

Minnesota **GreenStep**

Gold Leaf Program

An expansion for the Minnesota GreenStep Cities and Tribal Nations programs to challenge, assist, and recognize local climate action.

September 2022

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Executive Summary

In its [2020 Strategic Plan](#), the GreenStep Cities steering committee outlined several visions and goals for the future of the program, as recommended by GreenStep participant feedback. One high priority identified by the GreenStep partners and participants identified climate response. The GreenStep Cities program has one Best Practice specifically addressing Climate ([Best Practice 29, Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience](#)), along with many other program actions that address greenhouse gas reductions, adaptation, and community education [across the 29 best practices](#). However, there is a need to highlight and elevate specific actions to clearly define pathways for local governments to take climate action through the GreenStep program. These pathways should be relevant to climate change specifically in Minnesota rather than climate change as a broad topic. The Gold Leaf program identifies the pathways that are most applicable to Minnesota and its goals by cross-referencing actions with the State’s [Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory](#) and [Climate Action Framework](#).

GreenStep has expanded several times since its conception, adding to its program, for example, new Best Practices, additional steps, and even incorporating a pilot program for Tribal Nations to participate. Based on the interest of program participants and the visions shared by the state, we believe adding a climate action component to the existing GreenStep Cities program is the most appropriate step forward.

A climate action program through GreenStep will also help address the concerning climate trends in Minnesota. Temperatures are warming, especially during winter. Summers are becoming drier while precipitation events become more severe. Our natural environment is increasingly unreliable for migratory animals, birds, pollinators, and, indeed, us. Local governments are already seeing these impacts in their communities. Cities, tribal nations, and other governmental units are at the vanguard for climate action. However, there is still an unfilled niche or support for a climate action program specifically for local governments.

An advisory committee and other stakeholders worked to develop such a program. The program has taken the shape of a nature-themed “badge”, in which participants of the program would receive a “leaf” token of achievement for completing any of the selected [43 climate actions](#) under the categories of mitigation, planning, adaptation, and community. Once a participant receives a gold leaf, it can be displayed on a tree model or online image to showcase a community’s climate efforts. The climate action program differs from original GreenStep “Steps” in that these high-priority, high-impact actions are designed to be SMART (Figure 1).

This document describes the process of crafting a framework for this program and outlines the recommendations to begin a pilot program.



Figure 1: SMART actions are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.

Background

The [GreenStep Cities program](#) (“GreenStep”) is a voluntary challenge, assistance, and recognition program that helps cities achieve their sustainability and quality of life goals. The development of the program began in 2007 when the Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) held regional listening sessions around Minnesota to discuss the State’s [Next Generation Energy Act of 2007](#) and opportunities for community-based energy projects. The idea for a locally-focused sustainability program came from these listening sessions, a [report](#) was provided to the Minnesota Legislature, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), the Minnesota Department of Commerce, and CERTs were directed develop a voluntary program. In 2010, this initiative became the GreenStep Cities program, managed by a public-private partnership that includes State agencies, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions. In 2014, GreenStep expanded to pilot a program for [Tribal Nations](#).



Figure 2: The five steps of GreenStep Cities and Tribal Nations.

GreenStep offers a set of [29 Best Practices](#) across five categories: building and lighting, land use, transportation, environmental management, and resilient economic and community development. Each Best Practice includes four to eight actions that a community can take; each action can be completed at a 1, 2, or 3-star level depending on the scope and scale of the action taken.

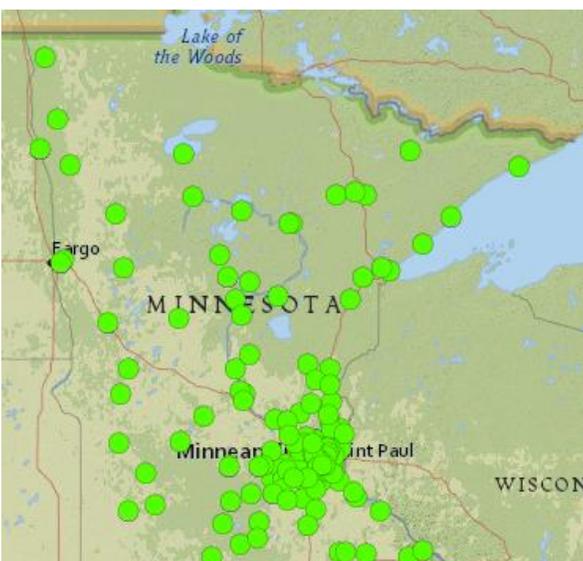


Figure 3: A map of Minnesota GreenStep communities.

Communities demonstrate progress in the program as they advance through five steps (Figure 2). To achieve Step 1, communities adopt a resolution to enter the program. Steps 2 and 3 allow communities to report and track actions they have already taken and additional actions they take while participating in the program. Steps 4 and 5 ask communities to enter various metrics and demonstrate progress each year, respectively.

