



50

Certified STAR Communities

A new milestone in the urban sustainability movement



SUSTAINABILITY
TOOLS FOR
ASSESSING &
RATING COMMUNITIES



50 Certified STAR Communities

A new milestone in the urban sustainability movement

The release of the STAR Community Rating System (STAR) in 2012 marked an important milestone in the urban sustainability movement. Hundreds of stakeholders worked together by consensus to deliver a common framework for sustainability with nationally accepted standards for measuring the depth and breadth of the social, economic, and environmental issues that our nation's cities and counties are facing.

Before STAR's development, local government leaders frequently asked:

- What does sustainability mean and how do we measure it in a standardized way?
- Which of the many available metrics and indicators best communicate local progress?

More than 30 pilot communities validated the Rating System's framework of goals, objectives, and evaluation measures, with the first community achieving a certified STAR Community Rating™ in November 2013.

Today, we mark a new milestone: more than 50 cities and counties have been certified under the STAR Community Rating System, with hundreds of others actively using the framework to guide local planning, decision-making, and investment.

The rating system's metrics and methods have inspired local leaders to be more inclusive, make equitable investments, advance work on climate, integrate health into sustainability considerations, collaborate within and across departments, and build broader community support, both with residents and the business community.

And the rating system has evolved -- as more communities certify, their data and experience contributes to our collective knowledge of sustainability and the growing evidence base linking actions to outcomes.

We want to celebrate this moment, acknowledge the achievements of the 50 STAR Certified communities, and share the impact of STAR certification both nationally and globally.



“The STAR Community Rating System is the ‘operations manual’ for the urban sustainability movement. It provides the national standards by which we aspire and the local actions that help us innovate and collectively impact our communities in a positive way.”

–Darryl Young of The Summit Foundation

Set Goals. Measure Progress. Improve Your Community.



Facts about STAR Certified Communities



Smallest: Charles City, IA

20,643,400

people live in a
STAR Community



Largest: Houston, TX

\$51,224

Median Household Income
of STAR Certified
Communities

● **Population in our nation's STAR Certified Communities:** 20,643,400

● **Smallest certified community:** Charles City, IA pop. 7,652

● **Largest certified community:** Houston, TX pop. 2,161,000

Median population for STAR Certified communities: 212,303

US Median Household Income (in 2014 dollars), 2010-2014: \$53,482

● **Median Household Income (average) of STAR Certified Communities:** \$51,224

of certified cities: 48

of certified counties: 3 (Broward County, Lee County and Monroe County, FL)

