

AI Integration Rubric and Success Metrics Framework for Higher Education

The AI Strategic Compass Summary

One framework. Any mission. Every institution.

Concept by [Joe Sabado](#)

A working guide to help institutions select, prioritize, and measure AI initiatives.

Purpose

The AI Strategic Compass is a flexible, conversation-driven framework that helps higher education institutions evaluate, prioritize, and measure the success of AI initiatives. It supports decision-making across teaching, administrative/student services, and research.

Challenges Addressed

- Scattered pilots without strategy
- No selection/prioritization criteria
- Undefined success metrics
- Ethical blind spots
- Lack of shared learning
- Disconnection from mission

Core Principles

- Low barrier to entry; usable at any AI maturity level
- Encourages cross-functional dialogue and transparency
- Not prescriptive; adapts to institutional context
- Supports strategy-aligned decision-making, not just implementation

Evaluation Rubric Categories

- Strategic Fit
- Ethical, Legal, and Compliance
- Financial Viability
- Operational Innovation
- Stakeholder Impact

Success Metrics

- **Outputs (KPIs):** Deliverables (e.g., tools, services).
- **Outcomes (OKRs):** Impacts (e.g., retention, satisfaction).
- **Maturity:** Capability to scale and sustain AI.
- **Readiness:** Preparedness to activate AI initiatives.

Domains

- Teaching, Learning & Student Success
- Research & Innovation
- Operations & Infrastructure
- Student & Community Engagement

Flow Overview

Screen → Score → Select → Plan → Track → Reflect

Worksheet Template: <https://bit.ly/aicompassworksheet>

Author's Note

*This framework is a personal project based on my 27 years in higher ed as a strategist, technologist, and practitioner. While the concept is my own, I used generative AI tools to refine and accelerate the work. It was created independently and does not represent my employer's views. Feedback or Questions? Contact: **Joe Sabado** – joesabado@gmail.com*

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One framework. Any mission. Every institution.

Purpose

The AI Strategic Compass is a conversation-driven, low-barrier, and flexible decision-making framework designed to help higher education institutions navigate the complexity of AI integration. It enables leaders to evaluate potential initiatives across strategic alignment, ethical considerations, operational efficiency, and institutional value, while embedding success metrics into planning and execution.

Challenges the Framework Addresses

- **Scattered Pilots, No Strategy:** AI projects emerge in silos without strategic alignment.
- **No Selection Criteria:** Initiatives lack a clear, mission-driven evaluation process.
- **Undefined Success:** Projects begin without KPIs or outcomes to measure impact.
- **Ethical Blind Spots:** Data, equity, or compliance risks go unaddressed.
- **No Institutional Learning:** Pilots don't generate shared insights or improvement cycles.
- **Mission Drift:** AI efforts lose connection to the teaching, equity, or research goals.

Core Design Principles

- Supports structured, values-aligned decision-making rather than technical design.
- Offers simplicity and adaptability for institutions at any level of AI maturity.
- Prioritizes dialogue and transparency over top-down mandates.
- Uses scoring as a conversation starter, not a verdict.
- Keeps the barrier to entry low to encourage experimentation and shared learning. Embeds feedback, reflection, and iteration as core to the lifecycle.

