

AASHTO Innovation Initiative

[Proposed] Nomination of Innovation Ready for Implementation

Sponsor

Nominations must be submitted by an AASHTO member DOT willing to help promote the innovation. If selected, the sponsoring DOT will be asked to promote the innovation to other states by participating on a Lead States Team supported by the AASHTO Innovation Initiative.

1. Sponsoring DOT (State): Georgia Department of Transportation
2. Name and Title: Scott Higley, Director of Strategic Communications

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Innovation Description (10 points)

The term “innovation” may include processes, products, techniques, procedures, and practices.

3. Name of the innovation:

“Experience U”

4. Please describe the innovation.

Experience U is a technology-based solution to promote greater organizational awareness for GDOT employees. Replacing highly informal and ineffective means of information-sharing, this

solution is a one-stop online resource created to facilitate greater knowledge share within the organization, enabling GDOT employees to search, locate and share pertinent information regarding GDOT policies, practices and procedures with much greater ease than ever before. Further, this application will promote greater "organizational awareness" and will deliver the ability to get answers to questions through one interface.

5. What is the existing baseline practice that the innovation intends to replace/improve?

The existing baseline practice was the highly informal and often ineffective information and knowledge sharing among employees. This was a practice that relied almost solely on institutional knowledge and existing relationships within GDOT, requiring years of employment and experience in the agency and handicapping newer employees with more limited professional networks in the organization.

6. What problems associated with the baseline practice does the innovation propose to solve?

More than 48% of the individuals who make up GDOT's state employee workforce have fewer than five years of service. With many of the agency's most knowledgeable employees planning their upcoming retirements, a great deal of loss of organizational knowledge occurs. The existing baseline practice relied almost solely on existing relationships and institutional knowledge and awareness that required years of employment and experience in the agency in order to be effective. This practice proved particularly challenging for newer employees with more limited professional networks in the organization, leaving them to "feel their way" which limited overall productivity and opportunity to quickly access valuable information in a timely fashion.

7. Briefly describe the history of its development.

As part of GDOT's formal Management Development Program (MDP) – which brings employees together in a 'boot camp' style training course to build their management skills and to better the organization - a work group in the 2018 MDP class identified the need to capture and retain the institutional knowledge existing among GDOT's more senior employees who will eventually retire from the agency. More importantly, the work group committed to build a platform in which to easily locate and share that critically important knowledge once captured. The work group also recognized that today's workforce needs an easy way to access information with the ease and speed of a key stroke in order to improve organizational awareness and ensure top productivity. Following a compelling presentation by this MDP work group, GDOT executive leadership approved the development of a technology-based solution. With input from other GDOT offices, the work group began to develop a combined solution called Experience U: Connect the DOT. This solution became a one-stop resource to ascertain, network, and share pertinent information regarding GDOT policies, practices and procedures.

8. What resources—such as technical specifications, training materials, and user guides—have you developed to assist with the deployment effort? If appropriate, please attach or provide weblinks to reports, videos, photographs, diagrams, or other images illustrating the appearance or functionality of the innovation (if electronic, please provide a separate file). Please list your attachments or weblinks here.

A comprehensive overview of 'Experience U: Connect the DOT' was presented to the Georgia State Transportation Board, GDOT's governing body of elected officials, on December 17, 2019, a few weeks prior to the launch of Experience U. Access this overview, which includes images outlining accessibility and functionality of the tool, here:

<http://www.dot.ga.gov/AboutGeorgia/Board/Board%20Meeting%20Documents/ExperienceU-12-11-2019.pdf>. As seen in the presentation, Experience U features the following applications within the tool: An Organizational Chart with clickable detail and information about each GDOT employee; a 'Chat' feature where employees can interact (a link to Microsoft Teams platform); the 'Forum,' where employees can pose general questions, therefore crowd-sourcing GDOT information that can't be found readily anywhere else on Experience U; an 'FAQs' page, where source information from the Forum pages and other knowledge are archived and made searchable for future reference; an 'Acronyms' page, which helps to decipher the more than 1,400 acronyms and jargon that GDOT employs on a daily basis; a 'Publications' page, featuring links to handy online publications of note for GDOT employees; 'The Network,' GDOT's public-facing online news distribution service which also serves as a key way for employees to stay up to date on GDOT happenings and announcements; a 'Policies' page; a training-based 'Tutorials' page; and 'Recognitions' and 'Awards' pages, which highlight special achievements of GDOT employees. Images of many of these applications can be seen on the following page. (Please note that the tool itself can only be accessed through an internal portal by GDOT employees, and access is authenticated; this helps preserve the proprietary nature of the content within Experience U.)

