

Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System -- Buildings Call Notes

February 19, 2008

The call began with a round of introductions. We then went through each credit individually. For each credit, people asked questions and provided feedback.

OP Credit 1: New Construction, Renovations, and Commercial Interiors

Feedback on the Credit

Several institutions suggested separating new construction from renovations and commercial interiors. A couple schools mentioned that they have active green building programs that address new construction but not renovations. As the credit is currently written, those institutions wouldn't receive any points. AASHE can't change the criteria for the pilot period, but understands the concern and will consider it for future versions of STARS.

A participant said that LEED is problematic because, at least for lower levels of certification, you can choose which building features to implement and a certified building may not be energy efficient. Our understanding is that US Green Building Council is working to address this issue, but if it hasn't been sufficiently addressed before the release of STARS 1.0, we might consider requiring the achievement of certain energy credits. It is also important to keep in mind that within STARS there is a separate section of credits that address energy consumption, so the energy performance of buildings will be captured there.

After the call, AASHE asked Melissa Gallagher-Rogers, USGBC's Manager for Higher Education & Government sectors, to respond to this point. She wrote, "In June 2007 USGBC added the requirement that all LEED projects achieve at least two "Optimize Energy Performance" points in the LEED Energy and Atmosphere Credit 1, which improves the energy performance of LEED for New Construction certified green buildings by 14% for new construction over the ASHRAE 90.1 baseline. Buildings certified under LEED for Existing Buildings Operations & Maintenance are also required to achieve these two points in EAc1. This means that they must either achieve an Energy Star score of 69 or if they are a Non-Energy Star space type, then they must perform 19% above the national average. In addition, USGBC is working on carbon weightings of the credits to ensure that all LEED project contribute to reduced carbon dioxide production. "

A participant said that her institution submitted paperwork for LEED certification three years ago and the building hasn't been certified due to delays with the US Green Building Council. AASHE will check in with USGBC about this. For future versions of STARS, it may be appropriate to revise the time line so that it covers more than three years.

AASHE asked Gallagher-Rogers how long it takes to achieve certification. She responded, "Once the final documents are submitted for review, it takes on average 25 business days for the return of the review on a single building certification. This is the initial review and so if there are questions that the project team needs to clarify then it will take an additional 25 business days after resubmission for the return of the re-review of those materials."

Q: What constitutes a 'major renovation'? What level of remodel triggers eligibility for this credit?

A: For the pilot period, it was decided on the call that renovations that cover 25 percent or more of a building are considered 'major renovations' and should be counted for the credit.

Potential alternative thresholds discussed include using the absolute size of the renovation (more than 5,000 ft² would be 'major') or the total cost of the renovation (suggestions included \$0.5 and \$1.5 million). The 25% standard was chosen because it seemed most applicable for both small and large institutions.

Q: How do you document that a non-certified building meets certification criteria?

A: For the pilot period, describe the process your school went through to ensure that it meets criteria and submit the documentation that you use internally. Based on what institutions submit during the pilot period, AASHE may prescribe best practices for submitting this type of information. AASHE will have to watch this closely, a participant noted, because it's not necessarily the certification that's expensive; energy modeling, building commissioning, and achieving other LEED credits are the big expenses.

Q: The criteria section says, "Buildings completed during the past three years are considered new." When does the three-year period begin?

A: The three-year period is the 3-years prior to the current academic year.

Q: We recently received funding to start construction on a new building and plan for it to be LEED Certified. Can we include it?

A: Only completed projects count. The building doesn't have to be occupied, but construction must be complete. Projects that aren't yet completed can earn credit in a future STARS submission, after they have been completed.

Q: The documentation section asks for a link to our green building policy. Should we include the link if our policy is outdated?

A: Yes. Include the link and clarify the discrepancy between the policy and current practices in the notes section.

OP Credit 2: Buildings Operations and Maintenance

Feedback on the Credit

One caller noted that LEED-EB may be phased out because it's difficult to achieve. Another caller clarified that there is a new version of LEED-EB, which focuses on operations and maintenance (LEED-EB OM). Institutions should use most recent version the certification criteria.

Q: What buildings aren't eligible for LEED-EB?