Key Goals

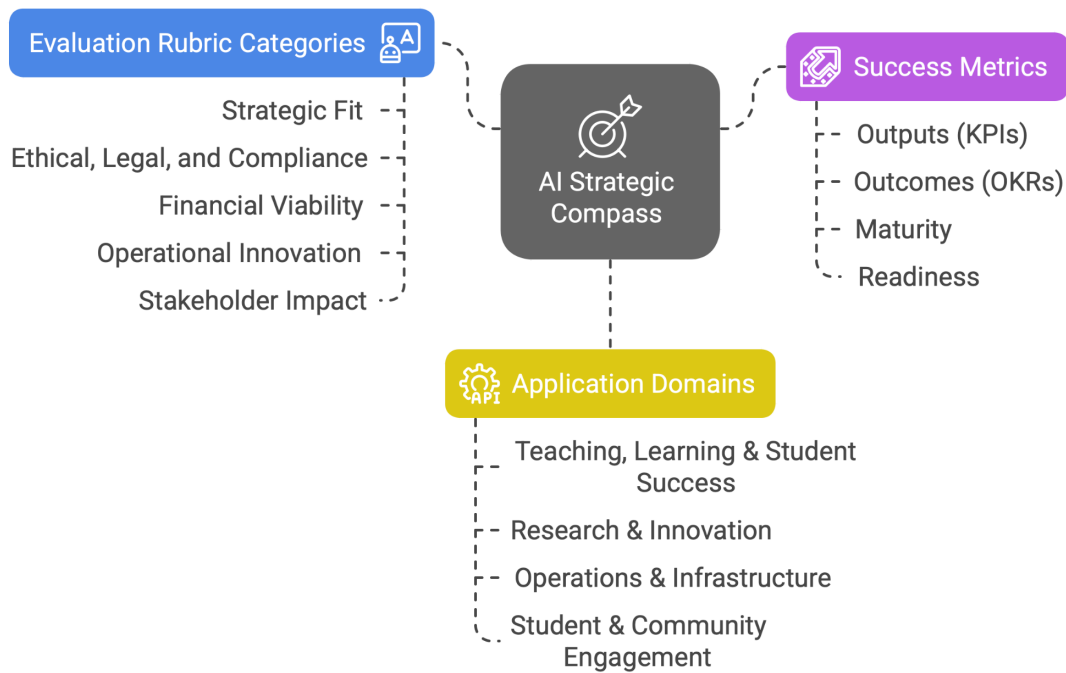
- Align AI initiatives with institutional mission and strategic goals.
- Create a unified structure for decision-making across teaching, services, and research.
- Make AI-related risks and impacts visible and addressable.
- Define measurable success (via outputs and outcomes).
- Shift campus culture from reactive pilots to intentional strategy.

These domains ensure that AI strategies are holistic, mission-aligned, and capable of addressing the full breadth of higher education enterprise needs.

What the Framework Is Not

- Not a technical implementation blueprint.
- Not a prescriptive governance process.
- Not a substitute for compliance or data ethics policies.
- Not a static scoring tool – it's a dynamic guide for collaborative evaluation.
- Not limited to mature institutions – it's usable from pilot to enterprise scale.

AI Strategic Compass Components



Evaluation Rubric Categories

- 1. Strategic Fit:** Is the initiative aligned with institutional priorities and goals?
- 2. Ethical, Legal, and Compliance:** Are there risks around bias, transparency, data, or compliance?
- 3. Financial Viability:** Are there sufficient resources? What's the short- and long-term ROI?
- 4. Operational Innovation:** Does it improve workflows, capacity, or innovation potential?
- 5. Stakeholder Impact:** How does it affect students, staff, faculty, and public trust?

Rubric Scoring Guide

Each initiative is evaluated on a 1–5 scale across five dimensions. Below is a summary of scoring interpretations:

Dimension	Score 1 (Low)	Score 3 (Moderate)	Score 5 (High)
Strategic Fit	Minimal alignment with goals	Moderate support for strategic objectives	Directly drives core mission and priorities
Ethics, Legal, Compliance	No risk	Moderate risk, manageable with oversight	High risk requiring robust mitigation
Financial Viability	Minimal cost/impact	Balanced cost and ROI	High investment with strong, necessary ROI
Operational Efficiency	Minimal gains	Moderate innovation or improvement	Transformational impact on workflows
Stakeholder Impact	No visible impact	Mixed reactions, requires engagement	High-value impact, boosts trust/reputation

Total Score: The rubric scores each process across the five categories on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating low risk/impact and 5 indicating high risk/impact.

- **5-10:** Low Risk/Impact — AI integration is low-risk and should proceed with minimal additional safeguards.
- **11-15:** Moderate Risk/Impact — AI integration is feasible but requires careful oversight and moderate risk mitigation.
- **16-20:** High Risk/Impact — Significant risks; AI integration should proceed with strong safeguards and ongoing monitoring.
- **21-25:** Critical Risk/Impact — High-risk scenario; consider alternative strategies or implement AI with extensive controls and safeguards.

Success Measurement

Measurement ensures that investments align with mission, drive accountable action, and sustain ethical innovation. By defining outputs, outcomes, maturity, and readiness, institutions transform ambition into measurable, mission-centered impact.