At present, [143 cities and 4 pilot tribal nations](#) participate in the GreenStep programs. Over 52% of Minnesota’s population lives in a GreenStep city or tribal nation (Figure 3).

Context

Preparing for its [2020 Strategic Plan](#), the GreenStep Cities Steering Committee asked participants what they needed from GreenStep and its partners in order to continue reaching their sustainability and quality-of-life goals. One emergent need is for climate response through a more concentrated focus on mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and community education. To satisfy this need and continue to challenge, assist, and recognize communities, the GreenStep program must expand to provide the tools, resources, support, and motivation for communities interested in addressing climate change. GreenStep applied for a [Minnesota GreenCorps](#) member to help develop a program to meet these burgeoning needs. The GreenCorps member assisted in program development from September 2021 to August 2022.

One primary goal of creating GreenStep after the Next Generation Energy Act was to help local governments reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, to make the program more accessible to all communities, the focus of GreenStep’s language shifted from climate change to sustainability and quality-of-life. Public support has risen for the climate change movement in recent years. To reflect this change of attitude, GreenStep has the opportunity to build into its program a tool of support and recognition for communities addressing climate change.

At the time of this proposal, the state has released its [Climate Action Framework](#), an initiative under [Executive Order 19-37](#), to provide guidance on how the state can meet its Next Generation Energy Act goals and enhance the climate resilience of Minnesota’s natural resources, working lands, and communities. While some actions listed in the framework are specific to state abilities, many can be achieved by supporting local governments in climate action (see [Appendix B](#)). GreenStep is a trusted program with existing program participants, partnerships, and connections, which provides a pathway and the resource for the state to work with local governments in tandem toward climate action. It is important to work specifically with cities because [approximately 75% of all carbon emissions come from cities \(Greenhouse Gas Protocol, 2021\)](#). This puts local governments in a prime position to take action toward reducing those emissions and increasing climate resilience.

Process

Project planning began in September 2021. Research topics included global and local climate change causes and effects, successful climate action programs on both national and international levels, Minnesota community interests and values, and more. Stakeholders were first engaged in December 2021.



Goals

One of the first steps during the project development phase was to identify goals to help guide the decision-making process.

- **Accessible and attainable for any community.** Factors such as size, number of city staff, or amount of financial or technical support should not act as barriers for cities to participate. The selected framework for this program should be able to accommodate whatever capacity a community is able to work within.
- **Participation is voluntary.** In alignment with GreenStep values, communities should join voluntarily. GreenStep has always been and will continue to be non-regulatory. There should be no pressure for communities to join if uninterested, and participants should not be made to feel that joining this program is the only way in which they can advance through GreenStep.
- **Challenges participants to improve.** GreenStep has always provided a means for communities to push themselves. It clearly defines goals, provides pathways to accomplish those goals, and lets communities choose which goals they're interested in accomplishing. Climate action through GreenStep should continue to challenge participants to meet their goals and create new ones that are manageable, ambitious, and realistic.
- **Assists participants with resources.** The resources that communities require to meet their climate action goals should not be a barrier. GreenStep should be able to assist communities with identifying and procuring the resources necessary to take action.
- **Leads to action that addresses climate change.** Action must be specific to climate change, rather than sustainability as a whole. While GreenStep values all efforts to increase sustainability and quality-of-life, this program will specifically emphasize and promote climate change action to reflect the importance of climate action.
- **Promotes transparent reporting of actions and outcomes.** Communities should be able to use this program to hold themselves accountable and report in a way that informs and inspires others. It should provide a resource with which a city can look back on its climate action journey. Through sharing, this program will also build momentum and become a resource for other cities looking to take action.
- **Re-engages Step 5 communities.** Upon reaching Step 5, communities have no program-provided incentive to continue to report actions. GreenStep only provides Step 5 communities formal recognition for reporting metrics. This climate program should reintegrate formal recognition and support for taking action.
- **Publicly recognizes participants.** According to feedback, public recognition is one of the biggest motivators for communities to participate in GreenStep. Adding a recognition component to this program would likely provide motivation as well.

Interests

GreenStep hosted a series of meetings in 2021-2022 to gauge interest from communities, partners, and technical assistance providers. These meetings consisted of both informational presentations and idea facilitation sessions. Represented at these meetings were state agencies, GreenCorps members, private businesses, sustainability nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and city staff. This working group came to be known as the GreenStep Climate Program Advisory Committee (“the advisory committee”) and met on average every three weeks. Common concerns and interests included:



