

Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System – Grounds Call Notes

March 11, 2008

Notes from the call are arranged into the following categories:

- 1. Questions and feedback about STARS as a whole**
- 2. Questions and feedback about the Grounds category**
- 3. Questions and feedback about OP Credit 12: Organic Campus**
- 4. Questions and feedback about OP Credit 13: Non-potable Water Usage for Irrigation**

1. Questions and feedback about STARS as a whole

When people ask questions during the call, how are those changes being incorporated? Will the credits included in Pilot Phase One reflect those changes?

Since people are already gathering data, it would be confusing to change the credits for the pilot period. However, in some instances, we are adding to or slightly modifying documentation components based on feedback. AASHE is recording all comments in the notes and they will be considered when developing future versions of STARS. However, it is important to note that STARS 0.5, which we plan to release later this month, will not reflect the most recent comments on phase one of the credits due to time limitations.

Will AASHE be assigning points or will schools determine if they have earned the points?

STARS is set up to be a self-assessment tool – schools determine the points they earn. In the future we may develop a peer review process that facilitates cross-campus learning and verification. Likewise, for STARS 1.0 schools may be able to solicit third-party certification.

2. Questions and feedback about the Grounds category

During the call, there was discussion about adding credits regarding the following issues to this section:

Native plant use – Several participants suggested adding a credit based on using native plants. AASHE agrees this is an important issue, but has struggled to write a meaningful credit that gets at this issue.

Undeveloped land preservation and low-impact recreation opportunities – While this credit generally wouldn't apply to urban institutions, it is valuable and worth capturing. Again, AASHE would welcome feedback on what a good credit that addresses this issue would look like.

Snow and ice removal – There are innovative practices that reduce the environmental impact of snow and ice removal. This would be a good Tier Two credit, with regional applicability

Stormwater management – This is an important issue that AASHE would like to have included in STARS. Regional differences and institutional settings (urban, suburban, or rural) have made it challenging to develop meaningful stormwater management credits.

A participant suggested looking at LEED's credits for guidance. LEED however is generally based on a single building (or cluster of buildings), and we've had difficulty expanding the credit to the campus level. It may make sense for many schools to develop campus-wide, instead of building-specific, stormwater management plans.

Some states have strict water quality requirements. Credits could be awarded for compliance with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program or other similar programs. Compliance with the law may be an easy point, but STARS doesn't have many easy points and it may be good to add some.

Some callers suggested adding a credit based on having a storm water management plan. Asking schools to provide the URL where the plan is posted would be helpful in sharing information across campuses. There could be multiple points for this credit, depending on how comprehensive, ambitious, and/or effective the plan is.

3. OP Credit 12: Organic Campus

A caller asked if athletic stadiums and golf courses should be included as campus grounds. Another caller suggested that it depends on how the institution defines its boundary. At some institutions, athletic fields are located off-campus and are managed by a separate entity; it would be difficult or impossible to get data about these facilities. Another participant suggested that since a primary purpose of STARS is to allow for fair comparisons between schools, there should be a level playing field in how the credits are applied. If schools adjust boundaries to exclude certain facilities, it may unfairly give those schools an advantage.

Several callers suggested changing the credit so it's based on using integrated pest management instead of avoiding a list of banned substances. They noted that there are some pests that are human health hazards (mosquitoes, fire ants) that can't be dealt with effectively in some climates using organic-approved substances.

McGill University is participating in an assessment through the Quebec Universities Association assessment based on Sierra Youth Coalition's assessment framework that asks for the amount of inorganic fertilizers and pesticides used, as well as the amount of campus space devoted to different uses (buildings, lawns, undeveloped, etc.). The credit could be developed using this information, with different points depending on intensity of fertilizer and pesticide use.

If we do add extra points to STARS (which was suggested on the last call, as a way to offer recognition for incremental progress and make the comparisons more meaningful), this credit could be worth several points, allocated according to percentage of land that meets organic standards or uses IPM.

A participant said the three-year transition period and documentation that is required for organic certification is unrealistic. The credit, however, doesn't require certification; it requires that schools don't use the chemicals that aren't allowed under organic standards. A caller suggested that the language should be changed since the USDA has strict guidelines about the use of the term "Organic." While these guidelines apply only to agricultural commodity marketing, it would be helpful to use a clearer term to prevent confusion.

4. OP Credit 13: Non-potable Water Usage for Irrigation

There is a lot of room for improvement with this credit. AASHE wanted to have a credit that recognizes water conservation, but it was really difficult to develop a credit that worked across regional/climatic differences. Having a trend-based credit, which would accommodate those regional differences,

penalizes schools that have already reduced water consumption and there isn't a clear goal/end target for water consumption. The credit as it's currently written will be easier to earn if schools are conserving irrigation water, but it's imperfect.

Someone asked if AASHE has considered having the credit based on the percentage of campus that isn't irrigated. We'd love to hear suggestions on how to write a credit like this that would be fair across different climates.

A caller said her institution didn't irrigate anything and asked how this would be handled. At the credit is written, it wouldn't apply. This is something we want to hear about, so definitely report it.

A caller suggested adding a definition of "non-potable water" and asked if irrigating from a lake or pond or non-potable ground water would count. As the credit is currently written, they would be applicable, but AASHE is open to suggestions for what to include or exclude. Someone said they shouldn't be included because they don't address the issue of depleting ground water level. Another caller suggested looking at what USGBC deems eligible. (As a follow-up, LEED-NC specifies "captured rainwater, recycled wastewater, recycled greywater, or water treated and conveyed by a public agency specifically for non-potable uses for irrigation.") Another participant said her school was considering building ponds to capture rain water to reuse; in this case, the pond water would count because the ponds serve as the rainwater storage.

A participant said her school catches rainwater and uses it to run air conditioning. Since the water is relatively cool, it's more efficient for the power plant and reduces natural gas consumption. While the benefits of this practice would be captured by the credits in the energy section, this seems like it would be worth an innovation credit.