Outputs (KPIs): Tangible, immediate deliverables of the initiative (e.g., tools deployed, students flagged, processes automated).

Outcomes (OKRs): Strategic, long-term shifts in behavior, performance, or institutional impact (e.g., improved retention, equity, revenue, satisfaction).

Both are necessary to measure effectiveness: outputs show what was built or delivered; outcomes show whether it made a meaningful difference.

Expanded Success Measures

To build a more resilient foundation for AI initiatives, institutions are encouraged to incorporate two additional lenses into success planning alongside KPIs and OKRs:

- **Maturity:** The institution's capability to responsibly integrate, govern, and scale AI initiatives, reflecting infrastructure, governance, cultural readiness, and operational resilience.
- **Readiness:** The alignment of people, processes, policies, and culture necessary for successful AI activation. Readiness assessments ensure that initiatives launch into environments prepared to support sustainable and ethical outcomes.

By embedding maturity and readiness into evaluation and planning, institutions move beyond project success toward institutional transformation.

Maturity Rubric for Institutional Capability

Assess the institution's systemic capacity to integrate AI across strategic, operational, and cultural dimensions.

- **Level 1 (Initial):**
AI experimentation is ad hoc and isolated, with no formal governance or resource support.
- **Level 2 (Emerging):**
Early governance structures are forming; resource allocation and leadership visibility are limited.
- **Level 3 (Defined):**
Formal governance, policies, and cross-functional AI teams are established; cultural acceptance is growing.
- **Level 4 (Managed):**
AI initiatives are integrated into strategic planning; institutional support, funding, and risk oversight are consistent.
- **Level 5 (Optimizing):**
AI capabilities are institutionalized as a strategic asset, with continuous improvement and proactive innovation management.

Readiness Rubric for AI Activation

Assess the preparedness of institutional structures, leadership, policies, and culture to successfully activate AI initiatives.

- **Level 1 (Not Ready):**
No preparation; critical gaps in leadership, culture, processes, and infrastructure exist.

- **Level 2 (Low Readiness):**
Limited awareness and support; isolated champions exist but no coordinated preparation.
- **Level 3 (Moderate Readiness):**
Institutional discussions and some structural foundations are in place; partial leadership buy-in.
- **Level 4 (High Readiness):**
Strategic leadership, resource alignment, policy frameworks, and operational capacity are largely ready.
- **Level 5 (Full Activation Ready):**
The institution is fully prepared across governance, culture, infrastructure, and people to ethically and effectively activate AI initiatives.

Application Domains

The AI Strategic Compass is designed to operate flexibly across four primary domains critical to institutional strategy and impact:

- **Teaching, Learning & Student Success**
(Curricular innovation, academic support services, student success interventions.)
- **Research & Innovation**
(Research administration, grant matching, scholarly discovery acceleration, new knowledge creation.)
- **Operations & Infrastructure**
(Administrative systems, IT services, finance, human resources, campus facilities optimization.)
- **Student & Community Engagement**
(Enrollment services, student affairs, alumni relations, community outreach, marketing and communications.)

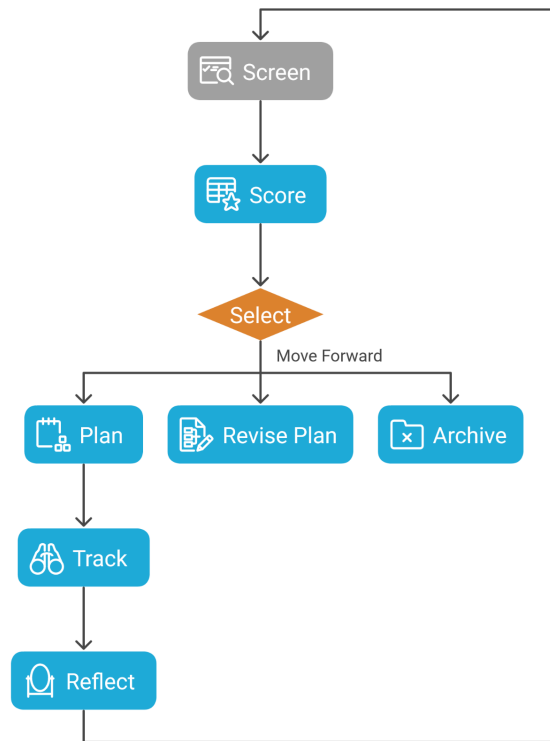
AI Strategic Compass Flow

- 1. Screen** - Use the rubric to assess fit, value, and risk.
- 2. Score** - Assign a score to each rubric dimension.
- 3. Select** - Choose whether to move forward, redesign, or deprioritize.
- 4. Plan** - Define success using KPIs and OKRs.
- 5. Track** - Monitor progress and capture impact.
- 6. Reflect** - Evaluate lessons and feed into future cycles.

