Minnesota GreenStep Cities

Public Officials Guide

Steps for Starting and Continuing the Program

For new and transitioning elected officials, appointed commission/committee/board members, and volunteer members

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Overview

GreenStep Cities is a voluntary challenge, assistance, and recognition program to help cities achieve their sustainability and quality-of-life goals.

The program identifies 29 best practices that focus on cost savings, quality of life, and energy use reductions, encouraging a culture of progress in Minnesota cities and tribal nations. 147 communities, encompassing over 52% of the state population, have joined the GreenStep program. Find your city's public GreenStep page to see the city council resolution that made your community a Step 1 city.

Cities that implement a minimum number of best practices across the five categories below will be recognized as Step 2 and Step 3 GreenStep cities. Each best practice can be implemented by completing one or more specific actions from a list of four to eight actions. A city's accomplishments are recognized on the GreenStep website and each year at the LMC annual conference. Measuring city performance metrics will garner Step 4 and Step 5 recognition.

Visit **www.MnGreenStep.org** to learn more about this program, to see what other cities have accomplished, and to understand how your city can become involved.

What is a Public Official?

For the purpose of this guide, a public official is any elected council member or appointed committee, commission, or board member. This guide will also be helpful for any volunteer citizen, student, staff, business, or other community group that works with the GreenStep Cities program.

If the public official or volunteer member is directly working on GreenStep Cities reporting, please see the Welcome Guide, which goes into more detail about the city log-in page and reporting guidelines.

Why be a GreenStep City?

Cities and Tribal Nations see a number of [benefits](#) to becoming a GreenStep City. Examples include:

- A **Minnesota-specific program**, tailored to the needs and compositions of our communities.
- A **means for continuous improvement** for cities to "go green," becoming more sustainable and resilient.
- A **one-stop shop** for staff, officials, and community members to identify best practice actions and resources. This *saves staff time and effort*.
- A **cost-saving tool** that delivers a stream of financial benefits including grant, loan, and rebate opportunities. In addition, many sustainable actions that communities take will save money over time.
- **Access to unique opportunities** for funding, pilot programs, and technical assistance. Being a GreenStep City may also support your community in competitive application processes.
- An **economic development-recruiting tool** for sustainable and environmentally conscious businesses to your community.
- A **guide to creating a healthier community** which aids in overall quality of life.
- Provides **public recognition** of the sustainable work your community is doing!

Getting Started

Training Materials

Whether you are a new GreenStep City or you are transitioning as a new public official, these training materials will help you get started.

- [GreenStep Cities Welcome Guide](#)
- [Monthly Workshops and Archives](#)

Where is Your City Currently at?

If you are transitioning as a new public official, be sure to get to know what your city has already accomplished and where to go from here.

- [Find your city](#) on the GreenStep Cities website to see what has been accomplished to date.
- Once on your city's page, see the *City Assessment Files* and *City Performance Metrics* for information like where your city is currently at and how to get to the next steps.

The Steps

Step 1

Step 1 is the easiest! Decide that your city wants to commit to being a GreenStep City and you have already achieved a step. Start by building community knowledge and interest by hosting public meetings or having a presentation by GreenStep Cities staff.

Next, write up a resolution (we have a sample resolution), introduce it at City Council, and vote "Yes"! This step will also need to identify one GreenStep Cities Coordinator (city staff, community member, public official, etc.) and encourage a few best practices to start implementing.

Finally, your new GreenStep Cities Coordinator will be tasked with posting initial background information on the GreenStep Cities website as well as educating city staff, public officials, and the community about the GreenStep Cities program.

Step 2

Ready to take action? Your city will need to implement 4, 6, or 8 Best Practices, depending on your city's category designation (visit your city's home page to see its category).

- Category C cities need to implement ANY 4 Best Practices.
- Category B cities need to implement ANY 6 Best Practices.
- Category A cities need to implement ANY 8 Best Practices.

Implementing a particular best practice action may take a day or years. It is possible to complete multiple best practice actions at once. The GreenStep Cities Coordinator will complete the action by posting on the city's log-in page.

Step 3

To reach Step 3, continue working on the work completed in Step 2. your city will need to implement 8, 12, or 16 Best Practices, depending on your city's category designation (visit your city's home page to see its category).