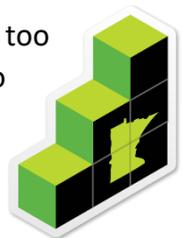
- **Financial incentives.** Advisory committee members, especially from state agencies and nonprofit organizations, expressed that local governments would not be interested in completing high level actions without financial incentive, or would not be able to complete actions without financial support through grants.
- **Technical assistance.** Rather than financial assistance, many city staff and other city representatives desired technical assistance, reporting that even if they do have the finances to complete actions, they may not have the staff or training to do so.
- **Maintaining simplicity in GreenStep.** Some advisory committee members cautioned that complicating the GreenStep program further will repel potential participants.
- **Emphasis on action over planning.** Staff from state agencies and nonprofits continuously asserted that it is past the time for climate action planning efforts to address the effects of climate change (through policies, ordinances, reports, etc.), and planning efforts are not as effective as they were previously. Rather, actions need to be focused on measurable or observable results.
- **Community leaders and youths.** Advisory committee members identified as having a local leader to champion climate action in their community is a major determinant of the success a local government has in participating in climate action. When organized, another major proponent of climate action is dedicated students pressuring and encouraging their local governments to address climate change.
- **Capacity of smaller communities.** Often there was concern for how accessible this program and its actions would be for communities with less city staff, resources, or greater political barriers. These communities tend to be with lower populations and/or located in greater Minnesota (although cities of all sizes and location struggle with capacity). While developing this program, we endeavored to find a balance between only including actionable options and reducing requirements to meet all cities where they are at.
- **Language.** A goal of this project was to have actions that can be repeated in order to receive recertification status. GreenStep regional coordinators indicated that such language would be intimidating. This language was eliminated from outward presenting materials. Some advisory

committee members criticized some frameworks as not appropriately reflecting the urgency and gravity of climate change. We endeavored to develop a program that had a friendly, approachable presentation, but also didn't downplay the seriousness of climate change. We also tried not to use language that asserted that climate change is an imminent threat to cities or utilize "doom speech." We present climate change as a serious issue here; however, we recognize that not all communities have climate goals.

- **Bias toward climate mitigation.** Many advisory committee members pointed out that the early stages of program development showed a bias toward carbon emission reduction ("climate mitigation") over other forms of climate action such as building resilience and involving community members. While a primary goal of this program is carbon emission reduction, they encouraged the program to address other forms of climate action as well. Focusing on mitigation can prevent some communities from action when they don't have a supportive local government. However, presenting mitigation as a way to achieve multiple community benefits may increase participation in areas where current elected members have not committed to climate action.
- **Prioritizing resources.** City staff, especially from cities in greater Minnesota, reported that even if they currently have or were to receive financial or technical resources, they may not be able to prioritize climate action over other urgent matters. Daily work, repairs, and other more immediate needs must be met first before diverting resources toward climate action.
- **Open to all GreenStep communities.** The advisory committee did not believe that this program should only be open to Step 5 GreenStep communities. Regardless of where a community is at in their sustainability journey, it should be able to participate in this program.

Differences from GreenStep "steps"

One particular concern raised by the advisory committee was that this program would be too similar to the current GreenStep "steps" to be worth developing. If the similarities are too many, the program would be redundant and subsequently communities would not be interested in participating. We validate this concern and decided to specifically define the ways in which we sought to make this program differ from the GreenStep core program.



- **Prioritizes high-impact actions.** Any action that increases sustainability is good action, no matter how big or small that action may be. GreenStep recognizes sustainability actions of any size, but for this climate program we sought to increase the challenge of typical GreenStep actions. This was done to re-engage Step 5 communities, challenge communities that have more resources, and create the opportunity for meaningful climate action. To do this, we attempted to include specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound language (or, SMART) that provide participants with the details need to take meaningful action.

- **Creates a “road map” from the 181 actions to narrow down a community’s focus.** With a menu of so many actions to choose from, each of which can be completed in many different ways, a community has freedom to progress through the GreenStep program in the way that is best suited to them. For a community interested in climate action, it may be difficult to parse through which actions are the most effective. This climate program helps participants prioritize efforts and highlights a path forward to climate action.
- **Focus on climate action, not just sustainability.** GreenStep focuses on sustainability, which may include facets of health benefits, economic prosperity, and general quality-of-life. While these may be co-benefits of climate action, this program will fulfill the need for supporting local governments interested in directly addressing climate change.

Rejected Frameworks

As the program continued to be developed, this feedback was kept in mind and applied to the greatest extent while still striving to reach the project goals. Based on feedback from the advisory committee, partners, CERTs regional coordinators, and the GreenStep Steering Committee, several framework possibilities were developed and consequently discarded. Criticism for earlier frameworks helped guide the decisions that led to the selected framework.

Framework 1: Greenhouse gas emissions actions

One of the most important resources we used in research for climate change in Minnesota is the [Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory](#), prepared as a joint effort between the MPCA and the Minnesota Department of Commerce. This report identifies the major sources of greenhouse gas emissions, along with the increases and decreases in emissions each of these sectors has experienced between the years 2005 and 2018 (Figure 4).

Our first framework draft was one in which we selected GreenStep actions that specifically target the sectors in which emissions are high, seeing little to no reductions since 2005, or have even experienced

The big picture

The positive progress Minnesota has seen so far has been concentrated in the electricity generation sector. Since 2005, all other sectors have seen only modest reductions or emission increases. Industrial, residential, and commercial have all increased by 15% or more and are heading in the wrong direction.