A: Buildings are considered eligible if they meet the first of the 'Minimum Program Requirements' for participation in LEED-EB. The requirement reads:

The building(s) must be fully occupied (defined as average or typical occupancy expected during normal operations) for at least the 12 continuous months preceding certification application. Vacant tenant space measuring 25% or less of the building floor area is permitted, as time-averaged over the previous 12 months. For an apartment building, hotel, dormitory, convention center, classroom, sports facility, or similar structure, ordinary partial occupancy is permitted.

Q: Are buildings that are leased to the institution included?

A: For the pilot period, institutions should use the same institutional boundary for each credit. If leased properties are included in the institution's boundaries outlined in the Introductory Information section, they should be included for this credit.

There was some discussion about whether or not leased properties should be included. Someone said that schools are subject to the limitations of available local real estate, and certified LEED-EB rental properties aren't widely available. Another person suggested creating a separate credit for leased buildings. Someone else said that if STARS aims to be ambitious, it should include leased spaces. Colleges and universities can help promote green buildings by requesting and/or requiring certified rental properties. Another person said STARS should be careful not to create an unintentional moral hazard and that form of ownership shouldn't matter. The green cleaning service credit applies equally to in-house and contracted cleaning services. Likewise, rented and owned buildings should be subject to the same treatment.

Q: LEED-EB certification would damage the historical integrity of some buildings on campus. How does STARS address this?

A: Even for the highest level of points in this credit, less than 100 percent of buildings have to meet EB criteria. Indicate the concerns with historic building preservation in the notes section. There may be opportunities to earn innovation points or Tier Two credits based on historic building preservation.

OP Credit 3: Potable, Non-Irrigation Water Consumption

Feedback about the Credit

A participant said that her institution has added several new labs since 2000-01. The credit penalizes the school for adding the labs, since labs tend to be heavy water users.

Q: Why was 2000-01 selected as the baseline year?

A: In general, water records are available for several years. Choosing a baseline year of several years ago rewards institutions that have made investments in water conservation in the interim. The actual year selected was somewhat arbitrary, and AASHE is open to suggestions for changing it.

Q: Our school and the city where we are located don't have water metering. Can we look at innovations and investments in water conservation devices to estimate a reduction? Likewise, what if we don't separate irrigation from non-irrigation water values?

A: During the pilot period you are encouraged to provide the best information you can with the data available. Indicate what data you are using in the notes/comments section.

Q: The documentation section asks for water policies. Do any schools have water conservation policies?

A: University of New Hampshire is updating their policy. Sara Cleaves can check if they can share it when it's available later this year. Emory University has a policy from 1985.

University of Georgia prepared a detailed report with recommendations on how to conserve water on campus. U-GA's plan is available at www.uga.edu/WaterResourcesReport.pdf.

Stanford University has a detailed plan, Stanford University's Water Conservation, Reuse and Recycling Master Plan, which is available at

http://facilities.stanford.edu/conservation/FINALStanfordConservation_Recommended_Plan10_16_033.pdf.

University of New South Wales (Australia) has a shorter policy, which is available at www.energy.unsw.edu.au/Downloads/WaterConservationPolicy-Interim.pdf.

Keep in mind that this piece of documentation doesn't have to include a policy. You could mention water-saving tools or devices your institution purchases, outreach programs to encourage water conservation, and other relevant programs.

OP Credit 4: Green Cleaning Service

Q: What kind of documentation does STARS require to demonstrate Green Seal equivalency?

A: For the pilot period, explain the process you went through to determine that you're roughly equivalent and then submit documentation that you use internally that shows equivalency. For future versions of STARS, documentation requirements may change.

Q: My school uses Green Seal-certified products, but our cleaning service isn't certified. Does this count?

A: There is a separate credit in the Purchasing section that recognizes institutions that purchase Green Seal or similar cleaning products. This credit is for Green Seal Cleaning Services, which covers best environmental practices for green cleaning. The practices include green cleaning products, but also include other criteria. A document outlining certification criteria for Green Seal Cleaning Services is available at www.greenseal.org/certification/cleaning_services_gs-42.pdf.

Q: Our institution has several hospitals whose cleaning has separate requirements that make them ineligible for Green Seal certification. How should we treat this?

A: Please explain instances like this in the comments section. We would love suggestions for how to address this in future versions of STARS.