



TRACE Scoring Pilot Report

350 Pittsburgh
March 2024

Executive Summary

Southwestern Pennsylvania’s large institutions have a clear responsibility to lead the region’s journey to a carbon-free future. In particular, our region’s higher education institutions are a cornerstone of regional economic transformation and are molding the next generation of citizens. In 2022, 350 Pittsburgh began the development of the Three Rivers Assessment of Carbon Emissions (TRACE) to connect those schools’ own efforts towards carbon neutrality with the larger community.

Since we knew that a new scorecard like TRACE would require careful and thorough work to assure that it was meaningful, clear, and objective, we started a pilot effort to create and validate the scorecard with a few schools before scoring all 10 Higher Education Climate Consortium (HECC) schools. This report summarizes the results of that pilot for three HECC schools—Carnegie Mellon University, University of Pittsburgh, and Robert Morris University—and Middlebury College in Vermont.

We greatly appreciate the engagement of students and administration at each of the four schools. Without them, the pilot could not have happened. No school achieved a perfect score—leaving them all with areas to improve. Some schools are earlier in their journey to carbon neutrality and some have fewer resources to make the shift. Our main purpose is not to compare schools to one another but to encourage them all to move farther, faster.

This report summarizes the process and results of the pilot.

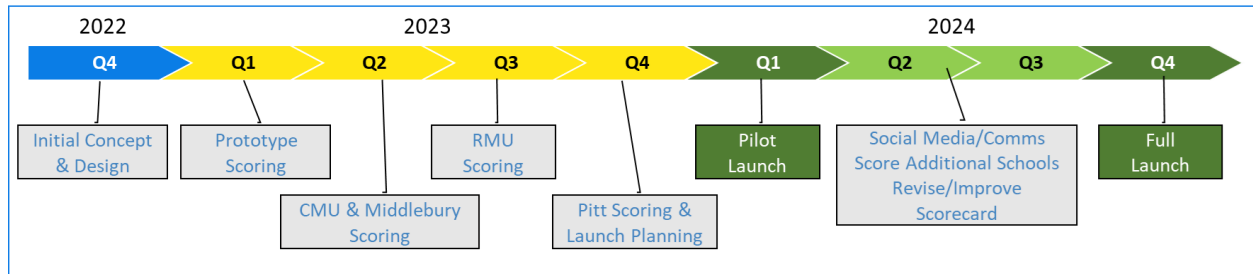
Pilot Overview

In 2022, 350 Pittsburgh developed a preliminary scorecard prototype with a goal to test both the scorecard and the scoring process prior to a full launch. Beginning in early 2023, we worked with students to score their own schools. Sustainability leaders at the four schools were

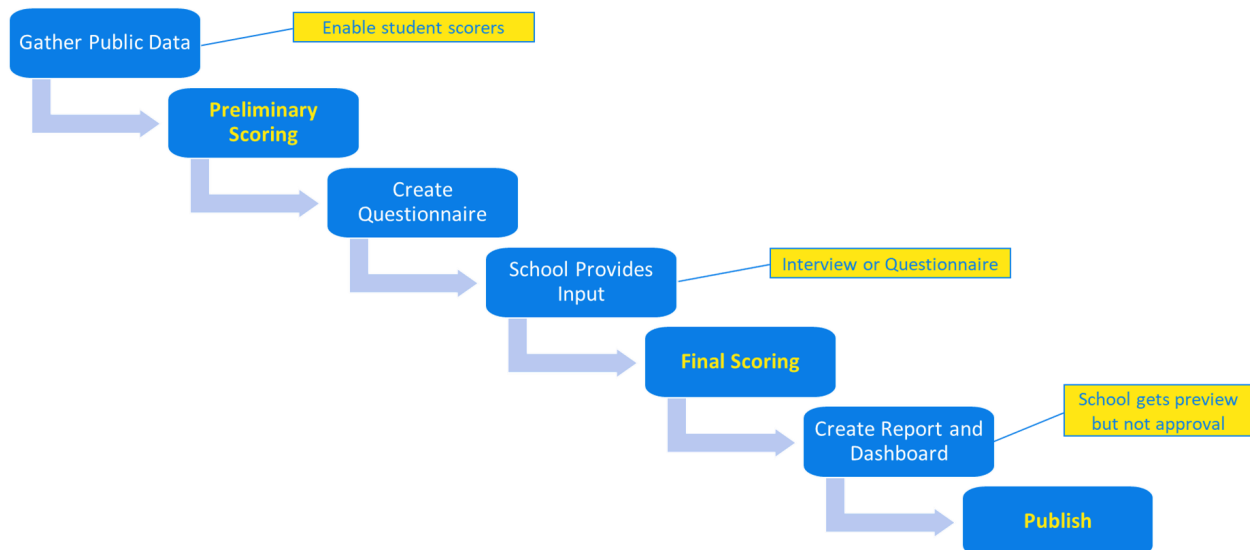




engaged to provide feedback to the student scorers and to 350 Pittsburgh. Through an iterative process, we completed scoring and refined the scorecard based on learnings and challenges discovered during the scoring process. Pilot scoring was completed in February 2024. The pilot timeline and process are shown in more detail below.



