

Introduction to the Carnegie Elective Classification for Sustainability

April 2, 2026





Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Overview of the Carnegie Elective Classifications
- Sustainability Classification
- Why Apply: Motivation and Impact
- Application Timeline, Framework and Process
- Tips and Next Steps
- Q&A



Housekeeping

- Attendee microphones are muted to limit disruption
- Use chat to introduce yourself
- Use Q&A to ask and upvote questions
- Participate in the polls
- Recording will be sent to everyone who registered
- Thanks for being here!

Poll #1

How familiar are you with the Carnegie Elective Classifications?

What interests you about the Sustainability Classification?



Introductions



Amy Halvorson
Director for Sustainability
University of Colorado Boulder



Marisol Morales, EdD
Executive Director, Carnegie Elective Classifications
American Council on Education

CU Boulder's Role as Host Institution

Our Responsibilities

**Steward national framework
for sustainability**



**Lead rigorous and credible
review process**



**Cultivate diverse
communities of practice**



Carnegie Elective Classifications: What They Do

The Elective Classifications provide an independent and rigorous assessment of an institution's extraordinary commitment to, investment in, and accomplishment at an important aspect of its public purpose.

Community Engagement



2006

Leadership for Public Purpose



2024

Sustainability



2027

Elective Classification Values & Goals

Elective
Classifications of and
by the field: people-
centered, driven by
equity and collective
action

Push without pulling
along: balanced rigor



Increase participation,
transparency & field
learning

Understand and use
data: Who is
participating? Where
and how can we do
work better?

Recognizing exceptional sustainability commitment at higher education institutions



Purpose

- Elevate **sustainability leadership**
- Foster **communities of practice** to drive innovation in the field
- Advance **individualized** campus sustainability identities



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Approach

- Prestigious **recognition award**, applications accepted every 3 years, classification retained for 6 years
- Prioritizing institutional **diversity and inclusion**
- Launched in **partnership** between CU Boulder, American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation



Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of Teaching



Sustainability Definition

The Carnegie Foundation defines sustainability in higher education as a holistic approach to advancing environmental stewardship, economic resilience, and long-term well-being through interconnected academic, research, and operational initiatives. This involves preparing students to address climate challenges, promoting responsible resource management, and fostering innovation for a sustainable future.

Institutions pursue sustainability by reducing environmental impact, conducting research that offers practical solutions to global challenges, and collaborating with communities. These efforts are culturally, regionally, and contextually grounded and draw on diverse knowledge systems, including Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and practices to ensure the well-being of both current and future generations.

