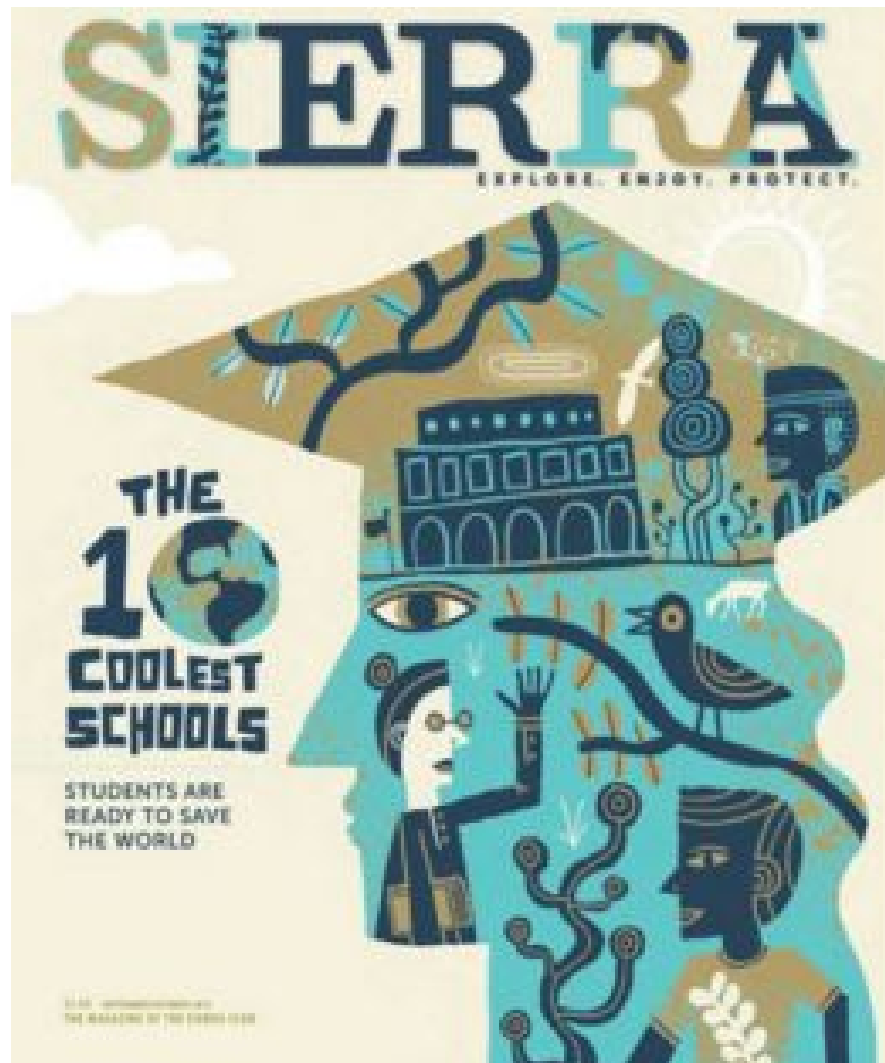**Request for Proposals:**
Data Management for *Sierra* magazine's annual Cool Schools Ranking

January, 2016

Overview

Sierra—the national magazine of the Sierra Club, the nation's largest grassroots environmental organization—seeks a data analysis firm to manage our annual Cool Schools ranking. Now in its tenth year, the Cool Schools ranking is an ordered list of America's greenest colleges and universities, as measured by campus sustainability programs and curricula. Each year, our ranking reaches more than 1 million print and online readers, and the editorial package draws national media attention from outlets such as the *New York Times*, CNN, NPR, and many others.

Project Summary

In 2015, 153 colleges and universities provided information for our ranking. Institutions submit their raw data through an established portal managed by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), called STARS. (see: https://stars.aashe.org/). Much of that data is then migrated into a custom scoring system designed to reflect Sierra Club's priorities. In 2015, our 1,000-point scoring key judged schools on approximately 70 different measurements. (see: http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/cool-schools-scoring-key-2015) In 2015, we published short profiles of the top ten schools; published in print the ranking of the top 100 schools; and posted online the ranking of all 153 participating schools, along with each school's full set of submitted data.

To ensure total confidence in our rankings, *Sierra* seeks to contract with an outside firm to manage data migration and scoring for 2016. This independent third party will oversee the transformation of raw data into a numerical ranking, including the development of a refreshed scoring tool based on sustainability priorities identified by *Sierra*. This firm will also be on-hand to consult with *Sierra* on questions or concerns from participating colleges and universities leading up to and immediately after the release of the ranking.

This project will include (but is not limited to) the following tasks:

1. Review our existing Excel-based scoring formulas (to be provided by *Sierra* magazine staff).
2. Revise existing scoring formulas to conform to the Sierra Club's updated scoring goals for 2016 (to be provided by *Sierra* magazine staff).
3. Improve existing formulas to weed out any potential for calculation errors.
4. Conduct, and ensure accuracy of, data migration from the AASHE STARS system to our customized scoring tool.
5. Run the tool and calculate each school's score.

6. For fact-checking purposes, hand-score a representative sample of schools to ensure accuracy, and/or perform other tests to ensure data integrity.
7. Be available to help *Sierra* staff respond to questions from participating schools before, during, and after the data collection process, and also after the ranking is published.

Goals

In 2015, errors in scoring forced *Sierra* magazine to run a significant correction to our rankings, which undermined the credibility of our brand. By hiring an outside firm, we hope to give participating colleges and universities full confidence in the accuracy and credibility of our rankings. We intend for the 10th Anniversary of the Cool Schools Ranking to make the biggest splash yet, and seek to develop a lasting, multi-year methodology that can carry the Rankings forward.

Project Timeline

Our annual Cool Schools ranking publishes in *Sierra*'s September/October issue. To hit our production schedule, the bulk of the work on this project must be conducted in spring 2016.

- **Early March:** Firm reviews and revises scoring formulas.
- **March 22:** Deadline for colleges and universities to submit information via AASHE's STARS data collector.
- **April:** Scoring calculations conducted.
- **May 15:** Deadline for Firm to deliver to *Sierra* editorial staff the completed (and fact-checked) ranking of all participating institutions.
- **Throughout, including mid-August - late September:** Firm must be available to address questions and concerns from participating institutions, via a Sierra spokesperson.

Qualifications & Basis for Award of Contract

In selecting a firm for this project, we will be considering several criteria.

- Experience managing complex data analysis.
- Expert knowledge of Excel or equivalent programs.
- Experience in creating methodologies for data set analysis: Taking criteria and formulating complex ranking systems and the data tools necessary to calculate products.

- Experience working with nonprofit organizations.
- Proven track record of credibility.
- Knowledge of fact-checking procedures and zero-tolerance for errors.
- Ability to assist *Sierra* staff in responding to queries and requests for clarification from participating colleges and universities.
- Proposed cost of project

Submission Deadline

Responses to this RFP are **due no later than Monday, February 8** and will be reviewed on a rolling basis. The contract will be awarded no later than March 1.

Contact

Please direct all responses or questions related to this RFP to:

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