of states represented: 29 states + the District of Columbia

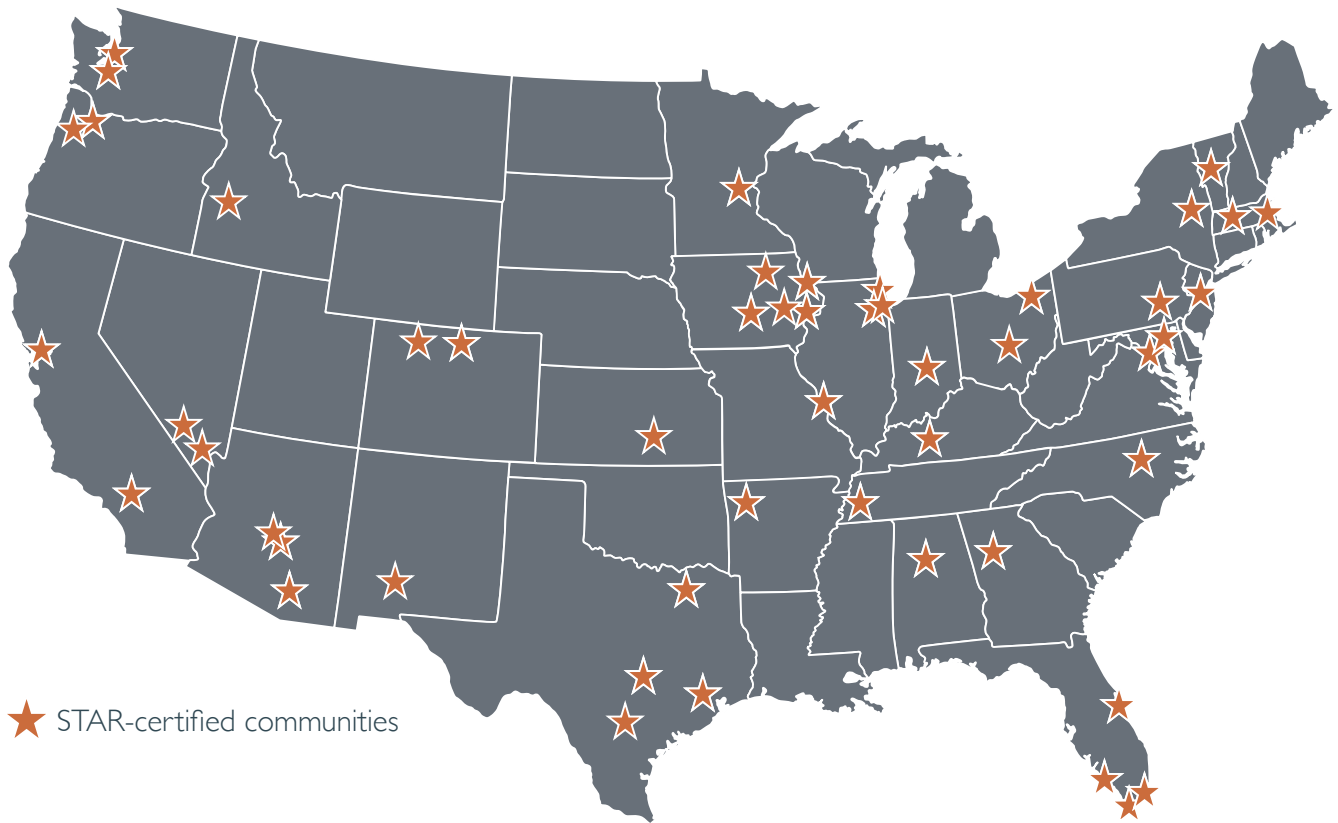
State with the most STAR Certified Communities: Iowa (5 communities certified)

First community to certify: Tacoma, WA in November 2013

First 5-STAR Community: Northampton, MA

Certified STAR Communities

Since the launch of the pilot program in October 2012, 51 communities have achieved STAR Certification.



5-STAR COMMUNITIES

Four communities have met the requirements for a 5-STAR Community Rating, which requires 600 or more points.

Baltimore, MD
Cambridge, MA
Northampton, MA
Seattle, WA

Austin, TX
Boise, ID
Broward County, FL
Burlington, VT
Columbus, OH
Davenport, IA
Dubuque, IA
Evanston, IL
Henderson, NV
Iowa City, IA
Las Vegas, NV
Louisville, KY
Memphis-Shelby County, TN
Plano, TX
Portland, OR
Raleigh, NC
Steamboat Springs, CO
Tacoma, WA
Tucson, AZ
Washington, DC

3-STAR COMMUNITIES

Twenty-seven communities have attained at least 200 points and received the 3-STAR Community Rating for sustainability leadership.

Albany, NY
Atlanta, GA
Beaverton, OR
Birmingham, AL
Blue Island, IL
Chandler, AZ
Charles City, IA
Cleveland, OH
Des Moines, IA
El Cerrito, CA
Fayetteville, AR
Fort Collins, CO
Houston, TX

Indianapolis, IN
Las Cruces, NM
Lee County, FL
Monroe County, FL
Palm Bay, FL
Park Forest, IL
Phoenix, AZ
Reading, PA
Riverside, CA
Rosemount, MN
San Antonio, TX
St. Louis, MO
Wichita, KS
Woodbridge Township, NJ

4-STAR COMMUNITIES

Twenty communities have attained 4-STAR Community Rating, accumulating between 400 and 599 points in the rating system. They include:

5 Trends | 50 STAR Certifications

Five key trends emerged from the results of the first fifty STAR certifications



STAR Certified Communities are action-driven

Communities received credit for implementing 9,023 local actions. Programs and services, such as recycling and volunteering initiatives, were the most commonly submitted and approved. Policies, codes, enforcement and incentive actions were also approved, but political will, staffing, and resource limitations made these actions less common. Most communities (65%) achieved certification based on approved action measures. On average, 43% of a total possible 408 action measures were approved and 36% of a total possible 108 outcome measures were approved. Over time, we expect communities to see the positive impact of their local actions through community-level outcomes, which will shift the proportion of points received from actions to outcomes.