Attach photographs, diagrams, or other images here. If images are of larger resolution size, please provide as separate files.

What is Experience U?

- Management Development Program Project
- Addresses need to access real time info to support a (disseminate) knowledge of our Department
- Improve the information and resource gathering experience at GDOT
 - Through knowledge management / organizational awareness
 - Getting Newer Associates acquainted with GDOT faster
 - Deepening the awareness of not just our roles, but the roles across all 35 offices and 7 districts

Experience U Interactive Org Chart

Real time view of the structure of the org., and scope of each District, Office and Division

Experience U Forum

- GDOT's new electronic message board for posting questions and comments
- Questions/Comments entered in the Forum will later become part of the FAQ's

Experience U Chat

- Enables collaboration via real-time instant messaging
- Link to Microsoft Teams instant messaging
- Support expedited decision making

Experience U Acronyms

Tool enabling quick search of GDOT and industry acronyms and abbreviations

Experience U Benefits

- Increasing employee engagement
- Making statewide communication more efficient
- Promoting and retaining institutional knowledge

Experience U Helpful links to GDOT's Most Frequently Accessed Websites

- GA Map (Map of Georgia)
- GDOT Publications
- Policies & Procedures
- Employee Recognition
- GDOT Awards & Recognition
- GDOT internet page
- The Network
- Tutorials
- GDOT Social Media page

GDOT
Georgia Department of Transportation
Experience U Update

Launched in Jan. 2020, Experience U surged in usage when COVID-19 forced employees to telework.



State of Development (40 points)

Innovations must be successfully deployed in at least one State DOT. The All selection process will favor innovations that have advanced beyond the research stage, at least to the pilot deployment stage, and preferably into routine use.

9. How ready is this innovation for implementation in an operational environment? Please select from the following options. Please describe.

- Prototype is fully functional and yet to be piloted
- Prototype has been piloted successfully in an operational environment
- Technology has been deployed multiple times in an operational environment
- Technology is ready for full-scale implementation

This tool was deployed and became fully operational in January 2020. It is notable that it went into use just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, making its timely online deployment even more important given the fact that face-to-face knowledge sharing became impossible due to telework and social distancing as mandated by GDOT following official directives and public health guidelines.

10. What additional development is necessary to enable implementation of the innovation for routine use?

None. Experience U is fully deployed and operational.

11. Are other organizations using, currently developing, or have they shown interest in this innovation or of similar technology?? Yes No

If so, please list organization names and contacts. Please identify the source of this information.

Organization	Name	Phone	Email
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
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Potential Payoff (30 points)

Payoff is defined as the combination of broad applicability and significant benefit or advantage over baseline practice.

12. How does the innovation meet customer or stakeholder needs in your State DOT or other organizations that have used it?

A more productive organization is a more effective organization and will be judged as being more effective by its customers and stakeholders. By providing easy online knowledge share and connectivity among employees, Experience U is helping build a more productive GDOT. Hours are being saved by consolidating easy access to information in one place, thereby allowing GDOT's 4,000 employees to accomplish more for their customers.

13. Identify the top three benefit types your DOT has realized from using this innovation. Describe the type and scale of benefits of using this innovation over baseline practice. Provide additional information, if available, using quantitative metrics, to describe the benefits.

