



stars technical manual

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Sharing

AASHE provides additional materials to facilitate sharing credit criteria with data providers. These documents, forms and other tools are available on the [STARS website](#) and in the online STARS Reporting Tool.

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Dear Colleagues,

Higher education has always recognized its public responsibility to educate students, to provide research that fuels our economy and strengthens our communities, and to model the behaviors that contribute to a just and more civil society. Recently, higher education institutions have also recognized the important role they can play in moving all of us to a more sustainable future, one that will provide prosperity today while ensuring that future generations have resources to meet their needs.

These goals, as essential as they are, are also complicated. The challenges facing the globe are vast, and it can sometimes be daunting to consider how institutions might change course, particularly given that we may be somewhat unsure of where we need to head.

To help address this challenge, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education offers campuses a comprehensive tool, the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System™ (STARS). Initially constructed over several years and with the help of many students, staff, faculty, and administrators drawn from a wide range of institutions, STARS® enables colleges and universities to gauge their progress toward sustainability. This voluntary, self-assessment tool provides a clear and thorough system by which higher education institutions can benchmark where they are today and set goals for the future.

STARS was developed by and for higher education, and recognizes the unique missions, challenges, obligations, constraints, and opportunities of colleges and universities. It provides a tool for looking at all facets of our institutions—curriculum and research, campus operations, planning and institutional capacity—with the goal of aiding strategic planning, fostering cross-sector dialogue about sustainability on campus, and stimulating conversations and learning between institutions.

On behalf of AASHE, thank you for your interest in STARS and for your ongoing contributions to creating a sustainable future. We look forward to your participation.

Toward sustainability,

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Acknowledgements

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STARS Steering Committee

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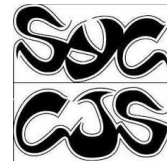
Technical Committees

Technical Committees of the AASHE Advisory Council are the primary source for input and insight regarding the content of STARS credits. [Learn more about the Advisory Council.](#)

Further information about the governance and technical development of STARS is available at stars.aashe.org.

Partner Organizations

AASHE gives special thanks to our partner organizations for their ongoing support of STARS.



Introduction

The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System™ (STARS) is a voluntary, self-reporting framework for helping colleges and universities track and measure their sustainability progress. It is designed to:

- Provide a framework for understanding sustainability in all sectors of higher education.
- Enable meaningful comparisons over time and across institutions using a common set of measurements developed with broad participation from the campus sustainability community.
- Create incentives for continual improvement toward sustainability.
- Facilitate information sharing about higher education sustainability practices and performance.
- Build a stronger, more diverse campus sustainability community.

STARS® is intended to engage and recognize the full spectrum of colleges and universities: from community colleges to research universities, and from institutions just starting their sustainability programs to long-time campus sustainability leaders. STARS encompasses long-term sustainability goals for already high-achieving institutions as well as entry points of recognition for institutions that are taking first steps toward sustainability.

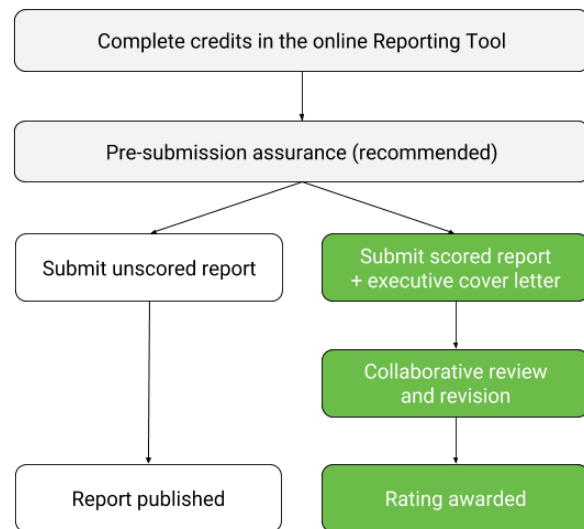
Participation

Participation in STARS involves collecting information about the institution’s sustainability initiatives and performance, documenting that information in the online Reporting Tool, obtaining assurance that the information is accurate and meets credit criteria and submitting a report to earn public recognition. Two types of reports may be submitted: scored and unscored.