Leadership support and a culture of sustainability positively impacts progress

High performers (high 4-STAR and 5-STAR Communities) are more likely to be tightly networked within their community and able to work across departments toward shared common goals. They seek opportunities to leverage community strengths to achieve the best outcomes for residents and businesses. Many high performers operate in a functional “can-do” climate. Their plans are intended to be not just visionary, but actionable. They dedicate resources and staff toward programs that address identified community needs.



The STAR Certification process inspires collaborative spirit

STAR certification requires communities to report their progress on national performance standards and clearly defined action measures, which can be performed by the local government or other community entities such as universities, civic groups, or the private sector. This process provides communities with direct feedback on how they measure across social, economic, and environmental areas. Many communities find inspiration as they consider the results of their certification report, and what they can do next. Often, a collaborative spirit grows through participation, enabling partnerships and bringing new advocates to the table.



Research and guidance on Equity and Empowerment is needed

Four STAR Objectives — Human Services, Equitable Services & Access, Environmental Justice, and Civil & Human Rights — continue to challenge cities and counties. Outcomes are difficult to achieve, in part because national standards for equity performance are still very new. EPA's new EJSCREEN Tool is a positive step for work on environmental justice, but generally more quantitative research is needed to inform the field of social justice and equity.



Many STAR Certified Communities have difficulty obtaining data

Two examples of content areas that challenge local leaders are Climate Adaptation and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Mitigation. Nationally standards are still being defined for vulnerability assessments. Indicator systems for resilience are also in process, and hopefully these systems will be robust and flexible so that they respond to local needs. While international standards for GHG mitigation are in place, many states and regions suffer from lack of data availability from external sources like utilities.

10 Impacts | 50 STAR Certifications

For many cities and counties, achieving a STAR Community Rating is just the first step. After celebrating the accomplishment of certification, most start to think about how to use the data they have gathered. Communities are using their STAR Certification to:

- 1 Integrate Metrics and Track Performance
- 2 Catalyze Local Action
- 3 Inform Local Decision Making
- 4 Strengthen Policies, Programs and Services
- 5 Make More Equitable Investments
- 6 Improve Regional Coordination
- 7 Build Buy-In and Support for Sustainability
- 8 Communicate Progress to the Public
- 9 Engage Philanthropy and Community Partners
- 10 Garner National Recognition

1. Integrate Metrics and Track Performance

Washington, DC



Washington, DC joined STAR as a beta and pilot community to test and provide input into the development of the rating system. Between 2011-2013, the District used STAR as a framework and technical resource during the development of the [Sustainable DC Plan](#), and then turned to tracking and measuring performance through STAR certification. In September 2014, Washington, DC received a Certified 4-STAR Community Rating. Using Sustainable DC as a foundation, and in partnership with community organizations and residents, the District has since focused on implementing strategies and programs to address areas of concern.

Every year, the District puts out an annual report to the community to report on progress. Many of the included metrics mirror outcomes and actions in the STAR Community Rating System. There is much progress to report! Since 2014, 80% of the 143 actions in the Sustainable DC Plan are underway, another 15% are complete, and 86% of actions in the Plan have been included in agency fiscal year performance plans. Moving forward, the District will add to their annual reporting efforts using the [Leading STAR Community Indicators](#).

2. Catalyze Local Action

Dubuque, IA

While performing the analysis for the Food Access & Nutrition objective within STAR's Health & Safety goal area, 4-STAR Dubuque identified two food deserts within the jurisdiction. To improve food access in these neighborhoods, city staff have partnered with the University of Dubuque to develop a research fellowship to expand the supply of locally grown fruits and vegetables. The fellow is coordinating two local CSA farms to set up stands in the food desert neighborhoods and is also working with the local hospital to look into the feasibility of a referral program where physicians give residents fresh produce tokens as part of their prescriptions.