Figure 4: The 2021 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory: 2005 to 2018 is a biennial report to the Minnesota Legislature outlining greenhouse gas emissions sources and trends.

an increase in emissions. We also identified new actions featured in other initiatives such as [LEED for Cities and Communities](#) and the state’s [Climate Action Framework](#) draft that could also be included under this framework (See [Appendix B](#)).

A major downside of this framework is that it emphasizes climate change mitigation at the expense of other types of climate action. An emphasis on mitigation may inadvertently turn away potential participants that are more active in other categories of climate action (i.e. adaptation or education) or place a higher value on benefits such as financial savings through climate action.

Framework 2: Number of stars

Each GreenStep best practice action can be completed at one, two, or three stars, indicating the degree to which the action was completed, with one star being “good,” two stars “better,” and three stars “best” (Figure 5). One potential framework was to provide certification and recognition to GreenStep communities that either have the greatest number of stars, or that have the greatest number of actions completed at the three star level. This would provide a numerical, straightforward way of determining certification.

This framework was discarded for several reasons. It provides an unfair advantage to communities who have been involved with GreenStep longer. If the framework were changed to certifying communities that earn the most stars per year or timeframe, it would provide an unfair advantage to communities that have the capacity to take multiple actions at once, or to communities that report all actions at once, even if those actions were not taken that year.

Best Practice Action 1
[Back to best practice page](#)
Enter/update building information into the MN B3 Benchmarking database, and routinely enter monthly usage data for all city-owned buildings/infrastructure that consume energy/water.

Implementation Tools | Star-level Examples

- ★ Complete the Building Editor for each city-owned building/structure; identify the person responsible for routinely entering data; enter (at least once/90 days) current, consecutive monthly energy use data ongoing; also best to begin with 12 consecutive months of historical energy use data.
- ★★ Complete 1 Star criterion and enter 24 consecutive months of historical data; routinely validate and review data by having city staff/a city commission look at patterns/trends and inconsistencies; identify potential opportunities for energy savings; showcase your B3 public page/results on your city website.
- ★★★ Complete 1 and 2 Star criteria, plan for follow-up operations/maintenance actions in poorer performing buildings; routinely enter current and consecutive (monthly or quarterly as available) water use data ongoing; gather and track data for leased buildings (note that Step 4 Metric #1 asks for this).

Figure 5: An example of the star-level examples provided under Best Practice Action 1.1 in the GreenStep Cities program.

Framework 3: Climate narrative

Often, creativity in communities leads to actions that may produce results that go above and beyond any single GreenStep best practice action or may exemplify best practice actions in ways that other communities can gain inspiration from. Under this framework, communities would be able to write a narrative about a project they're doing to take climate action.

However, this niche for recognition is already filled by other initiatives. For example, the League of Minnesota Cities' (LMC) [Sustainable City Award](#) is eligible only for GreenStep Cities (Figure 6). It identifies unique or inspiring implementation of any of the 29 best practices. The award comes with special recognition and a \$1,000 cash prize. Unique projects are also more likely to gain recognition through media attention, making program recognition redundant. While sharing stories is highly recommended to program participants, this framework conflicts with our goal of a program that allows for recertification; it is unfair to set a standard for "above and beyond" with each certification period.

Framework 4: Climate planning actions

We collected a handful of actions that were focused specifically on addressing climate change. Some of these actions, such as developing a climate action plan, were pulled from existing GreenStep actions; other actions, such as declaring a climate emergency, were new, in coordination with current trends of local Minnesota governments.

While the intention of this framework was to increase accessibility to communities with less resources while still emphasizing climate action, feedback indicated that this framework was too heavy on planning and not as much "doing." There was also concern that this framework focuses too much on mitigation rather than preparation, adaptation, or economic benefits, meaning that it would be harder to secure political support in some communities.



Figure 6: The 2022 Sustainable City Award from the League of Minnesota Cities was awarded to the City of Duluth for their Climate Action Work Plan.

From left to right: LMC Executive Director, David Unmacht, AmeriCorps VISTA Duluth Energy and Sustainability Assistant, Julia Forberg, Duluth Mayor, Emily Larson, Duluth Sustainability Officer, Mindy Granley, and LMC Board of Directors President, Ron Johnson. Photo Credit: League of Minnesota Cities

Selected Framework

The advisory committee determined that a badge-based framework would best suit the needs of this program, where participants will receive badges based on actions they complete. The advisory committee also determined a tree-themed framework reflected the nature of this program's needs, complemented the GreenStep aesthetic of sustainability and goal setting, and made the program accessible and desirable to communities. To this end, we created leaf-themed badges (Figure 7) to award to communities based on the climate actions they completed.



Figure 7: A sample tree design that includes individual leaf badges (green are all badge options; the empty leaves would be gold and given as actions are awarded).

We presented three possible structures of this tree-themed badge format to the advisory committee. Each structure has some overarching similarities, namely that in order to receive a leaf, a participant must complete climate actions under that leaf's category. Actions that communities can take to address climate change have been organized by four different categories: mitigation, planning, adaptation, and community. Other categories have the potential to be added later.