A STARS subscription and a cover letter from a high-ranking executive at the institution are required to submit a scored report for a STARS Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum Rating. Upon submission, AASHE staff will review the report for accuracy and adherence to credit criteria. Once the institution has addressed the issues that are identified, the report is published with the appropriate rating.

Alternatively, an institution may submit an unscored report and earn designation as a STARS Reporter without a subscription, an executive cover letter, or AASHE staff review. An unscored report may be submitted as often as once a year to update the institution’s information without changing an existing rating.

STARS Reporting Process








Steps in green only available with a STARS subscription.

Scoring & Recognition

An institution's score is based on the percentage of points it earns by pursuing relevant credits across Academics (AC), Engagement (EN), Operations (OP), and Planning & Administration (PA). Credits that are not applicable to an institution do not count against its score. An institution may also earn up to four Innovation & Leadership (IN) points for exemplary and path-breaking initiatives. These bonus points are added to an institution's percentage-based score to generate its final overall score.

Public recognition is earned on the following basis:

Recognition Level	Minimum Overall Score	
	Reporter designation	n/a
	Bronze Rating	25
	Silver Rating	45
	Gold Rating	65
	Platinum Rating	85

Recognition is valid for three years, although an institution can re-submit an updated report for a new rating as often as once a year.

Detailed information about the reporting process and a help center with answers to frequently asked questions are available on the [STARS website](#).

Table of Credits

Category / Subcategory	No.	Credit Title	Points Available
Institutional Characteristics (IC)			
Institutional Characteristics	IC 1	Institutional Boundary ^	-
	IC 2	Operational Characteristics ^	-
	IC 3	Academics and Demographics ^	-
	IC 4	Points of Distinction	-
	IC 5	Executive Letter ^ *	-
Academics (AC)			
Curriculum <i>Up to 40 points available</i>	AC 1	Academic Courses *	14
	AC 2	Learning Outcomes *	8
	AC 3	Undergraduate Program *	3
	AC 4	Graduate Program *	3
	AC 5	Immersive Experience *	2
	AC 6	Sustainability Literacy Assessment	4
	AC 7	Incentives for Developing Courses	2
	AC 8	Campus as a Living Laboratory *	4
Research * <i>Up to 18 points available</i>	AC 9	Research and Scholarship *	12
	AC 10	Support for Sustainability Research *	4
	AC 11	Open Access to Research *	2
Engagement (EN)			
Campus Engagement <i>Up to 21 points available</i>	EN 1	Student Educators Program *	4
	EN 2	Student Orientation *	2
	EN 3	Student Life	2
	EN 4	Outreach Materials and Publications	2
	EN 5	Outreach Campaign	4
	EN 6	Assessing Sustainability Culture	1
	EN 7	Employee Educators Program	3

	EN 8	Employee Orientation	1
	EN 9	Staff Professional Development and Training	2
Public Engagement <i>Up to 20 points available</i>	EN 10	Community Partnerships	3
	EN 11	Inter-Campus Collaboration	3
	EN 12	Continuing Education *	5
	EN 13	Community Service	5
	EN 14	Participation in Public Policy	2
	EN 15	Trademark Licensing *	2
Operations (OP)			
Air & Climate <i>11 points available</i>	OP 1	Emissions Inventory and Disclosure	3
	OP 2	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	8
Buildings <i>Up to 8 points available</i>	OP 3	Building Design and Construction *	3
	OP 4	Building Operations and Maintenance	5
Energy <i>10 points available</i>	OP 5	Building Energy Efficiency	6
	OP 6	Clean and Renewable Energy	4
Food & Dining * <i>Up to 8 points available</i>	OP 7	Food and Beverage Purchasing *	6
	OP 8	Sustainable Dining *	2
Grounds * <i>Up to 4 points available</i>	OP 9	Landscape Management *	2
	OP 10	Biodiversity *	1 - 2 **
Purchasing <i>6 points available</i>	OP 11	Sustainable Procurement	3
	OP 12	Electronics Purchasing	1
	OP 13	Cleaning and Janitorial Purchasing	1
	OP 14	Office Paper Purchasing	1
Transportation <i>Up to 7 points available</i>	OP 15	Campus Fleet *	1
	OP 16	Commute Modal Split	5
	OP 17	Support for Sustainable Transportation	1
Waste <i>Up to 10 points available</i>	OP 18	Waste Minimization and Diversion	8
	OP 19	Construction and Demolition Waste Diversion *	1