Hybrid Intake Flow

During intake, proposers draft intended KPIs and OKRs as a starting point. This drives clarity and focus without requiring perfection. Formal success planning happens only after rubric evaluation and selection.

AI Strategic Compass and Hybrid Intake Flow



Integrating Governance, Risk, and Compliance

The GRC Readiness Lens for the AI Strategic Compass

To ensure that AI initiatives are not only aligned and impactful but also trustworthy and institutionally resilient, this section introduces the GRC Readiness Lens—a complementary extension of the AI Strategic Compass. This readiness lens overlays the existing five evaluation dimensions with specific governance, risk, and compliance maturity considerations.

By assessing GRC within each rubric category—Strategic Fit, Ethics & Compliance, Financial Viability, Operational Innovation, and Stakeholder Impact—institutions can strengthen their decision-making and promote responsible, compliant, and well-governed AI integration.

The table below outlines how each Compass dimension maps to the three GRC pillars, with clearly defined Level 1, 3, and 5 maturity indicators to support assessment, planning, and iterative improvement.

AI Strategic Compass – GRC Readiness Framework (with Maturity Levels)

Compass Dimension	Governance	Risk Management	Compliance
Strategic Fit	AI initiatives reviewed by AI governance council for alignment with mission, strategy, and values	Strategic risks (e.g., reputational, equity, academic freedom) identified and assessed	Adheres to institutional planning processes, procurement policies, and strategic IT/legal standards
Ethics & Compliance	Ethics committee oversight for AI projects; documented ethical principles in policy	Algorithmic bias, fairness, explainability, and privacy risks assessed through AI risk tools	FERPA, ADA, GDPR, accessibility, DEI compliance verified; ethical audits required pre-deployment
Financial Viability	AI project proposals include governance review of business case, budget alignment, ROI justification	Contractual, IP, vendor lock-in, cost overrun, and resource dependency risks actively managed	Vendor due diligence and contract terms meet regulatory, security, and procurement compliance
Operational Efficiency & Innovation	AI implementation is governed within IT service, change management, and performance frameworks	Systemic risks (downtime, automation dependency, failure modes) proactively mitigated	Documentation, logging, model explainability, auditability, and retention policies are enforced
Stakeholder Impact	Governance includes representation from students, faculty, and staff; co-design is embedded in process	Stakeholder risks (misuse, exclusion, surveillance, over-reliance) assessed and mitigated	Tools ensure user consent, transparency, appeal processes, and accessible design for all populations

The following maturity levels illustrate how each AI Strategic Compass dimension—when viewed through a Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) lens—can evolve from basic awareness to institutional integration. Each level describes a progression from ad hoc or absent practices (**Level 1**) to full alignment, oversight, and optimization (**Level 5**).

Use these maturity statements to identify your current state, clarify what “good” looks like, and define next steps for strengthening trust, safety, and strategic alignment in AI initiatives.

GRC Maturity Levels by Compass Dimension

Strategic Fit

- Governance
 - Level 1: No governance over AI initiatives
 - Level 3: Some projects reviewed, inconsistently
 - Level 5: All AI projects reviewed by council for strategic alignment
- Risk Management
 - Level 1: Strategic risks not considered

- Level 3: Ad hoc assessments; limited visibility
- Level 5: Pre-launch assessments of equity, reputational, and academic risks
- Compliance
 - Level 1: AI bypasses policy and planning controls
 - Level 3: Policies exist but are inconsistently followed
 - Level 5: Fully integrated into strategic, IT, and procurement workflows

