I’ve written comments on the first 50 or so of the concepts submitted to the shared concept board. I’ll be making my way through the rest but wanted to give you some feedback before you submit your initial project design.

Here are some general issues that I want to draw your attention to:

— A concept is not an activity (“Editing”), an action (“Add Song”), an entire application or feature set (“Intuitive Text Editor”), a user interface component (“Front Page”, “Popular Items”, “Tab”), or a purpose (“Collaborative Editing”).

— A concept should be the part of the app that achieves the purpose. For example, “Blocking ads” is a purpose, not a concept; relevant concepts might be “Blocked Domain” or “Domain Setting”.

A concept is a mechanism that consists of some internal state and some actions associated with it, and the boundaries of the concept should be well defined. For example, the concept of Friend in Facebook has clear state (the friend relation, the invitations and their status, etc), actions (friending, unfriending, accepting and rejecting invitations), and has a well defined boundary (excludes the mechanism of creating posts, for example).

— A purpose should explain what a concept is for from the point of view of the user. It is not a goal or a desirable end state. For example, “To add a pinned item to your own board” doesn’t say what the concept is for and why you’d want it. Similarly “To allow a user to share photos or videos with all of the user's friends for 24 hours” describes what the concept does, but not what it’s for. Why does this matter? Because when you design something, the motivating purpose should match a real need, and if it does not, your design effort may be wasted.

— An operational principle (OP) is not a purpose, but a scenario explaining how the purpose is fulfilled. This OP, for example, mixes in the purpose: “When the user receives an email that meets the bundle criteria, it’s placed in that bundle. The bundle is displayed in Inbox as a single entry, so all emails in the bundle can be manipulated and displayed as one entity.” The scenario should be a concrete sequence of steps. This OP mixes in the purpose and doesn’t present a sequence of steps: “One might use an automation clip to control the volume of a guitar loop over time, so as the piece plays, the user does not have to manually turn the volume knob to achieve the desired effect.”

— Some of the concepts provided were given rather than instrumental concepts, meaning they were not part of the application design but were preexisting in the environment. For example, “User Location Pin” is not really a concept that is special to Google Maps, but is a given concept (Current Location) that existed for paper maps, embodied in a particular user interface widget. Similarly, “Scheduling” is a given concept (the concept of a schedule) represented in a particular visual manner.

— When explaining anything, especially a concept, try to avoid using the same term
you’re defining in the definition. For example: concept: “Pin it”; purpose: “To add a pinned item to your own board.”; OP: “Click pin it on an item, select a board you have created, and the pin will appear on that board”. Similarly: concept: “Bundle”; purpose “Bundle similar emails”.

Nice examples of concepts:
— Pandora Radio Station
— Messages Read Receipt
— Reddit Votes
— Robinhood Watchlist
— Pocket Saved Article
— Jira Ticket

Nice examples of misfits:
— OpenStack Security Group
— Vim Persistent Undo
— Netflix Profile
— StayFocusd Inaccessible Site