Pilot Timeline



Pilot Scoring Process

Each of the four schools had at least one member of administration engaged, providing information and feedback during the process.

Middlebury College, while not in the region, is a leader in climate change action and is the academic homebase for 350.org founder Bill McKibben, one of the foremost global climate change voices. We chose to include them in the pilot to provide a benchmark of what is possible.

Results

The criteria for the scorecard are described in the TRACE White Paper on the TRACE website. The detailed results for each school are provided in the individual school reports. In this section, we describe the overall results of the pilot. A summary table of the scoring is shown below. This



summary table is not intended to rank the schools against each other. Each school's circumstances, resources, and history are different: a ranking would be unfair. That said, each school individually has opportunities to improve on their current results.

- All of the pilot schools have room for improvement in **transparency**. They vary in the amount of public information they provide but all could do better in organizing and presenting their data in a way that it is easily accessible and understandable to the general public and institutions outside their walls.
- They can also all improve in **regional leadership**. Because of their high visibility in the region, activities that they undertake to both publicize their actions and results and their engagement with other institutions and community organizations have a significant impact on the regional momentum towards carbon neutrality.
- No school is doing well in reporting on their **financing and funding**. The scorecard assesses the schools' goals and progress toward eliminating fossil fuel related funding in their endowments, donations, research and other funding. They simply do not make this information available.
- The pilot schools are doing well in adapting their **curricula** to train the leaders of the future. Each school has degrees, certificates, and courses addressing various aspects of climate change. They could do better in **enabling student efforts** at the university itself. In some cases, environmentally oriented student groups are not well supported and have little access to school administration and leadership. We found that the simple act of having our student scorers contact administration to validate scoring improved the relationship between students and administration.
- The larger and most advanced schools, CMU and Pitt, are far along in their journey to **carbon reduction in university operations** but have a long way to go to achieve neutrality. As they get closer to their goals, improvements will get harder. In general, we are skeptical that they will achieve their carbon neutrality goals by their commitment dates without accelerated effort and investment.
- Robert Morris University is just beginning its journey to carbon neutrality and must set up **basic structures, plans, and resources** to achieve results. We ask that RMU's new president make this a major priority for RMU.

The other HECC schools who were not part of the pilot are missing because we were unable to identify student groups or individual students to take on the scoring project. Our great hope is that this pilot will help identify students who are motivated to drive scoring at their own schools for the full TRACE launch at year end 2024.

Interpreting the Scorecard

As described in the TRACE White Paper, the scoring framework assigns a total of 500 points across five categories. Each category has one to five attributes with individual scores. Based on these scores, a point total is computed and a letter grade is assigned from the point total. The letter grades are a straight scale, e.g., 401-500 = "A", 301-400="B", etc. Each school report provides the scores achieved in each category as well as the total score. They are summarized in the chart below. The category scores shown are the percentage of points awarded to the school in that category. Because the categories are not equally weighted, the total score (shown below the letter grade) is not the total of the individual percentages. The category color codes



are also a straight scale with 100-91 in dark green, 90-81 in light green, etc. The overall color corresponds to the letter grade with “A” in dark green, etc.

Summary Results

		Commitments and Execution	Structures and Plans	Transparency	Education and Research	Regional Leadership	
Carnegie Mellon University	B 375	67	75	75	67	100	
University of Pittsburgh	B 327	42	100	75	55	63	
Robert Morris University	D 133	0	33	0	83	50	Excellent
INCOMPLETE	I NA	Carlow University, Chatham University, Community College of Allegheny County, Duquesne University, La Roche University, Penn State Center Pittsburgh, Point Park University					Strong
Middlebury College (Benchmark)	A 409	75	100	75	100	62	Beginning
							Improvement Needed

Category scores in percentage

Future Plans

As we move toward the full launch at the end of 2024, we will adapt to the key learnings from the pilot. Student engagement is critical and valuable for the process, the students, and administration. Our next step is to recruit student scorers at the “incomplete” schools. We plan to make improvements to the scorecard and scoring process as we score the remaining schools during 2024. As the scorecard evolves and schools take greater action, we will update the scores of the pilot schools. We plan to publish the full TRACE results for all ten HECC schools by the end of 2024.

For More Information

The 350 Pittsburgh website, <https://world.350.org/pittsburgh/TRACE/>, provides full information on the TRACE including a TRACE whitepaper, the individual pilot school reports, an FAQ, and other news and information about TRACE.

You can also follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and X. See the website for details.



About 350 Pittsburgh

350 Pittsburgh was founded in Spring 2015 by local environmental activists to build on the momentum of the 2014 People's Climate March and form a Pittsburgh group dedicated to climate issues. We envision a future where policies and actions at the local, state, federal and international levels will have ensured a stable climate that provides an opportunity for all people to achieve health, prosperity and fulfillment.

Through public education and collaborative civic activism, 350 Pittsburgh:

- Promotes understanding of the devastating impact of climate change on the urban and rural communities in our region and elsewhere.
- Demands that the region's decision makers take all possible steps to help diminish climate disruption by ending our reliance on fossil fuels and investing in good jobs in a renewable energy economy.
- Encourages people in our region to become actively involved in the urgent struggle to reverse catastrophic climate change.

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