Badge Structure 1

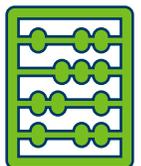
The first of these structures was one in which participants are required to complete a certain number of actions per certification period under a leaf category in order to receive that leaf. The number of actions required would reflect their GreenStep City or Tribal Nation category, which is determined by factors such as number of city buildings and staff.



Feedback indicated that this structure would not incentivize—and in some cases may even discourage—communities to join. Participants may feel as though there is no incentive to complete more actions in a given category if they've already completed enough to earn a leaf. There were also concerns about whether a certification period would make this program less accessible.

Badge Structure 2

The second structure developed was to assign a point value to each action. The point value would be determined by factors including impact, priority, cost, difficulty, and accessibility. Upon meeting a point threshold by completing enough actions, participants would receive a leaf.



Reception to this structure was mixed; quantitatively the advisory committee identified more cons, but the pros arguably had more weight from a qualitative standpoint. While praising its versatility, multiple committee members voiced concerns that this approach was too complicated. Additionally, calculating and assigning point values would be extremely challenging.

Badge 3: Selected Structure

Under the selected structure, actions were reworded to reflect goals that are predicted to have a higher impact on climate change. These actions would have a one-to-one ratio with leaves, where a community completes one action and receives one leaf for it. Many of the actions can be repeated. For example, if an action was “Install or support a community renewable energy project,” a city could achieve one leaf for adding a project in one year and another for a separate project a different year (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Draft Leaf example

Structure Preferences

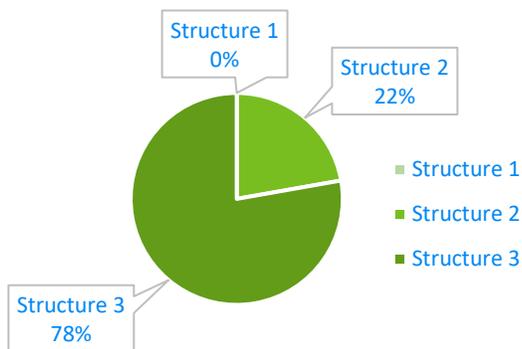


Figure 9: Advisory Committee preferences for each proposed badge structure.

Quantitatively, this was the structure that received the most positive feedback (Figure 9). More advantages were identified than disadvantages, and the advisory committee reported a clear preference of this structure than the others. The committee did bring up some questions of what this may look like aesthetically under this structure, depending upon the type of display used to showcase the awarded leaves. Complexity has been a common concern throughout this process, and this structure was praised for being simple.

Pilot Program

Launching a nine-month pilot program, followed by a two-month evaluation period with five to six participants is recommended to implement this new program. These participants should include (if interest is expressed):



- at least one Step 5 city
- at least one city at any Steps 2 or 3
- at least one tribal nation
- a consideration for participants across Minnesota
- a consideration for participant size and capacity

Pilot program participants should:

- Commit to implementing and reporting at least 2 NEW actions (see [Appendix A](#)) during the pilot period.
- Provide feedback on the program structure and support
- Serve as ambassadors of the official program launch

Upon the end of the program, participants should be asked questions to determine the program's successes and areas to be improved. Questions to ask participants may include:

- How has this program supported your community's climate action?
- Has this program provided meaningful incentive for participation?
- (For Step 5 communities) Did this program increase your city's involvement with GreenStep actions?
- (For Step 1-4 communities) How did this program affect your involvement with the main GreenStep program, if at all?
- Did you feel supported in your involvement in this program? Did you have extra support during this pilot (i.e. AmeriCorps members, temporary staff, etc.) and what difference do you think that made in your ability to participate in this program, if any?
- To what extent did participation in this program increase the number of specific actions taken and/or the speed at which they were implemented? Did this program lead you to take any actions that otherwise would not have taken place during this time period?

The GreenStep Cities steering committee should explore potential partnerships to increase the capacity for program management and ongoing evaluation, identify key technical assistance providers to support communities in their efforts, and consider the recognition aspects of the program during the pilot phase of the Gold Leaf program.

Considerations



While much of this proposal has determined a path forward, a few questions remain to be addressed during the pilot phase and continued development of this program.

- **Capacity:** The bandwidth of both GreenStep program and participant staff to take on the Gold Leaf program has yet to be evaluated. While we don't expect a significantly larger commitment required for this program than what GreenStep already necessitates from staff, a pilot program would be able to provide additional insight. The program can be adjusted if it is found to require too much staff time or other resources.
- **Timing:** With the selected framework, actions can be reported and formally recognized as they are completed, without any specific annual reporting period. Additionally, many actions can be repeated in multiple years to encourage growth overtime (see [Appendix A](#)). The pilot will explore how to provide the guidance and support for these repeatable actions.
- **Program sunset:** A suggestion was made to put an end date on the Gold Leaf program – for example, January 1, 2030 – to recognize the urgency associated with local climate action. All actions could be awarded with that timeframe in mind. In 2030, the program could be finished,

amended to address the impacts and needs of the time, or continued for another length of time.