Ethics & Compliance

- Governance
 - Level 1: No ethical oversight
 - Level 3: Ethics principles not operationalized
 - Level 5: Ethics board reviews major AI use cases
- Risk Management
 - Level 1: No tools for risk auditing
 - Level 3: Some bias/privacy tools used reactively
 - Level 5: Regular fairness audits using standard tools
- Compliance
 - Level 1: No policy adherence checks
 - Level 3: Late-stage compliance reviews
 - Level 5: FERPA, ADA, GDPR, and DEI integrated across lifecycle

Financial Viability

- Governance
 - Level 1: AI initiatives lack fiscal oversight
 - Level 3: Cost-benefit reviewed inconsistently
 - Level 5: Governance includes ROI, cost recovery, sustainability planning
- Risk Management
 - Level 1: No financial or legal risk review
 - Level 3: Reviewed by legal only post-implementation
 - Level 5: Risk-informed contracts, vendor and IP evaluation
- Compliance
 - Level 1: No procurement compliance
 - Level 3: Compliance checklists underused
 - Level 5: Full procurement vetting, audit, and controls enforced

Operational Efficiency & Innovation

- Governance
 - Level 1: AI deployed outside operational governance
 - Level 3: Partial alignment with change management
 - Level 5: Fully integrated into ITSM, change, and performance workflows
- Risk Management
 - Level 1: Automation risks untracked
 - Level 3: Reactive risk management
 - Level 5: Scenario-based planning, rollback, and contingency measures
- Compliance
 - Level 1: No documentation or traceability
 - Level 3: Inconsistent audit trail
 - Level 5: Full logging, model transparency, and lifecycle retention policies

Stakeholder Impact

- Governance
 - Level 1: No stakeholder input in governance
 - Level 3: Irregular consultation
 - Level 5: Stakeholders co-lead governance and review
- Risk Management
 - Level 1: No assessment of user/community risks
 - Level 3: Limited stakeholder consideration
 - Level 5: Community-informed risk modeling and participatory design
- Compliance
 - Level 1: No safeguards for consent, access, or appeal
 - Level 3: Minimal compliance features
 - Level 5: Co-designed, inclusive, transparent systems with full user protections

How to Use This Framework

- Use this matrix as part of your AI project intake and evaluation.
- Score each item on a 1–5 readiness scale to assess gaps and strengths.
- Pair this with the main Compass rubric to evaluate both strategic alignment and institutional safeguards.
- Use in workshops, governance reviews, or self-assessments.

This GRC Readiness Lens transforms the AI Strategic Compass into not just a prioritization and planning tool—but a framework for ensuring every AI initiative is ethically sound, well-governed, and compliance-ready by design.