Sustainability Frameworks for Higher Education



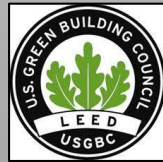
Institutional Sustainability Strategy

- *Sustainability Plan*
- *Climate Action Plan*
- *Campus as a Living Lab*

Commitment and Participation



Measurement and Certification



Ratings, Rankings, and Awards

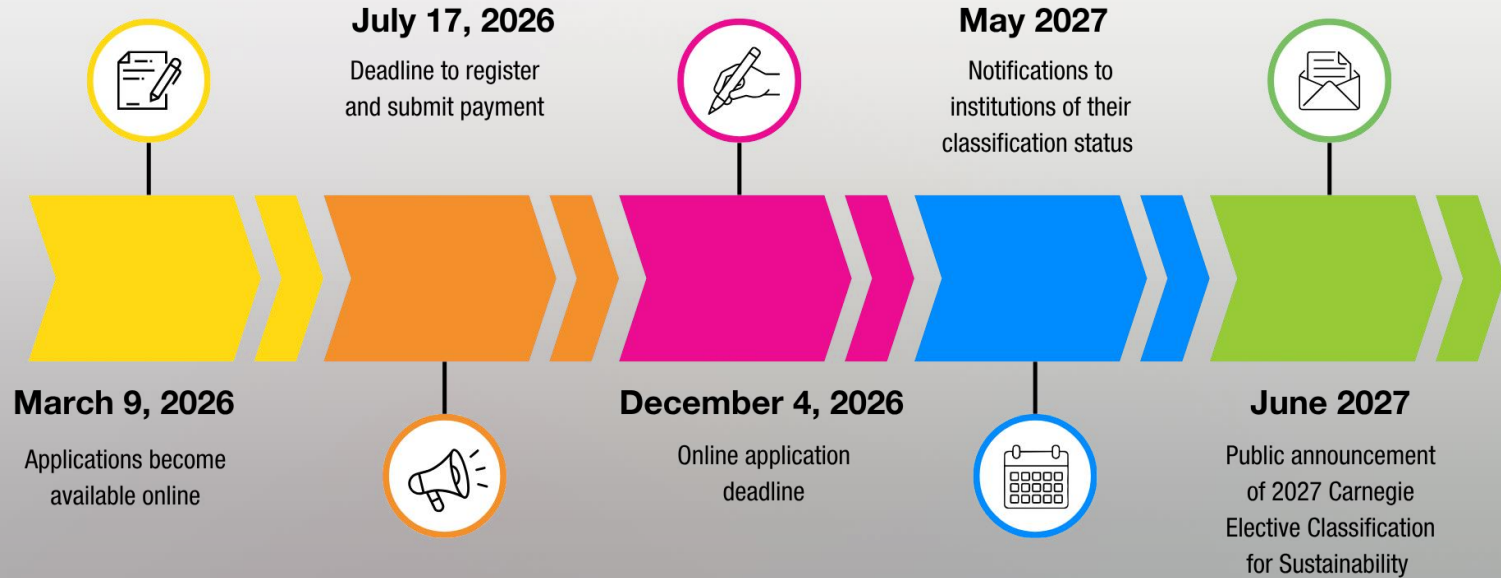
- QS World University Rankings
- Bee Campus USA
- Times Higher Education Sustainability Impact Rankings
- NACUFS Sustainability Awards
- Bicycle Friendly University
- Princeton Review: Top 50 Green Colleges
- UI GreenMetric
- Academic Ranking of World Universities
- Humane World for Animals
- Climate Luminary Honors
- EPEAT Purchaser Awards
- U.S. News and World Report
- Better Buildings Challenge
- ISCN Membership and Excellence Awards
- International Green Gown Awards
- Climate Registered Water Energy Leader
- ACUPCC Presidents Climate Commitment
- Net Impact Chapter of the Year
- Princeton Review: Green Rating
- AASHE Campus Sustainability Achievement Award
- Campus Race to Zero Waste
- Greenest University Restaurant
- Climate Registered Accelerator Hero

Why should my institution participate?

- Lead a rigorous self-study to establish priorities, strengthen campus community, and drive continuous improvement
- Elevate your institution's visibility to recruit students and attract donors
- Leverage a mixed methods approach to complement existing sustainability rating systems (e.g., AASHE STARS) through qualitative evidence and storytelling
- Showcase your holistic sustainability narrative to strengthen your institutional identity
- Engage and benefit from communities of practice across diverse institution types



2027 Carnegie Elective Classification for Sustainability Application Timeline



2027 Carnegie Sustainability Application Framework



Context Definition Ecosystem Model

- I. Campus Information
- II. Institutional Context and Definition
- III. Ecosystem Model for Collaborative Community Partnerships

Academics Research & Innovation Workforce Development & Career Preparation

- IV. Academic Integration of Sustainability
- V. Research & Innovation for Sustainability and Climate Solutions (Non-Community Colleges)
- VI. Workforce Development and Career Preparation
 - A. For Non-Community Colleges
 - B. For Community Colleges

Climate Action Plan Campus Infrastructure Resilience & Adaptation Reflection

- VII. Climate Action Plan
- VIII. Campus Infrastructure for Sustainability
- IX. Resilience and Adaptation
- X. Reflection and Additional Information

Data should
reflect AYs
2022-2023,
2023-2024,
2024-2025



Application Preparation Working Timeline

March 2026 to December 2026



Launch Process

- Identify campus partners and establish a team
- Explore where evidence is located
- Secure institutional buy-in and request resources

Plan and Gather Evidence

- Kick off meetings to strategize application approach
- Assign data collection and gather evidence
- Begin identifying potential gaps and how to address

Write, Write, Write!

- Finalize evidence
- Draft application sections
- Incorporate stakeholder feedback
- Ensure clarity, cohesion and alignment

Submit Application

- Review final draft
- Submit for institutional approval
- Submit application by December 4, 2026
- Plan for next steps

Tiered Review Process

Tier 2 Reviewers

Tier 2 reviewers are individuals who have had extensive experience in reviewing applications in the past and review applications that Tier 1 reviewers determined needed further review. Tier 2 can make recommendations to classify, not classify, or need further review.