3. Inform Local Decision Making

Cambridge, MA

Since certification in March 2016, 5-STAR Cambridge has already begun incorporating STAR metrics into their annual budget process to help demonstrate the impact of the City's work to the public. Using data to provide context to the City's many sustainability-related programs and initiatives helps to promote more detail-oriented and fact-based public discussion that can then contribute to local decision-making. The diversity of STAR's metrics will help city staff and policymakers better understand trends and opportunities for improvement. STAR metrics will also provide the public with a more comprehensive understanding of how the City's efforts across multiple disciplines contribute to sustainability in Cambridge.

4. Strengthen Policies, Programs, and Services

Fayetteville, AR

Since the City of Fayetteville received their 3-STAR certification in August 2014, they've been busy adopting new plans and ordinances to address gaps identified during the certification process. For example, the City has adopted an updated [Active Transportation Plan](#) and an [Invasive Species Plant Ordinance](#) that prohibits the planting of invasive species in new developments.

Fayetteville has also been expanding and strengthening sustainability-focused programs and services. The City partnered on a regional solar energy program with Ozarks Electric Company to help offset the energy use at the Fayetteville Regional Park. As part of the [Solid Waste Reduction, Diversion, and Recycling Master Plan](#), a food waste composting [pilot](#) has been approved through the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality.

5. Make More Equitable Investments

Cleveland, OH

Like most communities, STAR certification revealed that Equity & Empowerment was Cleveland's lowest scoring goal area. After receiving their 3-STAR Community Rating in June 2014, the City decided to assess strategies for integrating equity into urban sustainability. One key finding of the assessment is that equity needs to be front and center in all future planning efforts.

The [Cleveland Tree Plan](#) was one of the first plans adopted after the assessment. Cleveland was once nicknamed "The Forest City", but since 1940 the City has lost almost 100,000 public trees. Central to the vision of the Cleveland Tree Plan is that residents from every neighborhood in Cleveland will experience the many benefits of the urban forest, including increased resilience, health, prosperity, and overall quality of life. This process was the first opportunity to intentionally integrate equity into planning, especially with respect to where the City invests in future tree plantings.

In partnership with [Cleveland Neighborhood Progress](#), the City is also working on the Kresge Foundation-funded [Climate Resilience and Urban Opportunity Initiative](#). Cleveland's plan is centered on building climate resilience in four neighborhoods, each of which has a high percentage of low-income residents.

6. Improve Regional Coordination

Henderson and Las Vegas, NV

More than 2 million people reside in Southern Nevada, a region defined by the Mojave and Great Basin Deserts as well as the tourism, gaming, and convention industries that drive the local economy. STAR Certified cities, Henderson and Las Vegas, are committed to working together to find solutions to challenges such as resource consumption, job opportunity, housing and transportation choices, and the impacts of climate change.

While each city undertook the STAR certification process independently, they collaborated on data collection and engaged community partners, state agencies, local and regional governments, and private sector employers, underscoring the connected nature of sustainability. STAR helped both cities gather a baseline assessment of their social, economic, and environmental performance, while contributing to a better understanding of how the region is doing overall. Working together, the cities will be more resilient and able to respond to the needs of their growing population in the desert.

7. Build Buy-In and Support for Sustainability

Evanston, IL



Photo Credit: City of Evanston

Becoming a STAR Certified community has helped the City of Evanston talk about sustainability in a way that is easy to understand. It has also reenergized the City's [Strategic Plan](#), which set "creating the most livable city" as its adopted goal, and helped the City to identify sustainability strengths and areas for improvement.

Following its 4-STAR Certification, Evanston has incorporated STAR's seven goal areas into communications and education efforts as a powerful way to explain the key aspects of a sustainable and livable community. In December 2014, the City launched the Evanston Livability Academy to explore

each employee's role in making Evanston a more sustainable and livable community and to renew their shared enthusiasm toward supporting a high quality of life for all residents. All 800 full-time city staff were required to attend; employees from across all shifts and job functions, including police, fire, administrative staff, and water treatment plant operators, participated in the academy over a two-week period.

