STRATEGICALLY LEVERAGING INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESOURCES

THE ESCC PROJECT PRIORITIZATION METHODOLOGY

This document describes the methodology to be employed in prioritizing information systems projects so that university resources are focused on the tasks and projects of the greatest strategic value to Texas State. The Enterprise Systems Coordinating Council (ESCC) will utilize this methodology in establishing the priorities for all major information systems projects, especially those that will consume significant staff resources or cut across multiple divisions. ESCC priorities are recognized as higher than those established at the division or department level.

STEP 1: Objective and Quantitative Assessment

Step one is a relatively objective and quantitative assessment of a service request or project according to a fixed set of prioritization criteria, such as those recommended below.

Prioritization Criteria

The following set of questions should be asked relative to each new or existing service request whenever priorities are being established. For each “yes” answer, add 1 to a request's priority score. The requests with the highest priority scores will be given the greatest focus when allocating or assigning resources.

1.    Does the request address an external mandate?

These typically involve Texas State responses to legislative or regulatory requirements, but the imminent loss of critical functionality may also constitute a mandate (e.g., Y2K). In making this determination, consider the degree of automated support required for compliance as well as the consequences, if any, of non-compliance. Some mandates may not require automated solutions beyond those provided by standard office productivity tools (e.g., MS Excel). Note that consequences may be either formal or direct (e.g., loss of federal financial aid funds), or informal or indirect (e.g., "bad" publicity for being out of compliance).

2.    Has implementation already progressed to a point that makes project suspension ineffective or wasteful of resources?

Once a project has begun, it can quickly reach a stage at which terminating it is as much or more work as completing it. Suppose, for example, that a business process is altered as a result of a service request. If software has been modified or data has been converted to support that process change, reverting back to the old process may require additional software to reverse the effect of the data conversion, and may not even be feasible.

3.    Does the request seek to extend or enhance the self-service or E-business capabilities afforded to students, faculty, staff and external business partners (e.g., Web-based, self-service applications)?

The Internet has forever changed the service expectations of everyone. To remain effective in recruiting and retaining students, faculty, and staff, Texas State must expand the use of the technologies that empower these groups to "help themselves" at almost any time of day and from almost any location. For reference, see the *[EDUCAUSE Guide to Evaluating Information Technology on Campus](http://www.educause.edu/consumerguide/)* featured in the March 9, 2000 edition of [*The Chronicle of Higher Education*](http://chronicle.com/free/2000/03/2000030901t.htm). The Web browser (either Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator) has become the "common denominator" user interface for most users of technology. Faculty and staff expect to conduct university business via this interface; from faculty advisors generating degree audits to administrative assistants completing routine tasks (e.g., leave reports, PCR's, etc.). The Web interface to such processes is especially effective for the infrequent or "casual" user.

4.    Will the request further the implementation or integration of foundational technology that is a prerequisite for numerous improvements, some of which are major improvements, in the functionality and services available from multiple information systems?

Example 1: To remain effective and move forward technologically, Texas State's administrative systems must transition from System1032 and flat file architectures to Oracle. Projects that move existing functionality to Oracle or that enhance our capabilities via Oracle should be favored, especially over those that expand or increase our reliance upon the existing System 1032 or flat file databases, or on other RDBMS products.

Example 2: To advance further in providing self-service applications to customers, Texas State must establish methods for accepting payments via Web and IVR (Interactive Voice Response). The establishment of an IVR and Web-enabled credit card payment system is one such method.

5.    Will the request positively impact a large number of constituents, generate a substantial return on investment, or significantly reduce university risk?

Requests that directly impact large numbers of customers (e.g., students) in a positive way, or that prevent large numbers of customers from being negatively impacted, should be favored over those that have a lesser impact or that impact fewer customers. Requests that will reduce (not merely transfer) costs in terms of time or money, or that significantly reduce university risk should also be favored over those that do not.

6.    Are the appropriate number and type of staff available from the key stakeholder units to populate the project team?

STEP 2: Qualitative or “Common Sense” Assessment

Step 2 applies the collective wisdom and judgment of ESCC members to the results obtained from Step 1 in order to maximize the effective application of resources from a broad, university perspective. In Step 2, ESCC members consider other factors that might justify adjustments to the outcome of Step 1 and priorities are then modified accordingly. Example considerations include:

         The nature of any relationships with other projects already on the list or planned for the future. For example, is the project prerequisite or co-requisite, supportive, competing, redundant, mutually exclusive, etc.?

         Is there a compelling business case for pursuing the project that is not reflected by the criteria considered in Step 1?

         Can or should adjustments be made in project scope to effect a change in the project’s relative priority?