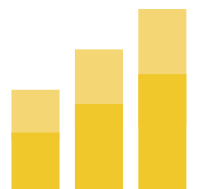




GRITS

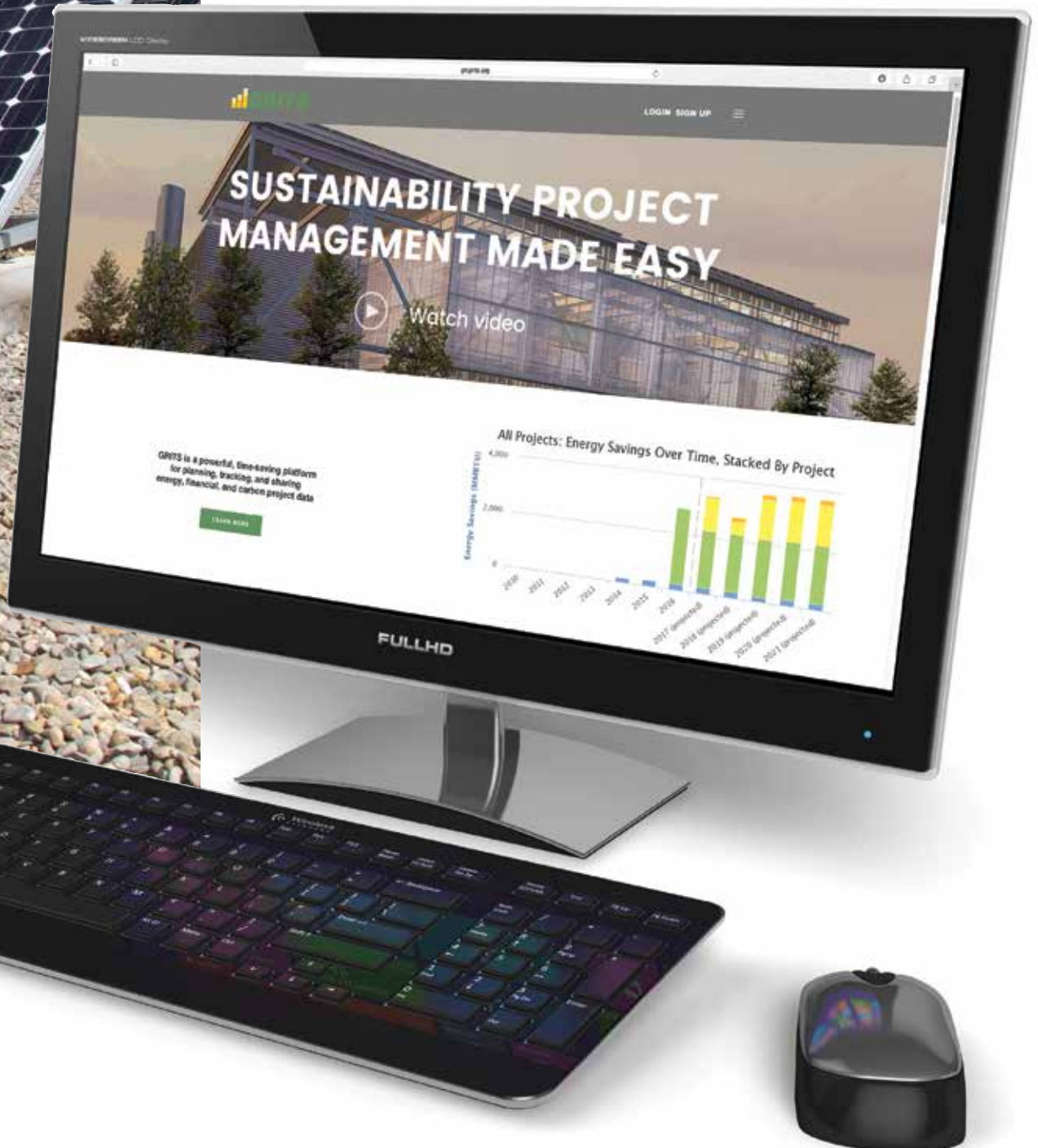
Making Energy-Efficiency Projects Easier
and More Collaborative

By Mark Orłowski and Aaron Karp





Today, more than 300 APPA member institutions are taking advantage of an innovative web platform for tracking project-level energy, financial, and carbon-savings data. Thanks to a partnership between APPA and the Sustainable Endowments Institute, APPA members have been able to access the **Green Revolving Investment Tracking System (GRITS)** tool for free, including the GRITS Library of more than 2,000 completed projects. In large part thanks to APPA members, the number of projects in the GRITS Library has grown by 700 percent over the past two years.





GRITS is used by a variety of administrators and staff at universities and other nonprofits in all 50 U.S. states and seven Canadian provinces. Facilities managers, energy engineers, sustainability coordinators, chief financial officers (CFOs), students, and other stakeholders are all tapping into GRITS to collaborate in pursuit of more resource-efficient operations.

