proposal**

### **Accelerating Innovation in Higher Education IT Organizations**

*UC Tech 2020 - Larry L. Sautter Award Program Submission*

#### **Submitter**

Shohreh Bozorgmehri  
Divisional Director, Student and Academic Services Division  
Office of Information Technology (OIT)  
University of California, Irvine  
[shohreh@uci.edu](mailto:shohreh@uci.edu) | (949) 824-7324

#### **Project Strategic Leadership**

Shohreh Bozorgmehri  
Divisional Director, Student and Academic Services Division  
Office of Information Technology (OIT)  
University of California, Irvine  
[shohreh@uci.edu](mailto:shohreh@uci.edu) | (949) 824-7324

Eric Taggart  
Associate Director, Enterprise Applications  
Office of Information Technology (OIT)  
University of California, Irvine  
[etaggart@uci.edu](mailto:etaggart@uci.edu) | (949) 824-8131

#### **Project Coordination Team and Contributors**

Oliver Amezcua, Analyst, Desktop Support Services, OIT, [oamezcua@uci.edu](mailto:oamezcua@uci.edu)  
Shohreh Bozorgmehri (Co-Lead), [shohreh@uci.edu](mailto:shohreh@uci.edu)  
James Chou, Programmer Analyst, OIT, [jchou1@uci.edu](mailto:jchou1@uci.edu)  
Benedict Chua, Desktop Support Analyst, OIT, [bychua@uci.edu](mailto:bychua@uci.edu)  
Jeff Fellows, Java Application Developer, OIT, [fellowsj@uci.edu](mailto:fellowsj@uci.edu)  
Sabrina Gagliano, User Experience Designer, OIT, [gagliano@uci.edu](mailto:gagliano@uci.edu)  
Kyle Kurr, Manager, Enterprise Unix Services, OIT, [kkurr@uci.edu](mailto:kkurr@uci.edu)  
Michelle Luttrell, Security Risk Analyst, OIT, [mjluttre@uci.edu](mailto:mjluttre@uci.edu)  
Seth Roby, Senior Software Engineer & Technical Lead, OIT, [sroby@uci.edu](mailto:sroby@uci.edu)  
Mike Story, Production and Release Supervisor, OIT, [mastory@uci.edu](mailto:mastory@uci.edu)  
Eric Taggart (Co-Lead), [etaggart@uci.edu](mailto:etaggart@uci.edu)  
Su Wang, Senior Software Engineer & Technical Lead, OIT, [suw@uci.edu](mailto:suw@uci.edu)

## **Project Senior Leadership**

Kian Colestock, Interim Chief Information Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor, OIT, [kcolestock@uci.edu](mailto:kcolestock@uci.edu)

Thomas Andriola, Vice Chancellor, Information, Technology and Data, OIT, [tom.andriola@uci.edu](mailto:tom.andriola@uci.edu)

## **Summary**

UCI has been a force of innovation in discovering breakthroughs that have real-world impact. These innovative ideas serve to benefit students, faculty, staff, campus leaders and the community and society as a whole. Innovation is also a prominent aspect of the UCI Strategic Pillars, HR's Achieve staff performance program, Office of Information Technology's (OIT's) core mission, and Cascading Goals – yet many people are challenged to figure out how to focus on innovative ideas while managing other existing priorities.

That is why we have created the Accelerating Innovation program. Accelerating Innovation is a new initiative at OIT that provides incentives for experimenting with new ideas and technologies. It's where new and useful ideas are evaluated, harvested, and advanced for further implementation. Accelerating Innovation has been developed to align with principles designed and taught by faculty from the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business participating in the UC IT Leadership Academy.

We (Shohreh Bozorgmehri and Eric Taggart) returned from UC IT Leadership Academy in 2017 and brainstormed various concepts with the Office of CIO and senior leadership who expressed their support and interest. From there, we developed and refined our plans over the following year which resulted in the establishment of the Accelerating Innovation program.

The framework for OIT's Accelerating Innovation program defines and educates all staff on the many aspects of innovation and provides a structure for advancing from ideation to proof of concept that can be evaluated for broader implementation. Our goal is to promote a culture of innovation that is accessible to over 400 employees in the department. We are fostering an environment that supports creativity and experimentation with new ideas, while encouraging all staff to expand innovative thinking into their daily work and projects.

Innovation and experimentation are important for our organization to remain relevant during times of rapid change (considering, in particular, the COVID-19 impact on higher education and economy). The program encourages creative thinking and application of new problem solving methods. Ideas are submitted at any time throughout the year as

they are conceived; the design and development phases can begin shortly after.

