IBM Request for Enhancement (RFE) allows IBM i clients to affect the course for the future

RFE usage benefits both clients and IBM

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In this article, you can learn how to make your wish for IBM i enhancements known to IBM developers and others in the IBM i community, how to vote for and track enhancements of interest, and how IBM evaluates and prioritizes the ideas to choose those with high client value.

IBM i development has an easy-to-use way to get input about the next new functions that clients would like to see implemented for the IBM i operating system. Using the web-based tool called *IBM RFE (Request for Enhancement) Community*, anyone can submit a requirement for a new function directly to the IBM product development teams. The *submitter* provides a description of the problem that needs to be solved or new function required, including at least one use case for that function. The submitter also describes the business impact of the enhancement – either the negative impact because the enhancement is not there, or the positive business impact that the enhancement could provide. The submission is public and visible to the whole IBM RFE Community. Others can comment on it to let IBM know if they are having a similar need, and vote for it to help give a quick tally of how many people in the IBM i community are interested in having IBM provide that particular function.

Value of RFE information for IBM

How can IBM make use of this direct customer input? These requests are a means for direct collaboration with the development teams that would need to implement them. Any requests for enhancements that are highly popular among the community provide a couple of key pieces of information to the IBM i developers. First, the functional area is widely used because a variety of folks voted on the request when they saw it. Second, the requests with the highest numbers of votes would help the greatest number of clients and therefore should be among the highest priority to consider for implementation.

It is more than votes

However, it is not just the votes that help to determine IBM's view of the priority. IBM will also pay careful attention to the *Use Case* and *Business Justification* as expressed by the submitter of the

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RFE to understand the anticipated business value, as well as take into account any comments and attachments that are added to the RFE. The RFE should be clear in explaining the business challenge, and how the new enhancement would address that challenge. Developers at IBM consider whether there is another way to do what the submitter is describing in the use case, and respond if there is indeed an alternate solution or a workaround. From any additional comments, especially comments that broaden the understanding of the business value, the developers will get an idea of how others in the IBM i community view the RFE. They also assess the business impact to the submitter and the community if the enhancement is not provided.

Let's take, for example, the component for *IBM i Access.* IBM i Access is a functional area of the system that is being transformed to make practical use of new technology. Many clients have been using it, and noticing the next new features they would like to see in this component area. It is also a product that nearly all IBM i clients need to use, and therefore, it has a wide audience. Many RFEs have already been submitted for this particular component, and many folks have been actively voting for them, and commenting on them. This information has been quite helpful to the IBM i Access developers as they decide the priority of what they need to deliver next.

Ultimately, in addition to delivering new technology, IBM i development would like to deliver enhancements that have been requested by actual IBM i clients. Highest priority is given to those that have the potential to reach the widest audience, and that can deliver the greatest business value and customer satisfaction. The RFE process provides the opportunity to impact the perception of IBM developers with every vote you cast, every comment you make, and every RFE you submit.

Enhancements align with future direction

You need to be aware, however, that there are certain types of enhancements that do not align with future technology directions and therefore are not likely to be implemented, even if they are highly voted. For example, if a valuable function was added to the most recent release, a customer might ask for IBM to move that function to prior releases. As part of the product lifecycle, IBM tends to include new functions only into its newest releases. Besides being more cost effective to do so, development must support the cadence of clients moving forward to the newer technology and releases.

IBM aims to deliver a large number and variety of enhancements in every new release. So, if an RFE asks for a function to be moved to earlier releases, it must be analyzed by the development team to see if its business value warrants going against the general strategy of not enhancing a release that is out of marketing and being stabilized.

Expected response times

To ensure timeliness, IBM i architects have set expectations as to how quickly development teams should be responding to RFEs.

The overall IBM RFE guideline is for an RFE to move beyond the **Submitted** status within 30 days of submission, and then beyond the **Under Consideration** status within 90 days of submission.

However, these timelines are too short for a product such as IBM i, with its large size and rich set of functions.

Therefore, IBM i development operates with a different timeline for IBM i RFEs. At least a couple of times per year, the open RFEs will be reviewed by the IBM i development teams. They will advance the status for those that are most viable for implementation. Even if an RFE had been determined to be viable for implementation, it might be closed later—perhaps development cost is too high, or voting indicates it does not appeal to a large percentage of the community, or a development team has too many good ideas that some need to be trimmed from their list. Generally speaking, if the outlook for an RFE is such that it would not be able to be implemented within a few years, developers might close the RFE rather than letting it age longer in the process.

Access RFE functions

It is relatively quick and easy to get started viewing and creating RFEs.