- Category C cities need to implement ANY 8 BP's.
- Category B cities need to implement ANY 12 BP's.
- Category A cities need to implement ANY 16 BP's.

Step 3 has certain [requirements that each category must meet](#) to receive recognition. These are actions that have been identified as priority and are expected for all GreenStep Cities to take. The GreenStep Cities Coordinator will complete the action by posting on the city's log-in page.

Step 4

[Steps 4 changes tone](#) to measure and report a minimum number of core and optional metrics for the previous calendar year. Metrics required for Building & Lighting, Transportation, Land Use, Environmental Management, and Economic & Community Development are outlined in the [Step 4 and 5 Metrics](#) spreadsheet. The GreenStep Cities Coordinator will review the metrics, collect data from city/county staff and utilities, and report annually, using the spreadsheet.

Step 5

[Step 5 also uses](#) the [Step 4 and 5 Metrics](#) entry spreadsheet. However, Step 5 requires that improvements are being made in targeted areas between year 1 and 2, etc. The GreenStep Cities Coordinator will fill out the form for the Step 4 data and indicate improvements, annually.

Best Practices

Get to know the Best Practice categories, below. This may help guide decision making under a number of city departments as well as budgeting processes. Each Best Practice has a number of sepecific actions. Each of those actions are assigned 1, 2, or 3 stars, based on the size and scope of the action.

1. Efficient Existing Public Buildings: Benchmark energy usage; identify savings opportunities in consultation with state programs, utilities, and others to implement cost-effective energy and sustainability improvements.
2. Efficient Existing Private Buildings: Provide incentives for energy, water, and sustainability improvements in existing residential, not-for-profit, and commercial buildings/building sites.
3. New Green Buildings: Construct new buildings to meet or qualify under a green building framework.
4. Efficient Outdoor Lighting and Signals: Improve the efficiency and quality of street lighting, traffic signals, and outdoor public lighting.
5. Building Redevelopment: Create economic and regulatory incentives for redeveloping and repurposing existing buildings before building new.

6. Comprehensive Plans: Build public support and legal validity to long-term infrastructural and regulatory strategy.
7. Resilient City Growth: Promote financial and environmental sustainability by enabling and encouraging walkable housing and commercial land use.
8. Mixed Uses: Develop efficient land patterns that generate community health and wealth.
9. Efficient Highway- and Auto-Oriented Development: Adopt commercial development and design standards for auto-oriented development corridors and clusters.
10. Design for Natural Resource Conservation: Adopt development ordinances or processes that protect natural systems and valued community assets.

11. Living & Complete Streets: Create a network of green complete streets that improves city quality of life and public health; adds value to surrounding properties.
12. Mobility Options: Promote active transportation and alternatives to single-occupancy car travel.
13. Efficient City Fleets: Implement a city fleet investment, operations, and maintenance plan.
14. Demand-Side Travel Planning: Implement Travel Demand Management and Transit-Oriented Design in service of a more walkable city.

15. Sustainable Purchasing: Adopt environmentally preferable purchasing policies and practices to improve health and environmental outcomes.
16. Community Forests and Soils: Add city tree and plant cover that increases community health, wealth, and quality of life.
17. Stormwater Management: Minimize the volume of and pollutants in rainwater runoff by maximizing green infrastructure.
18. Parks and Trails: Increase active lifestyles and property values by enhancing the city's green infrastructure.
19. Surface Water Quality: Improve local water bodies to sustain their long-term ecological function and community benefits.
20. Efficient Water and Wastewater Systems: Assess and improve city drinking water and wastewater systems and related facilities.
21. Septic Systems: Implement an effective management program for decentralized wastewater treatment systems.
22. Sustainable Consumption and Waste: Increase waste prevention, reuse, recycling, moving to a lower-consumption, more cyclical, and more biological approach to materials management.
23. Local Air Quality: Prevent generation of local air contaminants to improve community health.

