

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Minnesota  
**GreenStep**

[www.MNGreenStep.org](http://www.MNGreenStep.org)

## SUMMARY

The April 2022 - April 2023 reporting year brought us back together in-person as the COVID-19 pandemic eased up. There were 145 city and tribal nation participants in the program, covering 52% of the state's total population (see [Page 2](#)).

The City of Paynesville joined the program at Step 1 and 42 other cities advanced to Steps 2 or 3 or maintained their Step 4/5 status (see [Page 3](#)). Across all participants, 207 new best practice actions were reported on the website among all 29 Best Practices - reaching a milestone of over 5,000 action reports (see [Page 4](#))! This year, 6 participants reached Step 5 by demonstrating improved metrics for the first time (see [Page 5](#)).

We were able to host 12 virtual workshops that covered multiple topics, delivered 10 GreenStep road signs, and 18 volunteers visited with over 200,000 state fair goers (see [Page 8](#)). We also launched a 9-month long pilot for the new Gold Leaf local climate action program (see [Page 9](#)).

Finally, as we prepared for both state and federal opportunities through funding and new resources, we developed a GreenStep Into the Future report that looked at what the program *could* be with additional resources (see [Page 11](#)).

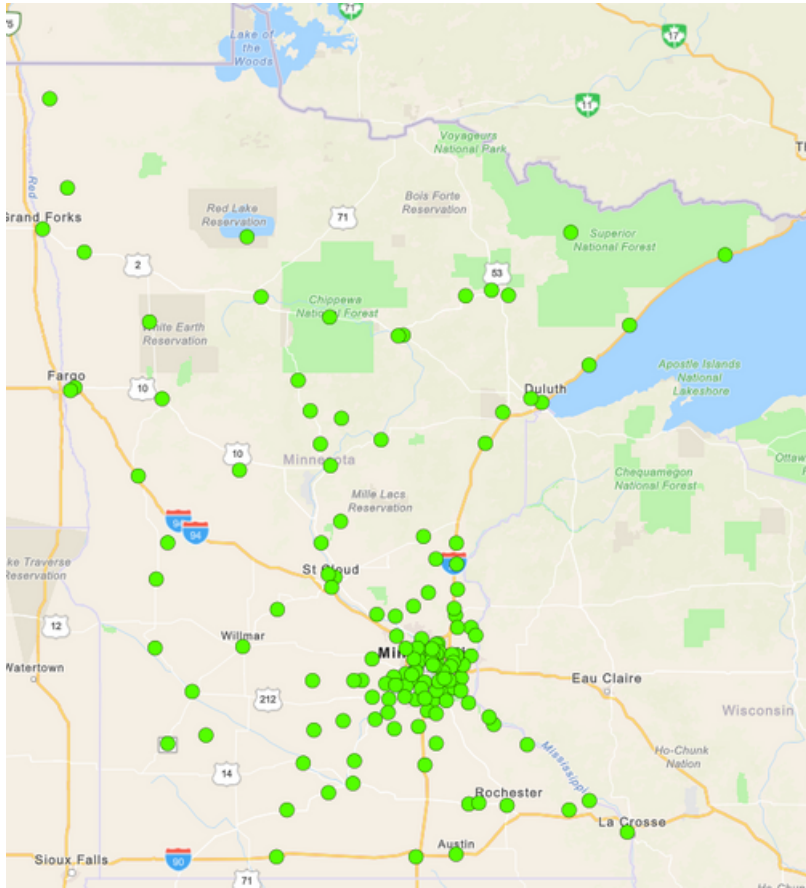
Thank you for another great year!



Mayor Patrick Hanlon (center) and Council members Brian Hunke (left) and Heidi Garrido (right) celebrate the City of Hopkins Step 4 & 5 awards at the League of Minnesota Cities conference in Duluth. (Photo Credit: City of Hopkins)

Congratulations to **Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe** for moving up **THREE** steps in one year! LLBO **achieved Steps 3, 4, and 5** between April 2022-April 2023.