- All functions for RFEs are accessed from www.ibm.com/developerworks/rfe.
- For most functions, you will need to log in with your developerWorks IBM ID.
- If you don't already have an IBM ID, you will be prompted to create one. If you had created an IBM ID in the past, but have forgotten the ID or its password, you will be instructed how to retrieve the ID or reset the password.

After the first RFE page is displayed, use the tabs (as shown in Figure 1) to navigate to the various RFE functions.

Figure 1. Tabs on main RFE page
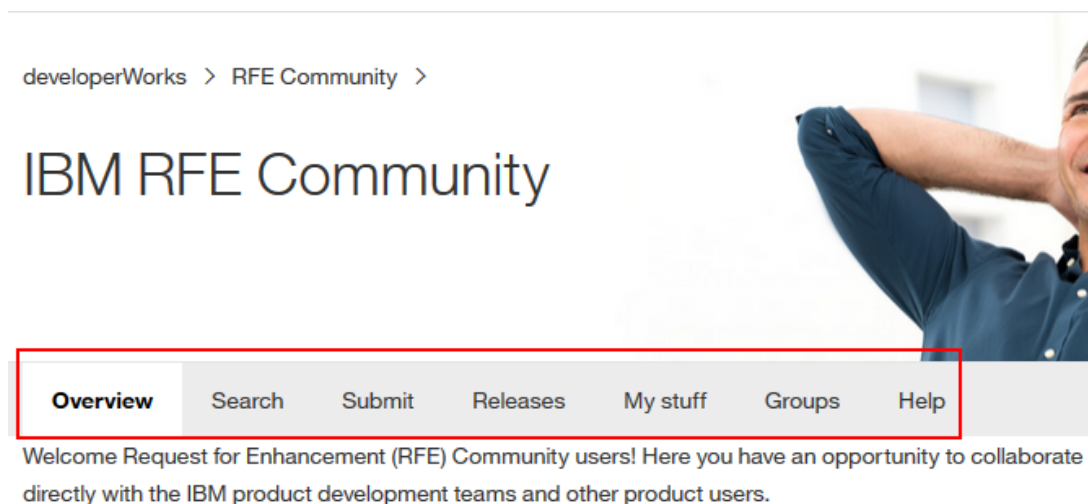
Search for RFEs

A good first step is to do a search. You can search for existing IBM i RFEs to get a feel for ideas that have already been communicated to IBM. Use the **Search** tab as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Searching for RFEs

Try the **Search by attributes** tab and select **I want to specify only the product.** Type **ibm i** in the **Product** field, and a list of products will be displayed. Select **IBM i** from that list. Then, click **Search** at the bottom of the page.

As you gain experience with searching for RFEs, you might want to use additional parameters to refine your search.

Add a comment or vote

You have an opportunity to add your voice to any RFE that is of interest to you. After clicking on an RFE to view, be sure to click its **Details** tab, and read the information in the **Description** and **Use Case** fields. Also, click the **Comments** tab and scroll down to read any existing comments.

After reading an RFE and its comments, you may want to add your own comments to the request. Perhaps you have a similar need, but a slightly different use case. You might be aware of a different way to work around the scenario that is described. As shown in Figure 3, click the **Comments** tab of the RFE and enter your comment.

Figure 3. Adding comments to an RFE

You choose whether your comment is a public comment or private comment. Public comments can be seen by anyone who views the RFE—you are then communicating to the whole IBM RFE Community. Sometimes, you might want your communication to be more private. In such cases, select **Private comment** to provide information that is visible only to you and to IBM developers. Then click **Submit**.

Whether you add additional comments or not, you have the opportunity to let IBM know that you would also like to see a particular RFE implemented. Click the **Vote** option at the end of the **Details** page of the RFE you want.

As you can imagine, the voting information is most valuable when used as intended. Vote for an RFE only if you believe that you or your business have a current or future need for the enhancement, not just because a friend or colleague asks you to. Remember that popularity is not the only criteria for a request to be implemented. See "Value of RFE information for IBM" for a description of other criteria.

Track RFEs

If you are the submitter of an RFE, you automatically receive updates related to your RFE. The submitter receives email notifications when the request has a status change or public comments are added.