- **Tribal Nations:** This program was developed to be inclusive of tribal nations, so that participants of GreenStep Tribal Nations can also take part in this program. However, while we reached out to GreenStep Tribal Nations contacts, we were unable to engage tribal nation representatives in program development. To best serve GreenStep Tribal Nations participants, tribal representatives should be invited to participate in the program pilot. GreenStep may explore the desire for a separate pilot program for tribal nations in the future.
- **Expanded Participation:** This program was developed for cities and tribal nations but every attempt was made to create a program that could be expanded or adapted in the future to include other participants, such as counties, schools, and regional development commissions.
- **Funding:** While no immediate funding needs have been identified to launch the Gold Leaf program, funding may be useful for hiring additional GreenStep staff capacity, updating the GreenStep website, developing award displays, or passing funds on to program participants to support their efforts.
- **Guidance:** Ample guidance materials and resources are already located under GreenStep best practice actions. However, it may be necessary to consider additional guidance that can more specifically support the Gold Leaf actions listed in [Appendix A](#), as well as explain the Gold Leaf program overall.

Appendix A: Gold Leaf Actions

Below is a list of proposed actions for this program, categorized by the way in which they address climate change. There are a total of 44 actions between four categories: [Climate Mitigation](#), [Climate Planning](#), [Climate Adaptation](#), and [Community Connectedness for Minnesota’s changing climate](#).

Climate Mitigation

Gold Leaf Action	Associated GreenStep Best Practices	Annual Recertification Criteria*
CM1 – Efficient public building operations: For one city-owned/school building, complete 12 months of facilities operations utilizing the B3/SB 2030 Energy Efficient Operations Manual (B3 EEOM).	1.6	Per building
CM2 – Certified green building operations: Document the certification of a public or private building at gold-equivalent or better under a green building operations framework (such as the LEED O+M rating system).	1.6 , 2.4	Per certification
CM3- Private sector incentives: Show a private party has newly completed significant energy/sustainability improvements using city-provided incentives.	2.4 , 2.6 , 3.4	Per project
CM4 - Resilient city growth: Document a project that has newly developed an infill lot or redeveloped an existing but underutilized property using city-incentives or as the result of city policy.	5.5 , 7.4	Per project
CM5 - Public sustainable buildings: Document that a public building has been newly constructed or undergone major remodeling and meets/qualifies under the SB 2030 energy standard or a green building or energy framework.	1.5	Per building
CM6 - Public energy efficiency projects: Invest in a new and significant energy efficiency project through performance contracting or other funding in city-owned/school buildings.	1.3	Per project
CM7- Alternatives to car travel: Become a Bicycle Friendly or a Walk Friendly community by implementing green and living street principals.	11.2 , 11.3 , 12.1 , 12.6	Per certification
CM8 - Active living campaign: Conduct an active living campaign like Safe Routes to School, Age Friendly Communities, etc.	12.2	Per campaign

CM9 - Ridesharing: Develop a new challenge campaign, create a new park-and-ride lot, start a new rideboard, and/or incorporate payment for ride-shares and local transit.	12.4	Per project
CM10 - Telecommuter Forward: Be certified as a Telecommuter Forward! Community.	12.5	Per certification
CM11 - Municipal renewable energy purchasing: Purchase 100% clean energy used by city government via the municipal utility, green tags, community solar garden, or 3rd party agreements.	15.2	Per year
CM12 - Community renewable energy projects: Newly install or support the installation for community-owned or public sector/municipally-owned renewable energy technology—solar, wind, hydro, etc.	26.4 , 26.5	Per project

Climate Planning

Gold Leaf Action	Associated GreenStep Best Practices	Annual Recertification Criteria*
CP1 - Safe shelter: Designate a new safe shelter with a plan that arranges for adequate provisions and backup power sufficient to meet daily run-time requirements as a shelter for one week or longer during utility grid failure.	29.1	Per shelter & plan
CP2 - Community resilience hub: Create a plan for a new resilience hub that describes community services to be provided throughout the year, as well as specific services provided during disruption and into recovery after natural hazard events.	29.3	Per plan
CP3 - FEMA rating: Enroll in the FEMA Community Rating System and be recognized at a class rating of 6 through 1.	19.8	Per certification /recertification
CP4 - Climate/resilience plans: Adopt a new or newly updated climate adaptation/resilience plan that is used for the city's comprehensive planning, policy-making, and budgeting. Document how underserved communities were part of the planning effort.	29.2	Per plan/ update
CP5 - Climate risk assessment: Conduct a new climate risk assessment or resilience project planning for local infrastructure (i.e. sewer, stormwater, city roads/bridges, water supply, wastewater, municipal powerlines, public facilities, etc.).	29.7	Per assessment/ resilience project plan