Benefit Types	Please describe:
Improved Operation Performance	GDOT now functions better as an agency that understands the importance of transfer of important institutional knowledge among our most important asset, our people. Hours formerly spent digging and searching for information can now be conserved and focused on other tasks, programs and projects, thus improving GDOT's performance for the taxpayers of Georgia.
Organizational Efficiency	Having launched in January 2020, Experience U had been tried by employees but not yet fully embraced at its launch. However, when the impact of COVID-19 forced employees out of the workplace, usage surged. (see charts on the image page.) The chat feature alone in the tool welcomes hundreds of users per day. Just six months after launch, more than 1,800 online meetings had been conducted via Experience U's Teams link.
Other (please describe)	Internal Crisis Management: GDOT has carried on in the face of a global pandemic, in large part due to the advent of Experience U. Not only does the tool provide an easy-to-use one stop shop interface, it also provides immediate access to other tools which allow GDOT employees to stay

	<p>connected and source information that might otherwise have been shared during in-person conversations that cannot be had due to social distancing. GDOT has not skipped a beat in delivering on its obligation to Georgia, and critical knowledge sharing and virtual employee interaction is a large part of that success thanks to Experience U.</p>
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Provide any additional description, if necessary:

Click or tap here to enter text.

14 How broadly might this innovation be deployed for other applications. in the transportation industry (including other disciplines of a DOT, other transportation modes, and private industry)?

While Experience U is currently a proprietary tool developed, deployed and used solely by GDOT, it has been found by the agency to be a highly effective and important tool which enables easy information sharing, knowledge transfer and interactivity among employees. The Georgia Department of Transportation, a statewide agency with 4,000 employees, highly recommends the platform or something similar for use by other state DOTs as a means of capturing, retaining and sharing institutional knowledge in a quick and productive manner. Similarly, large private sector organizations – especially those in the transportation industry but not limited to this category – would find such a tool useful.

Market Readiness (20 points)

The All selection process will favor innovations that can be adopted with a reasonable amount of effort and cost, commensurate with the payoff potential.

15. What specific actions would another organization need to take along each of the following dimensions to adopt this innovation?

Check boxes that apply	Dimensions	Please describe:
x	Gaining executive leadership support	Leadership support and buy in is critical. While no hard costs were realized, some employees were assigned to help develop Experience U outside of their normal job responsibilities. Therefore supervisors must be supportive of the effort and leadership must approve it.
x	Communicating benefits	As early as spring 2019, the MDP work group was already building and communicating an understanding of how the tool could ultimately improve many aspects of GDOT performance. Being able to articulate and communicate these benefits early on in the process allowed for an 'easy yes' from leadership and supervisors and ultimately helped expedite the rollout, which, as previously noted, happened just in time to serve as a critically important tool to overcome the negative operational aspects of COVID-19.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overcoming funding constraints	Click or tap here to enter text.
x	Acquiring in-house capabilities	While no hard costs were incurred, in house capabilities

		and talent were key to the success of this effort. Being able to articulate the future benefits of Experience U allowed leadership and supervisors the ability to provide staff and subject matter experts who assisted in the development.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Addressing legal issues (if applicable) (e.g., liability and intellectual property)	Click or tap here to enter text.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resolving conflicts with existing national/state regulations and standards	Click or tap here to enter text.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other challenges	Interestingly, very few challenges were encountered. The development of Experience U was a cross-departmental effort. The tool took several months longer to deploy than originally estimated, primarily due to the primary responsibilities of staff who were called away to focus on their core jobs.

16. Please provide details of cost, effort, and length of time expended to deploy the innovation in your organization.

Cost: There were no hard costs to develop the tool; Experience U was developed and deployed using 100% in-house resource and GDOT employees. From initial concept to launch, the timeline was approximately 15 months.

Level of Effort: The development and deployment of Experience U could best be described as requiring a moderate level of effort. Thanks to GDOT's Management Development Program, part of which serves as an incubator for innovative new solutions and technology-based applications, Experience U was provided with a source of in-house resources and employees who focused on it's fast-track development and deployment.

Time: Approximately 600 employee man hours were utilized to build the tool, source the content, test and deploy. An estimated 20 GDOT employees put an estimated 30 working hours into this team effort.

17. To what extent might implementation of this innovation require the involvement of third parties, including vendors, contractors, and consultants? If so, please describe. List the type of expertise required for implementation.

As evidenced by GDOT's experience in the development and deployment of Experience U, virtually no third parties, vendors, contractors or consultants would be required to be involved. GDOT developed the tool using 100% in house talent and expertise. However, recognizing that the level of experience and expertise of certain staff members might not match or be equivocal to that which can be found among GDOT staffers, the experience of another organization could be different.