	OP 20	Hazardous Waste Management	1
Water <i>Up to 8 points available</i>	OP 21	Water Use	4 - 6 **
	OP 22	Rainwater Management	2
Planning & Administration (PA)			
Coordination & Planning <i>Up to 9 points available</i>	PA 1	Sustainability Coordination	1
	PA 2	Sustainability Planning	4
	PA 3	Inclusive and Participatory Governance	3
	PA 4	Reporting Assurance *	1
Diversity & Affordability <i>10 points available</i>	PA 5	Diversity and Equity Coordination	2
	PA 6	Assessing Diversity and Equity	1
	PA 7	Support for Underrepresented Groups	3
	PA 8	Affordability and Access	4
Investment & Finance * <i>Up to 8 points available</i>	PA 9	Committee on Investor Responsibility *	2
	PA 10	Sustainable Investment *	3 - 5 **
	PA 11	Investment Disclosure *	1
Wellbeing & Work <i>7 points available</i>	PA 12	Employee Compensation	3
	PA 13	Assessing Employee Satisfaction	1
	PA 14	Wellness Programs	1
	PA 15	Workplace Health and Safety	2
Innovation & Leadership (IN)			
Innovation & Leadership <i>4 bonus points available</i>	IN 1 -	Catalog of optional credits *	0.5 each

^ Required for submission.

* Not applicable to every institution. See credit *Applicability* for details.

** The total number of points available varies based on an institution's context. See credit *Scoring* for details.

Anatomy of a Credit

Each credit is organized as follows:

XY 1: Credit Title

Z points available

The identifying number, title, and maximum points available for the credit.

Rationale

Background on the intent and importance of the credit in the context of sustainability.

Applicability

Indicates whether or not an institution may opt out of the credit without being penalized in scoring.

Criteria

The minimum requirements for an institution to earn points for the credit.

Scoring

Explains how points are allocated for the credit.

Reporting Fields

Lists the documentation fields that appear within the online Reporting Tool for the credit. Some fields are required, while others are optional and do not influence scoring.

Measurement

Timeframe

Describes the time period from which data should be drawn, typically based on the most recent information available as of the anticipated date of submission.

Sampling and Data Standards

Provides guidelines on when institutions may use a representative sample to measure performance and when samples are prohibited, as well as guidance related to data quality, allowable exclusions, and unit conversions.

Standards and Terms

Lists and defines important terminology and external standards that are referenced in the credit. Defined terms are *italicized* in the text.

Some credits also include a Credit Example or Scoring Example to help clarify criteria and scoring calculations.

Connections to U.N. Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the United Nations published [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), a "plan of action for people, planet and prosperity." The publication outlines 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), as well as 169 targets and associated indicators, forming a 15-year agenda intended to balance "the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental."



A college or university may use STARS to measure and report on its contributions towards the SDGs. Because the two frameworks share a similar intent and scope, at a very high level an institution's STARS score or rating can be used to demonstrate progress towards helping deliver the SDGs. To assist institutions with identifying more specific contributions, this manual also includes information about the SDGs to which an institution's performance in each STARS subcategory (e.g., Curriculum, Public Engagement, Energy, and so on) contributes most directly.

Due to higher education's critical role as a driver of teaching, learning, and collaboration for sustainability, STARS credits and indicators related to curriculum, research, and public engagement are of particular relevance in assessing an institution's global impact. Therefore, an institution that would like to use STARS to report on the SDGs may also:

- Use the SDG targets as a framework for identifying which course offerings provide students with the knowledge and skills to help address sustainability challenges (see *AC-1: Academic Courses* and *EN-12: Continuing Education*).
- Use the process of identifying its sustainability-related research and partnerships for STARS to map its scholarly output and collaborations to specific SDG targets (see, for example, *AC-9: Research and Scholarship*, *EN-10: Community Partnerships*, *EN-11: Inter-Campus Collaboration*, and *EN-14: Participation in Public Policy*).