# program participants



**146** Cities and Tribal Nations participate in the program

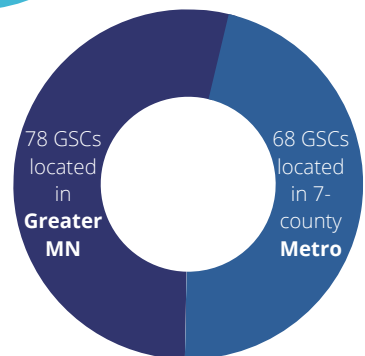
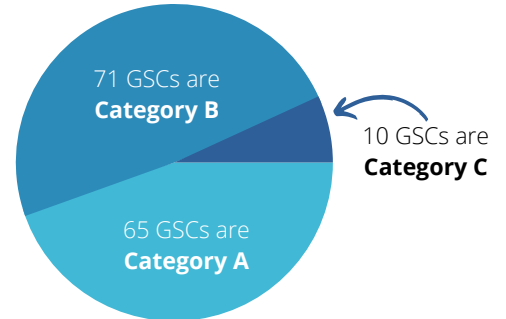
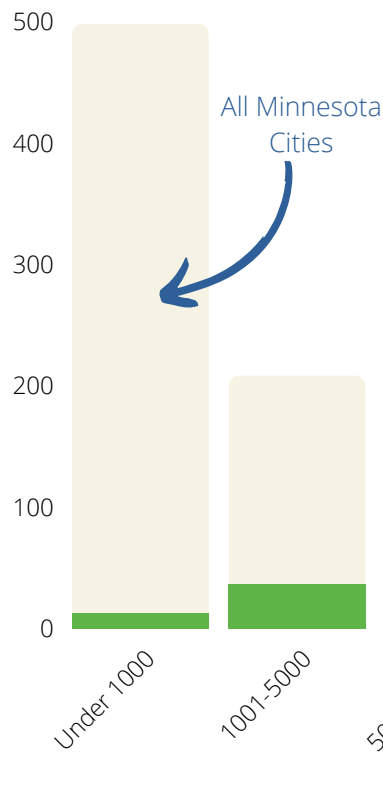
**52%** of the state's population live in a GreenStep City or Tribal Nation

**17%** of Minnesota's 855 cities are a GreenStep City

**27%** of GreenStep Cities are at the highest Step - Step 5

## Program Participants:

- are large (St. Paul, pop. 311,527) and small (Hewitt, pop. 251)
- are located in 57 of the state's 87 counties (66%)
- include areas of environmental justice concern: 75 participants include at least one census tract with populations of:
  - at least 40% of people reported income less than 185% of the federal poverty level (74 communities)
  - 50% or more people of color (22 communities)
  - federally recognized tribal areas (5 communities)



Of all Minnesota cities, 80% of the largest (25,000+ pop.), 56% of the medium (5,001-25,000 pop.) and 7% of small (under 5,000 pop.) cities participate.



Minnesota  
**GreenStep**

# 2023 *Step Advances!*

Total unique communities  
advancing a step in 2023:

**43**

That's 29% of total  
GreenStep participants!

## Step 1:

- Paynesville

## Step 2:

- Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Mendota Heights
- Mora
- New Prague
- New Ulm
- Saint James

## Step 3:

- **Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe**
- Robbinsdale
- Wyoming

**bold** - indicates a city that progressed more than one step this year

\* - indicates a city that has reached Step 4 or 5 for the first time

## Step 4 & 5:

- Apple Valley
- Bloomington
- Burnsville
- Coon Rapids
- **Cottage Grove\***
- Duluth
- Eagan
- Eden Prairie
- Falcon Heights
- Fridley\*
- Golden Valley
- Hopkins\*
- Hutchinson
- Inver Grove Heights
- Jordan
- La Crescent\*
- **Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe\***
- Mahtomedi
- Maplewood
- Marshall
- Minnetonka
- Moorhead
- Morris\*
- New Brighton
- Northfield
- North Saint Paul
- Oakdale
- Roseville
- Saint Anthony Village
- Saint Louis Park
- Savage
- Shoreview
- Woodbury

Everyone who  
achieved Step 4  
this year, also  
achieved Step 5!



GreenStep Cities participants and partners at the 2023 League of Minnesota Cities annual conference.





- **New Prague city parks ordinance requires all parks be able to retain water** for a minimum of a 2.5-inch rain event.
- **New Ulm completed 20 lighting upgrades** between 2018-21 that resulted in first 5-year savings of 49.1 kW, 152,819 kWh, and \$18,211 - an average payback of 3.4 years.
- **Richfield's organized solid waste program** launched in 2021, offering bi-weekly trash collection with "pay as you throw" prices. Cost savings include 90+% of residents saved on recycling price and 60-80+% of residents saved on their trash price.
- **Saint Peter requires all electric utility customers to participate in an "electric load management" program** when central air conditioning is newly installed or replaced.
- **Wyoming is home to the FIRST Minnesota-made fully electric fire truck**, built by Rosenbauer.