CP6 - Municipal climate goals: Newly adopt or strengthen existing climate or energy goal(s) (i.e. renewable energy, GHG emissions, carbon-neutral, etc.) with a deadline of 2030 or sooner.	6.5	Per goal
CP7 - Climate action plan: Adopt a new or updated Climate Action Plan or be part of a regional Climate Action Plan effort (document participation). For Category C cities, participate in a regional Climate and/or Energy Action Plan.	6.5	Per plan/ update
CP8 - Climate priority resolution: Newly adopt or strengthen a city resolution declaring a climate emergency and prioritizing climate action.	6.5	Per resolution
CP9 - Climate action budget: At least 1% of current city annual budget is allocated to climate action.	24.2 , 29.2	Per year
CP10 - Climate staff: Have a new or rehire a paid staff position with climate action as a main responsibility.	24.1	Per new hire
CP11 - Sustainable building/renovation policy: Customize a model sustainable building/renovation policy that includes the SB 2030 energy standard and adopt the language to govern private new/renovation projects that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) receive city financial support, b) require city regulatory approval (planned unit development, conditional use permit, rezoning, variance), or c) are city/school-owned projects; or Require that all buildings be certified/rated under an identified 3rd-party green building framework.	2.7 , 3.1 , 3.2	Per policy/ update
CP12 – Land use policy: Newly adopt or strengthen a policy limiting annexations or infrastructure extensions to encourage infill and redevelopment.	5.5	Per policy/update

Climate Adaptation

Gold Leaf Action	Associated GreenStep Best Practices	Annual Recertification Criteria*
<p>CA1 - Urban heat relief: In an area of environmental justice concern or high heat vulnerability, newly complete a city project such as: cool pavements; shading structures for a park or transit corridor; cooling water features for heat relief in a park or playground; cool/green roof material; roadside vegetative cover including resilient species increased by at least 40%.</p>	<p>29.6</p>	<p>Per project</p>
<p>CA2 - Flood mitigation: Newly complete an improvement project of green and/or gray infrastructure strategically designed to reduce localized flooding in an area of environmental justice concern or high flood risk such as: fix specific intersections, underpasses, culverts, or other areas prone to flash flooding; resolve recent occurrences of combined sewer overflow; add meaningful system capacity for extreme rainfall events.</p>	<p>29.5</p>	<p>Per project</p>
<p>CA3 - Back-up energy system: Newly install islanding capability and storage for a clean energy system in a publicly accessible building to provide back-up power that can sustain function during extreme weather events.</p>	<p>29.8</p>	<p>Per system</p>
<p>CA4 – Private resilience projects: Document a newly installed residential/commercial/industrial/non-profit project flood or heat risk reduction best practice to increase resilience using city incentives.</p>	<p>17.5, 29.4</p>	<p>Per project</p>
<p>CA5 – Resilient trees: Plant and maintain at least 2-3 climate resilient trees for each city tree lost.</p>	<p>16.3</p>	<p>Per year</p>
<p>CA6 - Building weather preparation: Newly modify/rebuild one city-owned building to improve flood resilience, prevent damage, and sustain function during extreme weather events.</p>	<p>29.5</p>	<p>Per building</p>
<p>CA7 - Property buy-out: Newly complete the buy-out of one or more properties at risk of flood damage through a city buyout program.</p>	<p>19.8</p>	<p>Per property</p>
<p>CA8 – Resilient public water systems: Newly implement a strategy to reduce climate change risk and increase resilience for city water or wastewater operations or a specific asset (such as a lift station, headwork, water intake/distribution/storage, booster stations/pump, treatment plant, etc.)</p>	<p>29.7</p>	<p>Per project</p>

Community Connectedness for Minnesota’s changing climate

Gold Leaf Action	Associated GreenStep Best Practices	Annual Recertification Criteria*
CC1- Combined Green Team: Have a green team with city and community member representation that meets regularly (at least 4 times every year) and address topics related to Minnesota’s changing climate.	24.1	Per year
CC2 - Youth Involvement: Have at least two filled youth/student positions on a city environmental commission, green team, or other advisory body that addresses topics related to Minnesota’s changing climate.	24.6	Per year
CC3 - Youth Collaboration: A school environmental club has an ongoing connection with a city commission or green team for involvement in topics related to Minnesota’s changing climate.	24.6	Per year
CC4 - Student Internship: A city student internship includes issues related to Minnesota’s changing climate in their work.	24.6	Per year
CC5 - Community Restoration: Host one or more events that engage community members in annual restoration or cleanup of public natural areas.	18.8	Per year
CC6 - Citizen Science: Create or participate in a Citizen Science program related to the environment and Minnesota’s changing climate.	18.8	Per program
CC7 - Accessible Public Green Spaces: Newly document that at least 20% of total city land area is in protected green infrastructure, or that 90% or more of residents are within a 10-minute walk, or within one-half mile of, a park or other public green/blue space.	18.3	Per documentation
CC8 - Tree Steward Community: Participate in the Tree Steward Program.	16.6	Per year
CC9 - Local Purchasing: Require and document that 10% of city purchases to be made from local businesses with special consideration for minority, disability, and women-owned businesses.	15.3 , 25.7	Per year
CC10 - Local Food Buying: Conduct a campaign and/or provide incentives to promote the increased buying of local foods by schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and event centers. Report the use of organic, whole food, and plant-based options.	15.3 , 25.7 , 27.4	Per year
CC11 - Community Visioning: Conduct a Community Visioning process (i.e. MN Main Streets, D4CR, etc.) that engages community members	5.2 , 8.1 , 29.3	Per process

