

# **\*Reach for the STARS\***



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## **Table of Contents:**

**Page 2: Executive Summary**

**Page 3: Introduction & Methodology**

**Page 4: Methodology Continued**

**Page 5: Recommendations**

**Page 6: Monitoring and Evaluation**

**Page 7: Conclusion**

## Executive Summary:

**Problem Statement:** Our project is focused primarily on the issue at Western Washington University of gathering data on our existing outreach campaigns and the future data collection that will need to occur in order for our STARS outreach ranking to be improved. At Western, there is a strong community of students and faculty who believe strongly in the need to improve sustainable practices not only within our community but as a whole. Our Sustainability Engagement Institute is the center for all our work with climate action and sustainable practices. The Institute itself is quite small and has limited resources to be able to effectively communicate the work we do on and off campus to improve sustainability. The outreach ranking we have on our current STARS rating reflects a report that doesn't have enough time, information, or data collected in an effective manner to be communicated to AASHE.

**Description:** To begin our project we spoke to many of those who are involved in the Sustainability Engagement Institute who have the background knowledge of our work. The ranking system that STARS used in its previous model was extremely quantitative and extremely difficult to accurately represent the impact our outreach was truly having. Within our research, we also found that the communication between those who put on tabling events or other various activities that could be considered outreach doesn't have the tools to effectively record the intended actions as outreach and report them to the Institute. Our project is mainly based on interviews and case study research to understand how our current ranking could be improved by the implementation of other peer institutes with higher scores. With all of this taken into consideration, for our project, we mainly wanted to capitalize on the actions we as an institution already make and how those actions can be minorly adjusted and recorded to result in an accurate representation of Western's dedication to sustainability outreach.

**Summary of Recommendations:** Within the scope of what is reasonable given the time, size, and resources at the disposal of the Sustainability Engagement Institute, we recognized the importance of making those who are working on the issues lives easiest. As a school, faculty and students included participate in a lot of campaigns that can be considered outreach if they would only have a tool to measure the impact. What our solutions consist of are theoretical tool kits that can be used between departments and campaigns that make recording the work we all do easier. While speaking with a few of our sources we found that in the cases where there is thought to be no data collected, there is data that could be reported, there is just no one place to organize it. Coming up with a standardized form or checklist that anyone can use including staff, faculty, and students to report on their campaigns and the impact they have led to on campus would account for the missing data and lack of communication between the Sustainability Engagement Institute and the rest of campus.

## Introduction:



In the Outreach Campaign section of STARS, Western received a score of 0 out of 4. STARS, which stands for the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System, is a self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance. It enables meaningful comparisons over time and across institutions using a common set of measurements. An Outreach Campaign is an activity to raise overall student and faculty/staff awareness of campus sustainability, and it contributes to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 11 "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable," 13 "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts," and potentially other goals as well because it has impacts on the sustainability of the campus itself as a community such as action on climate change and the eradication of poverty. Our project goal is to help WWU score higher on the Outreach Campaign section of STARS. As background research, we looked at the Outreach Campaign section of peer institutions and found that they scored a full 4 points for filling in detailed data and campaign descriptions. Since Western does not report any descriptions or data at all, it should receive a high score if we can establish an efficient method of collecting and recording data.

## Methodology:

- First understanding the quantitative manner of data collection in the original ranking system was important for us to fully become aware of what kind of data we needed to report on to get the desired ranking. We also compared Western's STARS score to other peer institutions to understand how they were able to achieve the score they did.
- We then moved on to our interviewing process which was the majority of our data collection for this project. Seeing as how there are already people on Western's campus whose job is to report, put on, and participate in outreach campaigns on campus there were many people we needed to speak to.

★ Lindsey MacDonald: Primary stakeholder and first interview; she let us know the general knowledge of our current outreach ranking and standing. She was also able to point us in

the direction of our other interviews to get more in-depth ideas about what we could contribute.

- ★ Kate Beck: Reporter for Western’s STARS evaluation; within this interview, we were able to talk directly about how our STARS reports were put in and what was needed for that to happen. Kate let us know that there is a new ranking system, the STARS 3.0, that would allow for data to be collected in three ways. Survey or assessment results, Communication analytics, and Conservative estimate based on mixed/limited data sources.
  - We have decided to focus our recording abilities only on the second form of data collection, communication analytics. Survey or assessment results focus too deeply on the quantitative aspect of the data collection and at Western, we primarily have qualitative data to report. The third option is helpful but too broad with a university of Western’s size we need to be as specific as we can with the way we focus our energy on reporting.
- ★ Dora Vaughan: Office assistant for University Residence Halls; discussing her role as one of the university residence halls office assistants who also runs many of the residence outreach campaigns we were able to pivot towards our solution in a recording tool for the various campaigns on campus. She runs Go for the Green which is the campaign that gets new students in the residence halls excited and knowledgeable about their sustainability practices. This campaign has measured outputs of positive impact but according to Dora, they did not know where or to communicate this data.
- ★ Case Studies:
  - Cal Poly Humboldt: [Humboldt State University, CSU Earth Month Challenge](#) This website tracks and allots points to different climate-friendly actions done by students.
  - Appalachian State University: [Carbon Neutral Commuter / University Sustainability / Appalachian State University](#) This initiative engages those who choose different methods of commuting to sign up to calculate the reduction in emissions as a direct response to the campaign.
  - University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire; It records the specific amount of trash picked up during clean-up activities and the number of sustainable menstrual products picked up by students through the Sustainable Menstruate Products campaign.
  - The University of Washington is a case study we looked at briefly even though they aren’t a peer institution of Western they had helpful insight into the Communication Analytic measuring that could be implemented into our reporting.
    - *“various ‘Trash Talk’ presentations for staff and faculty groups on campus, 5,298 individuals in total were engaged with over the course of the 2019 fiscal year. Each of these contacts was an opportunity to foster education and connection with the larger UW community, which is one of UW Recycling’s key goals.*

## Results:

- From the case studies, we figured out that we need to find ways to document specific data and other records with Western's current resources and improve our engagement with sustainability within the community.