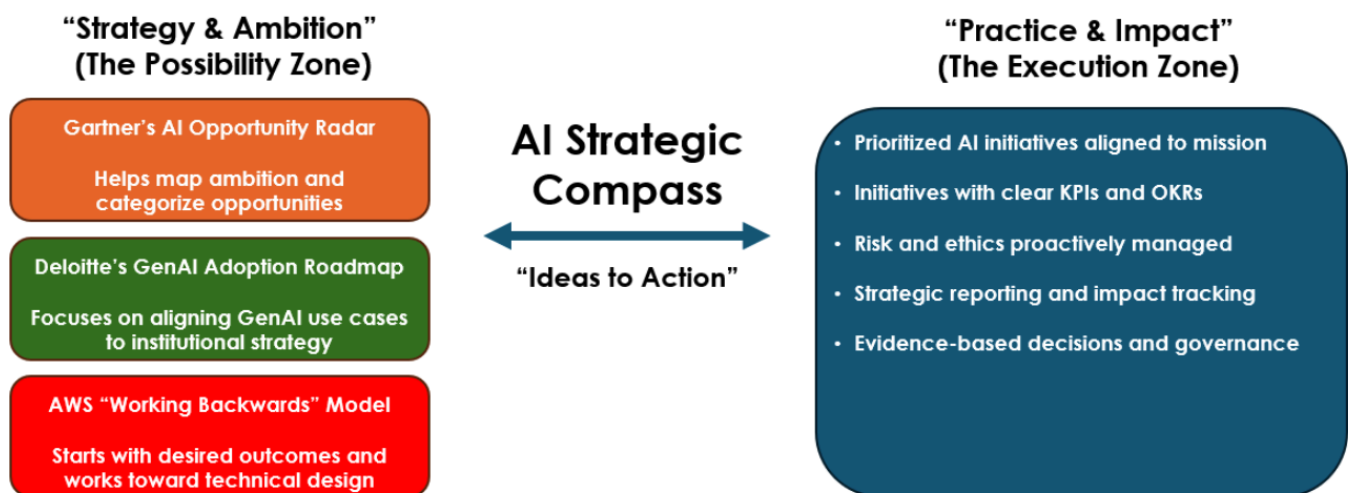
From Ideas to Action

The AI Strategic Compass moves institutions from exploration to execution.

This model bridges strategic ambition with practical steps—aligning ideas with outcomes.

It ensures that every AI initiative is mission-aligned, risk-aware, and results-driven.

This bridge ensures that the Compass is not just a strategic evaluation tool—but a practical enabler of institutional transformation.



Sample Use Cases

Teaching/Learning: Early Warning System

Title: AI-Driven Early Warning System for At-Risk Students

Purpose: Use data to identify at-risk students and recommend timely interventions.

Domains: Teaching & Learning

Score: 17/25

- Strategic Fit (4): Strong alignment with retention and student success.
- Ethics (3): Data privacy and bias risks manageable with safeguards.
- Financial (3): Affordable pilot; long-term viability depends on advising capacity.
- Operational (4): Enables more proactive, targeted advising.
- Stakeholder Impact (3): Needs strong communication and student trust.

Outputs (KPIs):

- 90% of flagged students reviewed by advisors within 3 days
- 25% decrease in course failure among flagged students
- 80% accuracy rate in identifying students who withdraw

Outcomes (OKRs):

- Increase course pass rates for at-risk students by 15% within one academic year.
- Reduce dropout rates by 10% by the end of the academic year.

Operations & Infrastructure: Course Scheduling Optimization

Title: AI Tool for Optimizing Course Scheduling

Purpose: Balance student demand, faculty availability, and room capacity to reduce scheduling conflicts and improve progression.

Domains: Administrative and Student Services

Score: 17/25

- Strategic Fit (4): Aligns with student success and operational efficiency.
- Ethics (2): Low risk; transparency with faculty needed.
- Financial (3): Moderate cost, often part of existing systems.
- Operational (4): High efficiency gains.
- Stakeholder Impact (4): High student value; moderate faculty support.

Outputs (KPIs):

- Room utilization reaches 85% during peak hours
- Course conflict rate reduced by 40% over one year
- Schedules finalized 21 days earlier than previous term

Outcomes (OKRs):

- Increase 4-year graduation rate from 68% to 72%
- Cut average time-to-degree by one semester
- Increase schedule satisfaction survey score from 3.2 to 4.0

Research & Innovation Domain: Research Funding Opportunity Matching

Title: AI System for Identifying Research Funding Opportunities

Purpose: Match faculty profiles with funding opportunities to boost research activity and funding.

Domains: Research

Score: 18/25

- Strategic Fit (4): Supports strategic research growth.
- Ethics (2): Low risk, consider data use transparency.
- Financial (4): Low cost, high ROI.
- Operational (4): Reduces manual workload, increases matches.
- Stakeholder Impact (4): High value to engaged faculty.

Outputs (KPIs):

- 1,000+ tailored funding opportunities delivered in 12 months
- 80% of faculty profiles completed/updated
- 20% increase in number of proposals initiated

Outcomes (OKRs):

- Increase total external research funding by 20%
- Increase grant submissions by 15%
- Raise success rate for new grant applicants by 10%

[Worksheet Template is available here.](#)

Please contact Joe Sabado @joepsabado@gmail.com for questions/comments about the framework.

Considerations

- **Q: Is this framework only for institutions with mature AI strategies?**

A: No. The AI Strategic Compass is intentionally designed for use at any stage of AI maturity—whether your institution is just exploring pilots or already scaling AI initiatives.

- **Q: Is this a scoring system that determines go/no-go decisions?**

A: Not necessarily. The rubric is a conversation framework—not a judgment tool. It helps align perspectives and highlight considerations before making a decision.