24. Benchmarks and Community Engagement: Adopt outcome measures for GreenStep and other city sustainability efforts, and engage community members in ongoing education, dialogue, and campaigns.
25. Green Business Development: Expand a greener, more resilient business sector.
26. Renewable Energy: Remove barriers to and encourage installation of renewable energy generation capacity.
27. Local Food: Strengthen local food and fiber production and access.
28. Business Synergies and EcoDistricts: Network/cluster businesses and design neighborhoods and developments to achieve better energy, social, economic, and environmental outcomes in service of a more circular and equitable economy.
29. Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience: Plan and prepare for extreme weather, adapt to changing climatic conditions, and foster stronger community connectedness and social and economic vitality.

Resources

Staff and Partners

The GreenStep Cities program is [a partnership](#) of many state agencies, organizations, and volunteers. Get to know them all below.

Minneapolis Pollution Control Agency [(MPCA)](#) • Co-Director [(Kristin Mroz)](#) • [Best Practice Advisors](#) • Approves Best Practice Actions entered on website	*Great Plains Institute [(GPI)](#)* • Co-Director [(Lola Schoenrich)](#) • Energy and climate technical assistance	*Environmental Quality Board [(EQB)](#)* • Connecting state agency and organizations to community needs • Steps 4 and 5 assistance • Communications for GreenStep (website, newsletter, stories, etc.)
League of Minnesota Cities [(LMC)](#) • Annual Awards Ceremony at LMC Conference • Provide model ordinances, policies, and other resources • Provide networking between cities and local government organizations • Monthly workshop coordinator	*Clean Energy Resource Teams [(CERTs)](#)* • Statewide assistance with energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy technologies and practices for homes, businesses, and local institutions • Regional Coordinators provide 1-on-1 assistance to communities	*Department Of Commerce [(COMM)](#)* • Division of Energy provides information and assistance related to energy technology • Provide financial and technical assistance • Assistance in energy efficiency and weatherization
Izaak Walton League [(IWLA)](#) • Provide assistance in outdoor conservation of natural resources • 1-on-1 assistance with Greater MN communities	*[Rethos](#)* • Promote connection between people and historic places, promoting community vitality • Downtown revitalization	*Urban Land Institute MN [(ULI)](#)* • Assist with community land use and real estate development

Data Entry Assistance

GreenStep Cities use a number of resources to enter in information for the GreenStep Cities program. GreenStep Cities staff and help guide you on resources for any of these options.

1. Dedicate a city staff person to update data for GreenStep Cities.
2. Hire a part-time staff person or coordinate a shared staff person.
3. Hire an Intern.
4. Apply for an AmeriCorps member.
5. Coordinate with local youth.
6. Coordinate with local citizen volunteers.

Social Media and News

Track the latest GreenStep news and add your own at:

Facebook @mngreenstep

Twitter @GreenStepCities

Email listserve – a resource for GreenStep Cities Coordinators to connect (email GreenStep to be added)

Newsletter – a quarterly review of GreenStep Cities achievements, stories, updates, and news

Communities – Who's doing it?

One of the best ways to get feedback before starting a Best Practice Action is to see how other communities have implemented the action.

- View the Best Practice Action that you are interested in by clicking on the name of a best practice, and then clicking on the text of the action. The "Who's doing it" tab will display the GreenStep Cities that have taken the action, along with resources for taking the action and examples of city actions that warrant a 1-star (good) rating, a 2-star (better) rating, or a 3-star rating (best).
- Click on the name of the city for the description of their Best Practice Action.
- GreenStep Cities are always willing to help out another GreenStep City! Use the contact information listed to reach out the city staff who can assist you with questions, planning, implementation, and other questions.

Recognition

Your hard work has paid off! Get recognized for any achievements in the following ways:

- Attend the annual GreenStep Cities Awards Ceremony at the League of Minnesota Cities Conference (June).
- Nominate your project for the Sustainable City Award to receive $1000, a plaque, and have a video created.
- Let GreenStep Cities write a story about your project success! Contact GreenStep with any suggestions.
- Write a newsletter story for your city's newsletter.
- Write press release to your local paper to let your community know about it.
- Follow GreenStep Cities on Facebook and Twitter. We will happily share your story!
- Create a GreenStep Cities webpage on your city website.

Want to Know Even More?

GreenStep Cities staff and partners are always available for an email, phone call, or in-person visit. Let us know how we can help answer questions, facilitate an internal city discussion, or facilitate an entire community discussion.

Find the detailed Welcome! Guide at https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/media/466

Find our contact information at https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/page/contact.