

**STARS Advisory Committee Focus Calls**  
**Thursday, December 13, 2007**

**Topic: Sustainability Officers**

*Participants*

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**1. GF-Prerequisite 1: Sustainability Committee**

*Is having some sort of formal body devoted to sustainability such an important first step that it should be a required to achieve a STARS rating?*

There was general consensus that it should be a prerequisite, as long as committee is defined in a way that allows for flexibility in how schools implement. Having a committee helps institutionalize sustainability and helps garner attention for sustainability efforts. A committee is able to do more than an individual. Campuses without sustainability coordinators can still have committees.

*Should we be more flexible about the exact form such a body takes, or should we be more specific about the composition of the body, how frequently it should meet, and who it reports to?*

General consensus: committee membership should draw from all campus sectors; prerequisite shouldn't be too specific about committee's characteristics. Should require that the committee meet once per semester or quarter. The committee should have an outreach function. The institutions describe the committee's function in reporting.

There should be some institutional commitment to the committee in order for it to count. There was general consensus that being officially sanctioned or appointed by the school doesn't necessarily make a committee more effective; ad hoc committees may be just as powerful.

Would an institution without a formal committee be willing and able to write a letter authorizing participation in STARS? Yes.

**2. GF Credit 2: Sustainability Implementation Plan**

*Should formal adoption of the sustainability implementation plan be required? Given the potential risk that formal adoption may lead to a "weakened, compromise version" of the plan, is it more effective for the plan not to be formally adopted? (Which is likely to have the most impact?)*

It's more important to focus on whether schools act on the plan. Formal adoption would have to be defined (does it mean incorporating into strategic plan?). Getting policies adopted is a slow process.

How could you show progress is being made, regardless of formal adoption: minutes from meetings, progress reports (may raise confidentiality issues).

There is value in having a policy that is too ambitious to be formally adopted. It can be motivational, help with goal-setting, help groups advocate for bigger changes. Getting formal approval can slow progress.

One way to assess that the plan is being worked on, even if it isn't officially sanctioned is to request a progress report or update.

Perhaps give opportunity to report on whether plan has been endorsed by or developed in partnership with other departments. This may be complicated because institutions structure departments differently.

### **3. GF Credit 3: Sustainability Officer**

*How should we define "sustainability officer"? There is wide diversity in the functions and reporting structures of existing sustainability officers. Which structures and functions demonstrate greater commitment to sustainability?*

*How should we use the point structure to encourage the structures and functions that represent greater commitment?*

Use intensity point scale, a 4-point scale would recognize everyone's efforts. Look at budget (need money to get things done). Consider purview of officer's duties; some positions are more narrow than others. Having one person could count for a point, two people could count for a point, reporting on a high level could be a point and some budget parameter could be a point.

Budget point could measure of sustainability budget in relation to total revenue, or could be spending per capita. Budget measures are difficult because there may be a huge facilities budget for retrofits that sustainability budget wouldn't capture. We should be careful to not privilege or penalize small/large schools.

Ultimately sustainability should be in job descriptions. Trying different approaches is good. Maybe investigate sustainability staff normalized. Keep simple for first round.

3 points -- have designated officer .1 FTE minimum devoted to it = 1 point

1 pt -- full time person (max 1 pt. per school, for this)

1 pt -- full time person reporting to VP, Provost or President, with purview over operations and academics (max 1 pt per school)

### **4. GF Credit 5: Shared Governance**

*What are the best practices for shared governance?*

*What specific criteria would you require for earning this credit?*

There wasn't sufficient time to address these questions.

### **5. GF Credit 6: Reinvestment Mechanism**

*Is a reinvestment mechanism only valuable for the funding it provides or are there other important benefits of having such a mechanism in place? What are the other benefits?*

Reinvestment mechanism addresses critical barrier to achieving sustainability goals for a public institution: you can't dip from one budget into another. Reinvestment mechanism creates an incentive and a new way of thinking.

It's not necessary to have a formal policy -- schools can do it informally. How would document informal approach? Maybe you can quantify? Require that its in place over 3 years?

Does it need to be its own fund? Utilities budget left over may go into sustainability; or if get rebates or performance contract; need to be careful not to make it too narrow.

Are we trying to get at how much funding we have (do we have enough funding to implement our plans)? A school that doesn't have reinvestment is charging departments every year to fund projects. Funding mechanism should be left open.

An important part of this is creativity. Everyone's funding structure is different, and schools are allowed to do different things due to varying regulatory environments. This should almost be an innovation credit; we do not want to confine creativity by being too prescriptive. We want to capture information about what creative funding mechanisms are out there.

It's important that funding mechanisms have methods for continuation.

It may be appropriate to combine credits 6 and 7.

## **6. GF Credit 7: Dedicated Sustainability Funding**

*What are the distinct types of "dedicated sustainability funding" that an institution can provide?*

How do we normalize budgets for different size schools? Do we use operating budget, number of students or something else? There was general agreement that beyond setting a minimum threshold, it is too complicated to normalize.

*Are some types more important than others (e.g., more secure source; higher growth potential; bigger impact)?*

*Should we only give a credit to a particular type of dedicated funding, or should we offer additional credit opportunities for each type of funding?*

## **7. New Credits**

*Should we add a new credit based on the "percentage of staff who have sustainability functions written into their job descriptions"? Do you have suggestions for defining "sustainability functions"? Who would you include as "staff"? What percentage of staff should have sustainability functions in their job descriptions in order to earn a point?*

Some people liked this idea, but there wasn't clear consensus on to whom it should apply. Some suggested faculty and unionized staff be excluded. Others felt schools should be recognized for getting sustainability in those employees' job descriptions.

This should be an intensity credit that honors those who have just started. If we do an intensity credit, the first one shouldn't be a percent. There wasn't a clear sense of what percentage would be appropriate. Suggestions ranged from 25 to 50 percent. Figuring out where schools are now would be helpful in setting targets.

This may be biased in favor of smaller schools.

Benefit of keeping type of staff open means it will be easier to calculate. In the pilot we could give participants opportunity to report what kinds of staff sustainability integrated into job description.

*Should we create a credit for having a sustainability awards or other sustainability public recognition program? If so, how should we define the credit to ensure that such programs are meaningful and significant?*

*Are there any other credits related to sustainability funding that should be considered for inclusion in STARS?*

The group didn't have time to address these questions.