- **Q: Who should use this framework on campus?**

A: It's best used collaboratively—by IT, faculty, research leaders, provost offices, student affairs, and institutional effectiveness teams. It works in governance committees, innovation teams, or pilot planning.

- **Q: What if we don't have all the data or a complete proposal yet?**

A: That's okay. The framework is low-barrier and designed to support early-stage thinking. Use it even with draft ideas to spark structured discussion and planning.

- **Q: How does this help us measure AI project success?**

A: It includes both outputs (what gets built or delivered) and outcomes (what changes). This ensures you define success at the outset and track it over time.

- **Q: How does this relate to existing strategic planning or innovation efforts?**

A: It complements—not replaces—your institutional planning. It provides a shared language and lens for integrating AI into mission-aligned decisions.

References

AI Evaluation Rubric

Strategic Alignment and Value Creation

- 1 - AI offers negligible value and does not align with strategic goals.
- 2 - AI provides minor improvements but has limited strategic relevance.
- 3 - AI moderately enhances process outcomes and supports strategic objectives.
- 4 - AI significantly enhances process outcomes and is well-aligned with strategic priorities.
- 5 - AI is transformative, creating substantial value and directly supporting core strategic initiatives.

Ethical, Legal, and Compliance Considerations

- 1 - No significant ethical, legal, or compliance issues; AI is straightforward to implement.
- 2 - Low risk; minor ethical or compliance issues that are easily manageable.
- 3 - Moderate risk; requires careful consideration of ethical implications and compliance.
- 4 - High risk; significant ethical, legal, or compliance challenges that need rigorous management.
- 5 - Critical risk; potential for severe ethical, legal, or compliance violations that could compromise the institution's integrity

Financial Viability and Resource Allocation

- 1 - Minimal costs and resource needs; negligible financial impact.
- 2 - Low financial investment; modest resources required with a small ROI.
- 3 - Moderate costs balanced by significant potential ROI; requires careful budget management.
- 4 - High costs and resource demands, but with a strong potential ROI.
- 5 - Substantial financial investment with high resource demands; critical to evaluate ROI and sustainability carefully.

Operational Efficiency and Innovation Potential

1. AI offers minimal efficiency gains and little to no innovation potential.
2. AI provides incremental efficiency improvements and some innovation.
3. AI enhances efficiency significantly and introduces new innovative practices.
4. AI greatly improves efficiency, reduces errors, and drives significant innovation.
5. AI is transformative, leading to substantial operational improvements and pioneering innovations that redefine processes.

Stakeholder Impact and Reputational Considerations

1. No noticeable impact on stakeholders; reputation remains unaffected.
2. Minor impact; slight stakeholder concern but manageable.
3. Moderate impact; could lead to mixed reactions and require stakeholder engagement.
4. High impact; significant potential for stakeholder concern, requiring careful communication and management.
5. Severe impact; could lead to major stakeholder backlash or reputational damage, necessitating robust risk management and mitigation strategies.

Inspiration and Complementary Role of the AI Strategic Compass

The AI Strategic Compass was inspired by leading and relevant frameworks and strategies in higher education. Drawing on their strategic, ethical, and data-informed insights, it created a project-level evaluation tool that complements their broader focuses.

- [ASU Innovation Challenge](#)
- [Campus AI Exchange - Higher Education Policies, Guidelines, and Governance Practices](#)
- [CSU ETHICAL Principles AI Framework for Higher Education](#)
- [Jisc AI Maturity Framework](#)
- [EDUCAUSE - 2025 AI Landscape Study: Into the Digital AI Divide](#)
- [EDUCAUSE - 2024 Action Plan: AI Policies and Guidelines](#)
- [EDUCAUSE - A Road Map for Leveraging AI at a Smaller Institution](#)
- [EDUCAUSE AI Strategy Framework](#)
- [Gartner AI Ambition Framework](#)
- [Higher Education Act for AI \(HEAT-AI\): a framework to regulate the usage of AI in higher education institutions](#)
- [NIST AI Risk Management Framework](#)
- [NIST AI RMF Playbook](#)
- [ProSci Change Management Framework](#)
- [UCLA Open AI Proposals](#)
- [UNESCO AI and education Guidance for policy-makers](#)
- [University of California AI Council Risk Assessment Guide](#)
- [University of California Responsible AI Principles](#)

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