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Timeline (may be adjusted):

- August 2026 – Call for reviewers and graduate student fellows
- September 2026 – Applications due
- October 2026 – Reviewers and graduate fellows notified
- January-February 2027 – Training for reviewers
- February-May 2027 – Tier 1, 2, and 3 reviews



Tier 3 Reviewers

Tier 3 is made up of Carnegie Electives staff. Final review of applications from Tier 2 are made by Tier 3 reviewers.

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Tier 1 Reviewers

Peer review teams made up of 4-5 reviewers who review 8-10 applications and make a recommendation to classify, not classify, or move on to further review. Reviewers need to come to consensus. Reviewer teams are supported by a graduate student fellow.

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Poll #2

Is your institution planning to apply for the Sustainability Classification?



First Steps



- Convene cross-unit exploratory group
- Brief leadership on how Sustainability Classification connects to campus mission and request support/resources
- Take stock of current sustainability work—start with one section and map what data is available
- Note upcoming deadlines

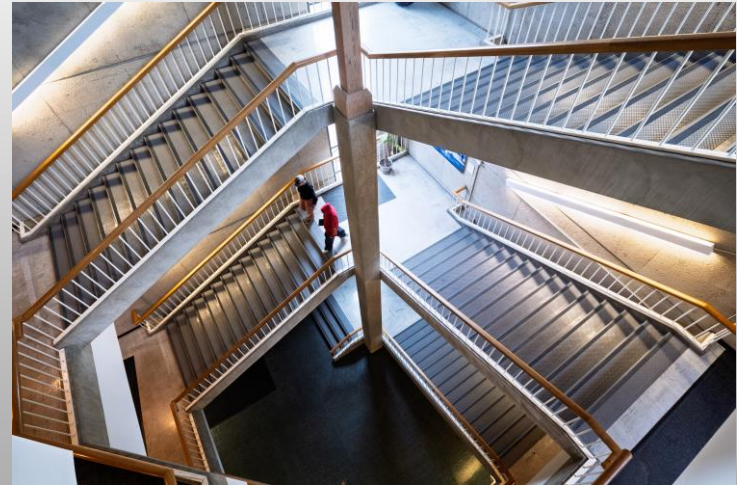
Trust the Process

- No application is expected to be perfect
- The value is in the reflection, not just the designation
- The self-study highlights your institution's unique context
- Progress and learning are important



Staying Connected and Building Capacity

- Download the [application & guidebook](#) from our site
- Sign up for our [mailing list](#)
- Register for upcoming [webinars](#)
 - Next up: “Setting Your Campus Up for Success” on Thursday, April 30th 1:00-2:00 pm MT
- Attend our [office hours](#)
- Stay tuned for announcements about communities of practice, coaching, and more!



Q&A



Poll #3

What are your next steps?





[www.colorado.edu/sustainability/
carnegie-elective-classification-
sustainability](http://www.colorado.edu/sustainability/carnegie-elective-classification-sustainability)

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Appendix



Carnegie Foundation



Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of Teaching

The mission of the Carnegie Foundation is to catalyze transformational change in education so that every student has the opportunity to live a healthy, dignified, and fulfilling life.

120 Years of Impact in Education

Our Legacy [▶](#)

1906

Carnegie Foundation is chartered by Congress

1918

TIAA_CREF (TIAA) Pension Fund established

1937

Graduate Record Examination (GRE) developed

1947

Educational Testing Service (ETS) launches

1968

Research supports creation of federal Pell Grant Program

1971

Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education

2022

High School Transformation

2025

Opportunity Colleges and Universities (OCUs)

Driven by the Field

2025 Pilot Cohort

- Facilitated by American Council on Education
- 20 campus participants
- 6 observer campuses
- 47 individual participants
- 65+ group meeting hours
- 50+ recommendations to strengthen the application



National Advisory Committee

- 19 members
- R1 universities, community colleges, Minority Serving Institutions, colleges in rural areas, and higher ed associations
- Meet 4x per year
- Advise on classification framework and tools
- Inform review criteria and processes
- Secondary review of applications
- Identify barriers to institutional participation and propose strategies for inclusion
- Serve as ambassadors to the field