In contrast to the traditional project proposal submission process, the Accelerating Innovation program incentivizes innovative ideas that are important and unique or outside the scope of OIT's existing systems or initiatives. Our program has positively benefited the whole department; during the pilot year, we awarded cash prizes to three innovation ideas: *"Use Theater Arts to Improve Technical Presentation Skills,"* *"Eliminate (Or Reduce) Passwords,"* and *"Add Mobile Device Responsiveness and Location Awareness to the Tririga Platform."*

The Accelerating Innovation initiative is a voluntary effort, and we recognize that finding the time to take ideas to the next level can be challenging. Despite that, we have found a way to help promote a growing and sustainable culture of innovation. OIT is conducting a new Innovation Research and Development (R&D) Time Pilot, where any full-time OIT employee in good standing who signs-up via their supervisor will have 5% time for Research and Development where they can use a portion of their working hours dedicated to innovation, experimentation, and bringing their ideas forward. Pilot participants will continue to be responsible for their primary work responsibilities – and they, their supervisor and upstream management will be responsible for assuring the innovation R&D time is scheduled appropriately and focused on relevant ideas. The R&D Time Pilot takes place for six months, and after that period ends, if it is successful, then it will be available to all employees in OIT.

The Accelerating Innovation team hosts ideation workshops to jumpstart innovative ideas, and no previous experience is required. This workshop is an excellent opportunity to draft innovative ideas, curate them with the feedback of peers in a safe environment, and grow the confidence needed to bring ideas to fruition. For example, in the past we have had ideation "lunch and learn" workshops where people come with no former experience in innovation and walk out with a refined idea in hand. The goal of these workshops is to increase the number of ideas submitted to the Accelerating Innovation program. Due to COVID-19 we will be launching a virtual edition of this ideation workshop.

As the world and institutions of higher education are continuously changing and evolving, innovation is more important than ever. Our next steps include transforming the Accelerating Innovation initiative toward establishing a Center for Innovation, as well as working on sponsoring a variety of virtual activities to reach a broader audience. In addition, we plan to expand our support for experimentation with new technologies and ideas to encourage risk taking while enhancing the program.

## **Outreach and Collaboration**

Collaboration is a key component of the Accelerating Innovation program. Whether it's collaborating to discuss, refine, or implement ideas, we encourage teamwork across cross-functional groups within OIT. Staff members are encouraged to review ideas submitted by their colleagues, vote-up the ones they like, provide useful comments or suggestions, and reach out to submitters directly to offer feedback or to become an implementation partner. We would also like to highlight our collaboration with the Chief Innovation Officer and Executive Director from The Cove (part of the UCI Beall Applied Innovation). The Cove serves to accelerate collaboration by connecting innovation partners in UCI and the greater Orange County community.

## **Program Components**

- Educational website about the program and the Innovation Framework:  
<https://sites.uci.edu/oit-innovation/>
- Ideation workshops to help people generate, form and refine their ideas into a pitch
- Idea submission and community engagement using the HypelInnovation idea management platform
- Scoring of submitted ideas against a standardized rubric to help highlight innovative strengths and potential areas for improvement
- Structured coaching process where the innovator is paired-up with an idea coach (from the coordination team) to further develop and refine the idea, identify needed resources and propose a proof of concept
- Proofs of concept are encouraged to help test ideas, demonstrate value and evaluate for success
- The Coordination Team and idea coaches help facilitate resources (such as time, money, training) to implement proofs of concepts
- Cash awards range from \$25 to \$2,500 and recognize the effort of innovators

## **Accelerating Innovation Timeline**

- 2017
- Gained inspiration from the UC IT Leadership Academy (UCITLA)
  - Designed the concept which aligns with UC IT Leadership Academy teaching principles
  - Ensured support by the office of the CIO and Divisional Directors

- 2018
  - Established OIT's Accelerating Innovation Program
  - Promoted, support and incentivize innovation and experimentation
  - Developed Criteria and Guidelines for incentives
  
- 2019
  - Awarded the first cohort of participants and award winners
  - Implemented series of Ideation Workshops accessible to all staff
  - Refined and standardized the innovation rubric and coaching process
  
- 2020
  - Launched the Innovation R&D Time Pilot Program
  - Transitioned the in-person program components to remote modalities

**Additional Resources**

- [Accelerating Innovation](#) Website
- [Educause 2019 Presentation](#) and [Poster](#)
- [UCI Strategic Plan](#)