

Innovation & Leadership (IN)

The credits in this category recognize institutions that are seeking innovative solutions to sustainability challenges and demonstrating sustainability leadership in ways that are not otherwise captured in STARS.

Institutions may earn up to four Innovation & Leadership points. An institution's overall, percentage-based STARS score is increased by the number of these bonus points it earns. For example, if an institution earned 30 percent of available points in the four main STARS categories, earning 2 Innovation & Leadership points would raise its final score to 32.

There are two types of Innovation & Leadership credits available. The number of points available for each type is outlined in the following table:

Credit type	Points per credit	Points available
Exemplary Practice	0.5	4
Innovation	1	4
Total points earned →		Up to 4

An institution may claim any combination of exemplary practice and innovation credits and may include as many of these credits in a submission as desired, however the maximum number of points applied toward scoring is capped at 4.

Exemplary Practice

[A catalog of credits available](#)

Exemplary practice credits recognize specific initiatives that demonstrate sustainability leadership.

Exemplary practices include:

- Emerging best practices that are not otherwise recognized in STARS (e.g., seeking independent review of STARS data prior to submission).
- Initiatives and outcomes that are a step beyond what is recognized in a standard credit (e.g., achieving third party certification for a program or exceeding the highest criterion of an existing credit).
- Exemplary initiatives and outcomes that are only relevant to a minority of institution types or regions (e.g., participation in green hospital networks).

Exemplary practice credits may be claimed in multiple submissions as long as the criteria are being met at the time of submission.

A catalog of currently available exemplary practice credits and associated reporting fields is available in the online STARS Reporting Tool and on the [STARS website](#).

Innovation

4 credits available

Innovation credits are open-ended and reserved for new, extraordinary, unique, ground-breaking, or uncommon outcomes, policies, and practices that address [sustainability challenges](#) and are not covered by an existing credit or exemplary practice option.

- 1) In general, innovation credits should have roughly similar impacts or be on the same scale as other STARS credits.
- 2) Outcomes, policies, and practices that are innovative for the institution's region or institution type are eligible for innovation credits.
- 3) The innovative practice, policy, program, or outcome must be ongoing or have occurred within the three years prior to the anticipated date of submission.
- 4) The innovative practice or program has to be something that the institution has already implemented; planned activities do not count.
- 5) The innovative practice or program should originate from an area within the defined institutional boundary.
- 6) Practices, policies, and programs that were once considered innovative but are now widely adopted (e.g., being the first institution to enact a policy 20 years ago that is now common) may not be claimed as innovation credits.
- 7) Multiple activities or practices whose sum is innovative can be considered for an innovation credit as long as those activities or practices are related. Listing a series of unrelated accomplishments or events under a single innovation credit is not accepted.
- 8) While the practices that led to receiving an award may be appropriate for an innovation credit, winning awards and/or high sustainability rankings in other assessments is not, in and of itself, grounds for an innovation credit. When the innovation is part of a partnership, the summary provided must clearly describe the institution's role in the innovation.

An institution can only claim a particular activity as an innovation credit once. When re-submitting for a STARS rating, an innovation credit that the institution submitted previously cannot be re-submitted. However, an institution that has made significant advancements to a project or program that was previously submitted as an innovation may resubmit based on those advancements if the project or program is still considered innovative.

To help verify that the policy, practice, program, or outcome that the institution is claiming for an innovation credit is truly innovative, the institution may submit a letter of affirmation from an individual with relevant expertise in the associated content area or a press release or publication featuring the innovation.

Reporting Fields

Please note that institutions will report on each innovation credit separately.

Required

- ☐ Name or title of the innovative policy, practice, program, or outcome
- ☐ A brief description of the innovative policy, practice, program, or outcome that outlines how credit criteria are met and any positive measurable outcomes associated with the innovation

- ☐ Does the innovation describe a new, extraordinary, unique, ground-breaking, or uncommon outcome, policy or practice that is not already covered by an existing STARS credit?
- ☐ Is the innovative practice, policy, program, or outcome ongoing or has it occurred within the three years prior to the anticipated date of submission?
- ☐ Has the institution previously received a STARS innovation credit for this specific practice, policy, program, or outcome?
- ☐ Which of the following impact areas does the innovation most closely relate to (select up to three):
 - ☐ Curriculum
 - ☐ Research
 - ☐ Campus Engagement
 - ☐ Public Engagement
 - ☐ Air & Climate
 - ☐ Buildings
 - ☐ Energy
 - ☐ Food & Dining
 - ☐ Grounds
 - ☐ Purchasing
 - ☐ Transportation
 - ☐ Waste
 - ☐ Water
 - ☐ Coordination & Planning
 - ☐ Diversity & Affordability
 - ☐ Investment & Finance
 - ☐ Wellbeing & Work
 - ☐ Other (e.g., arts and culture or technology; please specify and also select at least one *related* topic from the list above)

Optional

- ☐ A letter of affirmation from an individual with relevant expertise or a press release or publication featuring the innovation (upload)
- ☐ The website URL where information about the programs or initiatives is available
- ☐ Additional documentation to support the submission (upload)
- ☐ Data source(s) and notes about the submission
- ☐ Contact information for a responsible party (a staff member, faculty member, or administrator who can respond to questions regarding the data once it is submitted and available to the public)

Standards and Terms

Sustainability challenges

Consistent with [Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (United Nations, 2015), major sustainability challenges include (but are not limited to) climate change, global poverty and inequality, natural resource depletion, and environmental degradation. To identify courses, research, programs and initiatives that contribute towards understanding or solving sustainability challenges, it is helpful to ask:

- Does it contribute towards realizing one or more of the principles outlined in the [Earth Charter](#)? And/or
- Does it contribute towards achieving one or more of the targets embedded in the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs)?