though a series of events that include discussion of Minnesota’s changing climate and/or community resilience. Hold meetings in diverse and accessible locations and provide translators and interpreters, childcare, stipends, and/or meals for participants as needed.		
CC12 - Green Businesses and Jobs: Document the growth of new/emerging green businesses and green jobs through the targeted assistance and new workforce development actions.	25.1	Per year

* Consideration will be given on a case-by-case basis as actions are reported. The criteria listed here may be adjusted in accordance with the intent of the program.

Appendix B: GreenStep Cities Climate Action Mapping

The table below reviews the GreenStep Cities Best Practice Actions in relation to other programs that define and prioritize climate actions. See a more detailed list at <https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/media/681>.

GreenStep Best Practice Actions	Gold Leaf Climate Actions	MN Climate Action Framework	High-Impact Actions for Low Carbon Cities	USDN’s High Impact Practices	UN’s Sustainable Development Goals
BP 1 – Efficient Existing Public Buildings					
1.1					
1.2					
1.3					
1.4					
1.5					
1.6					
1.7					
BP 2 – Efficient Existing Private Buildings					
2.1					

2.2					
2.3					
2.4					
2.5					
2.6					
2.7					
BP 3 – New Green Buildings					
3.1					
3.2					
3.3					
3.4					
3.5					
BP 4 – Efficient Outdoor Lighting					
4.1					
4.2					
4.3					
4.4					
4.5					
4.6					
4.7					
4.8					
BP 5 – Building Redevelopment					
5.1					
5.2					
5.3					
5.4					

5.5					
BP 6 – Comprehensive Plans					
6.1					
6.2					
6.3					
6.4					
6.5					
BP 7 – Efficient City Growth					
7.1					
7.2					
7.3					
7.4					
7.5					
BP 8 – Mixed Uses					
8.1					
8.2					
8.3					
8.4					
8.5					
8.6					
8.7					
BP 9 – Efficient Highway- and Auto-Oriented Development					
9.1					
9.2					
9.3					
9.4					

BP 10 – Design for Natural Resource Conservation					
10.1					
10.2					
10.3					
10.4					
10.5					
10.6					
10.7					
BP 11 – Living & Complete Streets					
11.1					
11.2					
11.3					
11.4					
11.5					
11.6					
BP 12 – Mobility Options					
12.1					
12.2					
12.3					
12.4					
12.5					
12.6					
BP 13 – Efficient City Fleets					
13.1					
13.2					
13.3					

13.4					
13.5					
13.6					
BP 14 – Demand-Side Travel Planning					
14.1					
14.2					
14.3					
14.4					
BP 15 – Sustainable Purchasing					
15.1					
15.2					
15.3					
15.4					
15.5					
15.6					
15.7					
15.8					
BP 16 – Community Forests & Soils					
16.1					
16.2					
16.3					
16.4					
16.5					
16.6					
16.7					
BP 17 – Stormwater Management					

17.1					
17.2					
17.3					
17.4					
17.5					
17.6					
BP 18 – Parks & Trails					
18.1					
18.2					
18.3					
18.4					
18.5					
18.6					
18.7					
18.8					
BP 19 – Surface Water					
19.1					
19.2					
19.3					
19.4					
19.5					
19.6					
19.7					
19.8					
BP 20 – Efficient Water & Wastewater Facilities					
20.1					

20.2					
20.3					
20.4					
20.5					
20.6					
20.7					
BP 21 – Septic Systems					
21.1					
21.2					
21.3					
21.4					
21.5					
21.6					
21.7					
BP 22 – Sustainable Consumption & Waste					
22.1					
22.2					
22.3					
22.4					
22.5					
22.6					
22.7					
22.8					
BP 23 – Local Air Quality					
23.1					
23.2					

23.3					
23.5					
BP 24 – Benchmarks & Community Engagement					
24.1					
24.2					
24.3					
24.4					
24.5					
24.6					
24.7					
BP 25 – Green Business Development					
25.1					
25.2					
25.3					
25.4					
25.5					
25.6					
25.7					
BP 26 – Renewable Energy					
26.1					
26.2					
26.3					
26.4					
26.5					
26.6					
26.7					

BP 27 – Local Food					
27.1					
27.2					
27.3					
27.4					
BP 28 – Business Synergies & EcoDistricts					
28.2					
28.3					
28.4					
BP 29 – Climate Adaptation & Community Resilience					
29.1					
29.2					
29.3					
29.4					
29.5					
29.6					
29.7					
29.8					