Others who are interested in a particular RFE can also receive automatic updates by adding them to a personal list. Click **Add to My Watchlist** in the right sidebar when viewing an RFE of interest, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Add a request to a personal list
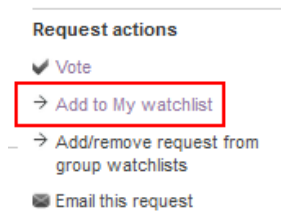
At any time after adding your first RFE to your watchlist, you can go to the **My stuff** tab at the top of the main RFE page, and then the **My watchlist** tab to see all the RFEs on your watchlist, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Access your watchlist
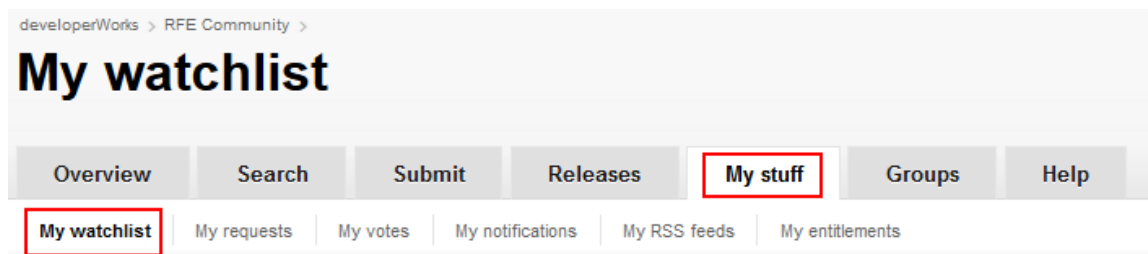
This allows you to easily find RFEs of special interest to you. Then you can check on the status, votes, and any new comments. You can also sign up to receive automatic email notifications or Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds when updates are made to RFEs on your watchlist.

Submit a new RFE

Perhaps you have an idea for a new function you'd like added to IBM i, and you have not seen that same idea elsewhere among existing RFEs. As shown in Figure 6, click the **Submit** tab, indicate that you want to fill out the form for your own new idea, and click **Continue**.

## Figure 6. Submit a new request
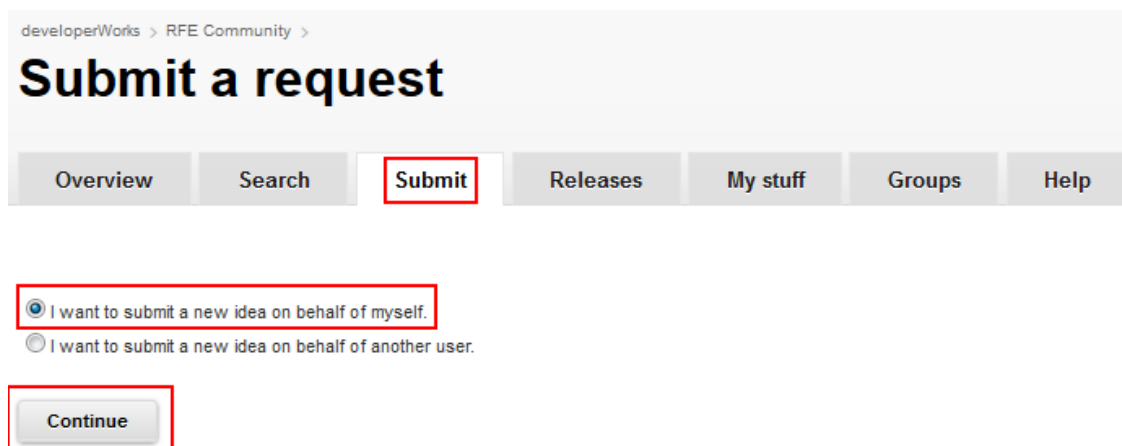
Then fill out the simple form on the displayed page.

Pay attention to provide a detailed description, business justification, and use case. These fields help IBM i development teams to understand your idea, project the potential impact for your RFE, and assess how it might be useful to others in the community. You might also choose to add attachments to your RFE, if that is helpful to effectively communicate the idea.

Ask others to support an RFE

For any RFE that you feel strongly about getting implemented (whether it is one that you submitted or one that you found during a search) you can let others know of its existence so they can also vote for it or comment on it. While viewing the RFE, you can click **Email this request** to send the request to your friends and colleagues, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Send RFE to others
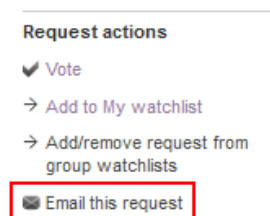
If they agree that the RFE has current or future usefulness for them, they can also cast their vote or add a comment.

Conclusion

Now that you've learned how easy it is to get involved in recommending new enhancements for the IBM i operating system, do take the next step. Log on to the RFE website and let IBM i development hear from you. Comment on an existing RFE, submit a new RFE, or simply vote for those of interest to you. Your collaboration with IBM i development and the community can indeed make a difference for the future of IBM i.

Resources

All functions for IBM RFEs are accessed from www.ibm.com/developerworks/rfe.