

Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System -- Kick-off Calls Notes

Combined from calls on February 11 and 12, 2008

Each call began with a brief overview of the STARS Pilot Project.

- **Goal** -- See how the how the credits work in a campus setting. Determine if the credits are reasonable and how institutions would score. The information gathered during the pilot will help determine what scores are required for earning certain ratings. Part of that will be seeing how to modify STARS so that it's applicable to all types of institutions.
- **Phases** – Pilot Phase Two will launch in fall 2009. This section will include the Education and Research section and the outstanding credits in the Administration and Finance section.
- **Confidentiality** – During the pilot period all data will be kept confidential. In future versions of STARS, we expect that data will be made publicly available to help promote accountability.
- **Feedback** – When the pilot period concludes, AASHE will conduct a survey to get general feedback about STARS. In addition, there are questions requesting feedback that accompany each credit.

The calls were then open for questions. For the notes, questions and answers are arranged in the following categories: General Questions, Questions about Reporting, and Questions about Specific Credits.

General Questions

What should I do if I have a question?

You can raise questions during the focused conference calls. In addition, we encourage you to send any questions to stars@aaashe.org or to call Julian Dautremont-Smith at 610-349-5994.

Are there deadlines for the process?

The only deadline is that all information must be submitted by December 31, 2008. Other than that, it's open and flexible so institutions can proceed as they wish. With the phased approach, it may make sense to complete Phase One during the spring semester so institutions can deal with Phase Two in the fall. In order to make the most of the focused conference calls, you may wish to familiarize yourselves with the credits that will be covered in each section before the call.

Will there be opportunities to collaborate with other schools (especially schools with similar characteristics)?

AASHE plans to create an online forum where participating schools can post questions and answers and share strategies. Next week (the week of February 19) AASHE will distribute a directory with the contact information for the STARS liaisons at each participating institution to all of the participants. To help you identify schools with characteristics similar to yours, we grouped the list of pilot participants on the website according to Carnegie Classification and size (www.aashe.org/stars/pilot_institutions.php).

Can we get a rating during the pilot period?

AASHE will not assign ratings during the pilot period. Eventually STARS ratings will be based on the percentage of applicable points an institution receives, so you'll be able to see your theoretical score based on performance during the pilot period.

Will we be able to transfer data submitted for the pilot to STARS 1.0?

It's likely that some credits will change for STARS 1.0, but data that is submitted can be transferred. Keep in mind that each credit in STARS 1.0 will require statements from a responsible party.

Can multiple people from the same institution participate in future conference calls?

We expect that will be fine. Our conference call line has a capacity of 96 callers – if we approach that number we may ask multiple people at an institution to share a speaker phone or we may schedule additional calls.

What should I do if I can't participate in one of the focused conference calls?

We plan to prepare notes from all calls and distribute them to the STARS liaison list. If you have a question about the credits, feel free to email stars@ashe.org.

When STARS is final, for how long will the rating be valid?

A rating will be good for three years. Institutions can receive a new rating as often as every year. Institutions can update information as often as they wish.

What will the credits in Phase Two be?

We're still developing the credits for Phase Two. However, simultaneous with the Pilot Phase One, in March 2008, AASHE will release a full version of STARS (STARS 0.5) for public feedback. STARS 0.5 will include all credits, including the Education and Research section and the outstanding Administration and Finance credits. STARS 0.5 will give you a sense of how the credits are taking shape. However, the credits will likely change before the release of Pilot Phase Two in the fall.

How can we determine how we compare to other schools?

AASHE plans to publish a summary of aggregated data and information about overall performance at the end of the pilot period. Schools are welcome to share information with each other as they wish, but AASHE is committed to keeping data confidential during the pilot period.

How are differences between Canadian and U.S. institutions addressed?

Some differences are addressed in the guide, but we realize there is a lot of room for improvement in making the system relevant for Canadian institutions. We welcome suggestions and feedback from Canadian participants on how to make STARS equally applicable for Canadian institutions.

Questions about Reporting

Will the president have to submit a letter during the pilot period?

During the pilot period, presidents are **not** required to submit a letter. Likewise, in the documentation section for each credit, a statement from a responsible party won't be required during the pilot.

What form will the letter from the president and statement from a responsible party take?

Both statements will be a standard form to which individuals can upload and attach their electronic signatures.

Can multiple people from my school enter information?

Yes. We will provide one log-in and password to the STARS liaison from each school. That person can share the log-in information and have multiple people enter information as he or she wishes.

When I go to report information online, will it be clear what has been reported already?

Yes. Information that has been entered online will display.

Does the institution's boundary have to be the same for each credit?

AASHE prefers if an institution uses the same boundary for all credits. If data aren't available for the same boundary, please report the data that are available and specify in the notes section how the boundary is different.

When will online forms be available?

The online reporting form will be available in mid-March.

What reporting period should we use if we don't have data for the previous year?

We're encouraging institutions to use data from the 12-month 2006-07 academic year, or the most recent year for which data are available. During the pilot period, if data will only be available during a shorter period, you should submit that data and note the difference in the time period in the documentation notes section.

Do we have to report the Introductory Institutional Information first? In what order do I have to work?

You may enter information in any order. Some of the calculations for credits will use the information supplied in the Introductory Institutional Information section, however, so you may not be able to see your results without the background information. Likewise, information provided in the background section will determine if certain credits apply to your institution.

What if we don't have the exact data requested in the documentation section?

If you have similar data, submit what you do have, and indicate what data are available in the comments section.

What does it mean that we have to report every two months?

We want to hear something from you every two months, just to make sure the project is still active.

Will we need to submit documents/paperwork?

Everything will be submitted electronically. What you will be asked to submit is outlined in the documentation section for each credit.

Questions about Specific Credits

What do you mean by age of institution and age of physical plant?

Age of institution refers to the year institution was founded. Age of physical plant will ask you to specify the gross square footage of your current campus that was built during each decade.

Should non-credit students be included in the student/population numbers?

If non-credit/continuing education students come to campus, they should be included in the population numbers.

Why are some credits based on three year trends and others based on an absolute reduction compared to a baseline?

There are shortcomings to both methods and we welcome suggestions on how to improve these credits. In general, the credits reflect the feedback received from the Strategic and Technical Advisory

Committees and public feedback from STARS 0.4. The greenhouse gas emissions credit is based on an absolute reduction (measured against a baseline year) because there is a clear desired outcome: carbon neutrality. In contrast, the energy consumption and waste minimization credits are based on downward trends for a couple of reasons. Waste generation and energy consumption vary widely depending on an institution's characteristics including residential population, lab space, and climate/temperature. We don't know what level of reductions it would be reasonable to ask institutions to achieve.

Will STARS include credits about diversity?

Credits about diversity and other social responsibility credits will be included in Phase Two.

Why don't you divide greenhouse gas emissions by gross square footage?

There is broad consensus that absolute reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are necessary for climate stabilization. That said, we welcome feedback on the credit and are open to changing it.

Does grant-funded air travel that passes through the institution count as "institution-funded" air travel?

If the funding goes through the institution then it should be tracked. However, if you have a mechanism to track only part of your institution's air travel, we would still love to hear about it. Indicate what data are available in the documentation section.

To determine commute modal split, can you count the number of parking permits assigned and assume the rest use alternate modes?

If you don't have survey data, please report the information you do have. In the notes section, indicate how figures were estimated.