Feedback was so positive that the City followed up the original academy with a yearlong Livability Series in 2015 and 2016, where each month focused on one of the STAR goal areas. Staff from across the city were required to attend at least one session, which included interactive events, such as visits to local businesses, tours of City facilities, service learning projects, and round-table discussions. Evanston is also working on continuous improvement, focusing on [60 unique ideas](#) generated by staff from the Livability Academy.

8. Communicate Progress to the Public

Broward County, FL



Photo Credit: Paul Krashefski, Broward County

Broward County, FL became the first 4-STAR certified county in the nation in February 2014. Participating in STAR gave Broward County the ability to form deeper connections with partners, develop programs with cross-cutting themes that fully encapsulate co-benefits, and take on emerging issues with the support of a national network of peers.

What began as a way to demonstrate their leadership in sustainability and climate change planning quickly developed into a full-blown community building exercise. With a community of 1.8 million people, the Broward County assessment required participation by over 30 different county departments, local government agencies, and community partners to complete. By redefining sustainability through this broader lens, they were able to understand and celebrate their community's achievements better than they ever had before.

After their rating was achieved, the County launched a [4-STAR Broward](#) branding and marketing campaign to ensure that all partners were able to communicate each other's stories and successes with one voice.

9. Engage Philanthropy and Community Partners

Houston, TX

After receiving 3-STAR certification in April 2015, the City of Houston is better equipped to prioritize and move forward with sustainability and resilience planning. One strategy that the City has been considering is the development of a community climate action plan. City staff have reached out to local foundations, using their STAR certification results to explain the community's strengths, weaknesses, and gaps. Local funders are excited to see the City utilizing their data to create and inform the climate action plan.

City staff are also using the STAR certification results to engage diverse community groups and empower them to use the information gathered to mobilize members and organizations to improve community-wide sustainability. City staff emphasize that it's not just what the City is doing that counts, but also what the non-profit partners are doing to improve the quality of life for all Houstonians.

10. Garner National Recognition

Memphis-Shelby County, TN

Memphis and Shelby County, TN received their 4-STAR certification in February 2015 as part of a larger effort to develop and adopt the Mid-South Regional Greenprint and Sustainability Initiative, a 25-year plan to create 500 miles of greenway trails and 200 miles of bike paths. The Office of Sustainability saw STAR certification as a way to build on the success of the Greenprint effort, measure plan progress, and repurpose its supporting citizen group, the Sustainability Advisory Committee, who had struggled to find focus after the plan was adopted.

Memphis' sustainability work has since garnered national attention. In 2015, the [Mid-South Regional Greenprint Plan](#) was awarded the "Excellence in Sustainability" Award by the American Planning Association. Likewise, an effort to build out an interactive dashboard of sustainability indicators and metrics was a [Partners for Places](#) national grant recipient. This dashboard will use data collected for STAR to highlight gaps and demonstrate progress.



About STAR Communities

STAR Communities is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that works to evaluate, improve and certify sustainable communities. We were established to administer the STAR Community Rating System (STAR), the nation's leading sustainability framework and certification program. Built by and for local governments, STAR is a catalyst for local action and is transforming the way that communities address their social, economic and environmental progress.

STAR certification provides communities with a clear, data-driven approach to credibly and transparently track progress toward community-wide performance goals.

While hundreds of local governments are actively using the STAR framework to guide local planning, decision-making and investment, only 51 have completed the robust data collection and reporting efforts associated with certification.

In the coming year, STAR Communities will release Version 2.0 of the Rating System and an annual indicator program to track progress between certifications. We will also be conducting analysis and research to bolster the field of sustainability science and link community actions to sustainability outcomes. Finally, we are expanding post-certification support through reports and workshops to spur implementation efforts.

Join us as a STAR Member Community or an Affiliate partner and help us to set goals, measure progress, and improve your community!



“ STAR has reenergized and refocused Plano's sustainability program. Previously our efforts centered on recycling and diverting materials from the landfill. While these are important programs, sustainability requires a comprehensive approach. STAR provided the perfect template for inventorying and benchmarking our current efforts and charting a path for future action. We found STAR to be perfect in getting all city departments involved as well as many other community organizations.”

—Frank Turner, Deputy City Manager, City of Plano, TX



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