- Based on the interviews with multiple stakeholders, we figured out that we should focus on improving the method for measuring existing campaigns as well as suggesting recommendations for new campaigns. Also, since Western already has many student-led projects, implementing a method of measuring qualitative data, rather than merely recording quantitative data, would provide an accurate visualization of the current situation on campus and help make it more sustainable. Dora was curious about how to get numbers of students positively impacted by the campaign and also their engagement.

## Recommendations:

The recommendations we have for our project aimed at how to make the job of reporting on STARS outreach at Western easier but also ensuring we get the credit we deserve. One of the ideas we had was creating an outreach template to help not only organize those who wish to put on an outreach campaign but also a way for that campaign to be reported on. This sheet could consist of things to help ground the campaigns with clear goals and ways to organize and also ways to track how well the campaigns go. Below I have attached a very generic template that could be used from CitizenLab which includes most of the ideas of things that would be beneficial to use.

Online Engagement Canvas 2

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## Online Engagement Canvas

Define the building blocks of your engagement platform and strategy

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>1. Goals</b><br>Did you agree on shared objectives?<br>What are the short and long term goals of your platform?<br>What projects will be put on the platform?<br>What projects will be open for input continuously? | <b>2. Organization</b><br>Who will lead the core team?<br>Who are the operational and strategic stakeholders?<br>Does every project manager know how to set-up and follow-up on projects? | <b>3. Communication</b><br>How will be the platform fit in the overall communication strategy?<br>What channels will be used to communicate launches?<br>How will feedback or follow-up be organized? |
|  | <b>Audience</b><br>Who is the targeted audience?<br>Are there particular groups or organisations to focus on?   | <b>Calendar</b><br>Are there key dates to work towards?<br>What activities or events are opportunities for engagement?  |
| <b>4. Metrics</b><br>What is going to be measured and when?<br>When is the platform going to be seen as a success?   | <b>5. Risks</b><br>What is possibly blocking inside your organization?<br>What are the external factors to take into account?   |   |

On top of these generic ideas of what could be included, some forms of data collection could consist of...

- ❖ At Tabling/general Outreach:
  - Tallying the number of people you engage with at the table
  - A dot graph to increase engagement while also using another form of tallying
  - Considering a QR code/survey to engage research questions
- ❖ Student focused/Residence hall Outreach:
  - Baseline measurements to calculate positive impact
  - Taking count of email lists and online engagement with sustainability content
  - Social media followers and engagement with various accounts
  - Attendance at meetings pertaining to campaigns

These recommendations are all aimed at trying to increase communication amongst the Sustainable Engagement Institute, who runs the reporting for STARS, and with all of the departments on Western's campus that have thought about or have done an outreach campaign and not gotten credit for it. To implement this kind of recommendation there would need to be a joint effort between the S.E.I. and other departments like the University Residence Halls to use any tool that could be developed and properly report on the work they're contributing to sustainability outreach. This would be a rough guide for those who are interested in reporting their work and also a reminder or checklist of things to consider when beginning outreach campaigns you wish to see benefit Western's campus.

### **Monitoring & Evaluation:**

Evaluation and the length of monitoring mean we can use our project to track the success of student's current and future outreach programs. Ideally, our project would be used for not only our next STARS report but all future STARS reports. Schools report their outreach data for review every four years so using the methods we recommended in our report we will be able to track all future outreach campaign data and be able to maintain the high STARS score we will obtain in our next report.

Our methodology will also be useful in evaluating future outreach programs by the university. In the future students and staff will come up with new outreach programs to help the university reach its sustainability goals. Without tracking and monitoring the data from these programs there will be no way for the university to evaluate the effectiveness of those programs. Just like how we aren't able to measure the success of our current outreach programs.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, our project has identified key opportunities to significantly improve WWU's STARS Outreach Campaign ranking. By implementing a standardized outreach

reporting system, WWU can effectively capture and communicate the sustainability efforts already underway across campus. This system will not only elevate WWU's STARS ranking but also foster greater collaboration sustainability work happening throughout the university community.

Our recommendations focus on creating a user-friendly outreach template that simplifies campaign organization, data collection, and reporting. This template will empower faculty, staff, and students to effectively track and communicate the reach and impact of their outreach initiatives. By incorporating qualitative data collection methods alongside quantitative measures, WWU can provide a more comprehensive picture of its sustainability efforts. The proposed system fosters improved communication between the Sustainability Engagement Institute (SEI) and other departments, ensuring all sustainability outreach efforts are recognized and contribute to WWU's STARS ranking. This collaborative approach will lead to a more streamlined reporting process and a more accurate reflection of WWU's dedication to sustainability outreach. This will serve as a testament to the collective efforts of the WWU community in building a more sustainable future.

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