For many GRITS users, the most important benefit is the increased spotlight on project successes. Unlike traditional tracking mechanisms, GRITS' intuitive user interface allows diverse stakeholders to work together and come to understand the tangible benefits of projects without the need for a technical background. "You manage what you measure, and GRITS offers us a convenient tool to evaluate and share the carbon and cost benefits of our portfolio of projects," writes John Pumilio, director of sustainability at Colgate University, in a recent email.

FUNCTIONS AND FEATURES

Since GRITS 1.0 was launched three years ago, the platform has grown significantly in terms of users and available features. Over that time, GRITS has continued to meet the needs of users across a range of cases. If your institution hasn't taken advantage of its free GRITS access as an APPA member benefit, or if you have not logged in recently, here's how GRITS supports resource-conservation work:

- The cloud-based platform allows all project data to be kept in one place and accessible from anywhere through a secure password-protected account system.
- Provides different levels of access to users including editor and read-only privileges.
- A dashboard displaying the amount of capital invested in projects and the amount saved from past projects for each fiscal year.
- Automatic calculation of a wide range of financial metrics for both proposed and completed projects including return on in-

vestment (ROI), internal rate of return (IRR), net present value (NPV), and payback period.

- Automatic calculation of each project's carbon savings and overall carbon savings achieved by your entire project portfolio.
- Enter proposed projects, view their anticipated impact, and create a portfolio of proposals for campus or climate-action planning.
- Bulk-upload projects via a provided spreadsheet template to save even more time.
- Tap into the GRITS Library of more than 2,000 already-completed projects at other institutions for project ideas and benchmarking.
- Generate project PDFs that contain various measures of your project's impact to share with the campus community or as part of a presentation to financial decision makers.

The newly launched GoGrits website includes a full description of the features and benefits of the platform.

GRITS 1.7

With the recent release of GRITS 1.7, we focused on developing new features that enable users to better customize the tool's functionality to their needs. Highlights include:

- Institutions that generate their own electricity, steam, or chilled water can now create custom carbon emissions factors for these resources and apply them to projects, either individually or as a group.
- Users can create custom resource-price scenarios to show how resource prices and financial savings would change under a given escalator rate or a fixed price over multiple years.
- GRITS can now group individual buildings/facilities into campuses.
- The addition of campuses is enhanced by another new feature, geolocation, which allows GRITS to find facilities and campuses on a map via an integration with Google Maps.

- A new affiliations filter has been added to the GRITS Library, which allows a user to find projects at other institutions that are part of the same network or association. For example,

GRITS by the Numbers

- 300 institutions accessing GRITS through SEI's partnership with APPA
- 1,045 completed projects entered (for which there is complete data)
- Total-to-date financial savings: \$58 million
- Total-to-date energy savings: 3.3 million MMBTUs
- Total-to-date emissions savings: 415,000 metric tons CO₂e
- Total project investment: \$96 million
- Median annual financial savings: \$3,300
- Median payback period: 2.7 years
- Median annual return on investment: 27.1%

APPA member institutions are able to filter projects completed only by other APPA members. Options for the Climate Leadership Network (an initiative of Second Nature) and for institutions with a green revolving fund have also been added.

- Users can now upload a cover photo for each project to illustrate the work being undertaken.
- A new live-chat feature has been added to GRITS. Just click the yellow “contact us” bar in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen, and a GRITS staff member will be available to answer questions in real-time, weekdays during business hours. At all other times, the chat bar is a convenient way to submit a question; and we’ll respond the next business day.

Many of the new GRITS 1.7 features were conceived thanks to helpful user feedback. We’re always working to make GRITS better and a significant portion of the development ideas that eventually become a new GRITS feature were originally suggested by users.

LOOKING AHEAD

So what’s on deck for additional new GRITS features? Over the next few months, we will be developing an API (application programming interface) connection with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Portfolio Manager, which will allow for instant data exchange between the two platforms.

Portfolio Manager is a free tool that many institutions use to track changes in energy use across a variety of buildings. Integrating it with GRITS will combine project-level tracking with the bigger picture of changing resource consumption from a baseline in a group of buildings, and ensure that common data points will only need to be entered once. For example, if an institution has 50 buildings being tracked in Portfolio Manager, a user will be able to instantly transfer all of the relevant data from all 50 buildings into GRITS instantly.

Another feature in development will allow users to easily share GRITS project data publicly. While GRITS currently offers charts and graphs that can easily be exported, as well as rendered in PDF reports for individual

projects, this new feature will allow users to implement automatically updating dashboard type functionality. For institutions that want to more widely communicate the energy, financial, and carbon-savings impact of their projects, the new dashboard capability will allow for easy public display of GRITS data in real time on an existing facilities or sustainability office website.

As the GRITS user community continues to grow rapidly, we have recently begun reaching out to individual users to offer a personal screen-share walkthrough to help those who haven’t logged in recently get up to speed with the newest GRITS features.

If you would like to activate your institution’s free GRITS access through the APPA partnership or to schedule a GRITS tour, please email support@gogrifs.org. ☎

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