

STARS Technical Development Policy

This policy was approved by the STARS Steering Committee in April 2010 and amended January 2014, June 2017 and October 2024.

Overview

The policy outlines how AASHE manages the STARS technical development process, including:

- The schedule for making changes to the Technical Manual and Reporting Tool
- Decision-making and engagement of interested/affected parties
- How changes will be recorded and communicated
- Implications for participation

The technical development process for STARS is broken into three distinct stages:

1. Administrative updates
2. Incremental updates
3. Major updates

1. Administrative Updates (e.g., 4.0 to 4.0.1)

Intent and Versioning

Administrative updates are released to integrate minor corrections and/or modifications into the current version of STARS. Although an administrative update will not result in a change in version, the revised Technical Manual will include an indication that the content has been updated, e.g., “STARS 4.0: Administrative Update One” or “Version 4.0.1”.

Types of Changes Covered

Administrative updates involve two types of changes: minor corrections and minor modifications.

Minor corrections involve fixing minor issues with a fairly obvious resolution. Examples include:

- Correcting typos and other errors
- Resolving inconsistencies (including inconsistencies between STARS and external standards referenced in a credit)
- Clarifying issues that are not clear to participants but are covered within the existing rules and criteria

Minor modifications are typically initiated in response to questions not addressed by the existing Technical Manual and may also respond to a desire for additional supporting information from participants. Examples include:

- Offering alternate approaches to measurement
- Improving definitions
- Adding optional documentation fields

In an administrative update, credits and indicators are not added or deleted, required documentation fields aren't added or deleted and point allocation, credit-level scoring formulas and overall scoring calculations do not change.

Decision-Making and Engagement

The Steering Committee has ultimate decision-making authority regarding the content of STARS, including the details of the credits and content of the Technical Manual. Before announcing administrative updates publicly, staff will share all changes with the Steering Committee in writing as part of a consent agenda. Such changes will be discussed by the Steering Committee if a member raises concerns with a proposed change.

Staff will use discretion to determine which issues warrant feedback and input from the AASHE Advisory Council. In general, Advisory Council members may have a role in recommending minor modifications, but will not be engaged for minor corrections.

A public comment period is not required, however the Steering Committee may direct the staff to solicit public feedback on any administrative updates deemed to have substantive scoring impacts.

Recording and Communicating Changes

An updated edition of the Technical Manual is released and corresponding revisions are made directly in the Reporting Tool. A record of changes is published to support participants who have been actively using the Technical Manual in question. The changes are announced to active participants, for example in the online STARS community and on the STARS website.

Timeline

Administrative updates may be integrated into the Technical Manual as necessary, but no more frequently than quarterly.

Reporting and Participation Implications

The types of changes made in administrative updates involve no interruptions for participants within the Reporting Tool.

2. Incremental Updates (e.g., 4.0.1 to 4.1)

Intent and Versioning

Incremental updates are released to introduce some substantive changes to the content of STARS without revising the organizational structure of the framework, systemwide point allocation or the rating methodology. An incremental update increases the first decimal of the current version by one in both the Technical Manual and the Reporting Tool.

Types of Changes Covered

Incremental updates may include:

- Changing the criteria or required documentation fields associated with credits and indicators
- Modifying how points are calculated for individual credits and indicators (including adding or modifying contextual variability in scoring)
- Changing credit and indicator applicability
- Adding or deleting a small number of credits
- Adding or deleting indicators within credits
- Redistributing points within impact areas (e.g., to accommodate new content)

Decision-Making and Engagement

Staff work with members of the AASHE Advisory Council and other interested/affected parties as needed to develop proposed changes. The Steering Committee deliberates on proposed changes and is responsible for approving the new version.

Some process for soliciting public feedback on updates that have substantive implications for scoring is expected (e.g., a survey, poll or webinar), but a formal public comment period is not required.

Recording and Communicating Changes

A new edition of the Technical Manual is released and a new “credit set” is made available in the Reporting Tool. A summary of changes from the previous version is published. The new version is announced by AASHE, for example in the *AASHE Bulletin* newsletter, in the online STARS community, on the STARS website and through other avenues.

Timeline

Incremental updates may be released no more frequently than once per year and there should also be at least a year between the release of a new major version and the next

incremental update. This stage may be skipped, at the Steering Committee’s discretion, and the changes included instead in a major update.

Reporting and Participation Implications

Upon release, all subsequent registrations will be for the new version. Existing participants will have the option to upgrade to the new version or continue reporting under the current version for a specified period. Upon upgrading, much of the data participants have already saved in the Reporting Tool should be relevant and available for use in the new version.

3. Major Updates (e.g., 4.1 to 5.0)

Intent and Versioning

Major updates are released to make comprehensive, structural and/or methodological changes to STARS. A major update increases the version by one whole number in both the Technical Manual and the Reporting Tool.

Types of Changes Covered

Anything is possible in a major update. Examples include:

- Adding or deleting many credits and indicators
- Adding or deleting impact areas
- Changing overall point allocation
- Changing how scores and ratings are calculated
- Adding or deleting rating levels
- Adding prerequisites or requirements for third party verification

Decision-Making and Engagement

Based on feedback from participants and the broader community and developments in the field, staff work extensively with members of the AASHE Advisory Council and other subject matter experts to develop proposed changes. The Steering Committee deliberates and approves the new version. One or more formal public comment periods are held.

Recording and Communicating Changes

A new edition of the Technical Manual is released and a new “credit set” is made available in the Reporting Tool. A summary of changes from the previous version is published. The new version is publicized widely (e.g., press release, *AASHE Bulletin* newsletter, conference sessions and/or webinars highlighting changes).

Timeline

Major updates may be released no more frequently than once every three years and there should also be at least a two-year span between the release of an incremental update and a major update.

Reporting and Participation Implications

Upon release, all subsequent registrations will be for the new version. Existing participants will have the option to upgrade to the new version or continue reporting under the current version for a specified period. Upon upgrading, some of the data already saved by participants in the Reporting Tool will be relevant and available for use in the new version, although to a lesser extent than incremental updates.

Table of Changes Allowed at Each Stage

Type of change	Administrative Update	Incremental Update	Major Update
Minor corrections (e.g., to address typos or omissions)	✓	✓	✓
Minor modifications (e.g., clarifications, alternate approaches and new definitions)	✓	✓	✓
Changing credit criteria (i.e., beyond clarifying or interpreting existing criteria)		✓	✓
Adding or deleting required documentation fields		✓	✓
Modifying how points are calculated for individual credits and indicators		✓	✓
Changing credit or indicator applicability (i.e., beyond clarifying or interpreting existing rules)		✓	✓
Adding or deleting indicators within credits		✓	✓
Adding or deleting credits		✓	✓
Redistributing points within impact areas		✓	✓
Adding or deleting impact areas			✓
Changing overall point allocation			✓
Changing how overall scores and ratings are calculated			✓
Adding or deleting rating levels			✓
Adding prerequisites or requirements for third-party verification			✓