## Notable Actions reported this year:

- **Arden Hills Project Circulation Plan** is required for larger redevelopment projects to consider all modes of transportation and integration with current plans.
- **Burnsville organics dropsite** located at a city park was estimated to divert 202,748 pounds of organics in 2022.
- **Edina adopted a Green Fleet Purchasing Policy** in 2022 that requires all new light-duty fleet vehicles and off-road or lawn equipment vehicles be phased-out and replaced with electric and low-carbon fuel alternative options, eliminating 122 metric tons of GHG for every 1% of the fleet transitioned to EV.
- **Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa's Gitigaan program** offers gardening and food-related workshops throughout spring and summer, providing 140 Fond du Lac households with over 40 varieties of seeds and vegetable plants, tilling services, and a fall fest celebration.
- **Grand Rapids installed the state's FIRST solar-storage project** in 2021 - a 15 acre, pollinator-friendly, 2 MW and 1MW/2.5-hour energy storage battery site and the largest solar installation operated by a municipal utility in Minnesota.
- **Lake Crystal completed a public/private tree inventory** in 2022 that informed the city that 31% of trees are ash and lead to the completion of an Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan.
- **Mendota Heights offers a rain garden installation program** for residents whose property is part of a street improvement project.
- **New Hope completed the deconstruction of a home** in collaboration with Hennepin County and Better Futures MN in 2022.

5138

Total cumulative  
actions for all  
cities

Actions are  
reported at  
the 1-, 2-, or 3-  
star level

956

Total actions  
reported at the  
3-star level

207

New actions  
reported this year

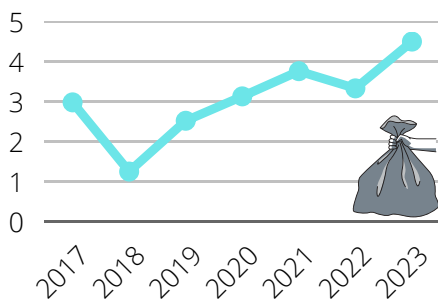
# STEP 4&5 METRICS

In 2023, **33 communities completed Step 4** and **all 33 also completed Step 5** metrics reporting. All communities submitting metrics received recognition. **Two communities reached both Steps 4 and 5** this reporting year. For two communities, this was their first time reporting Step 4 metrics and **six reached Step 5 for the first time** this year. (Metric numbers are shown in parenthesis.)


## WHAT DO THE METRICS TELL US?



21 communities report 100% of their **traffic signals have been converted to LED** (1.5)

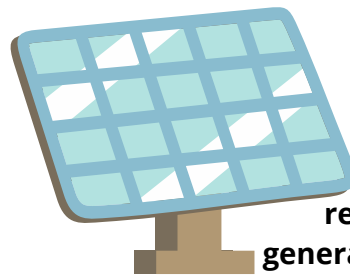


Cities reported an average of 4.5 pounds of **solid waste generated** per city resident/per day, a pound increase over 2022 metrics (13.1)

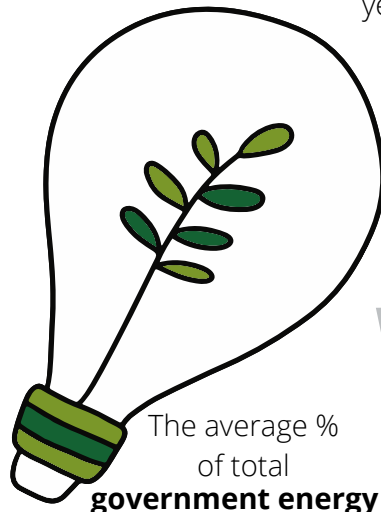


Communities reported adding an average of 37% **affordable housing units** (of total housing added) (7.6)

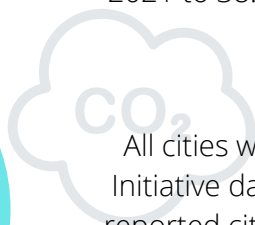
See more metric summary & individual city accomplishments on our [Recognition](#) page.



A collective total of 4,398 **municipal and private renewable energy generation sites** reported - an increase of 1,510 sites compared to the previous year (14.1)

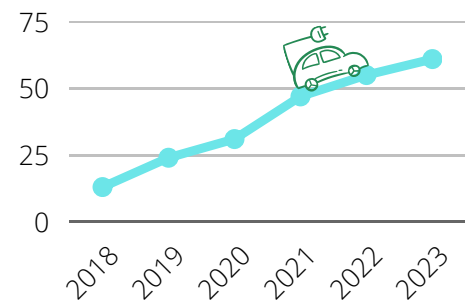


The average % of total **government energy use that is met by generated and/or purchased renewable energy** increased from 36% in 2021 to 38.5% (14.6)



All cities with reported Regional Indicators Initiative data (32) show an increase in 2021 reported city-wide travel emissions; 4 show a decrease in waste emissions; and 2 with data show a decrease in energy emissions (17.1-17.3)

Cities report owning or leasing 61 **electric vehicles in the city fleet**; up from just 28 in 2018. (3.5)



5,045 **new trees were planted** in 2022 (8.6)

44.5 miles of **new or reconstructed sidewalks or trails** were completed in 2022 (4.1)

An average of 94% of residents in reporting cities **live within one mile of a bike route** (4.2); 77% **live within ¾ mile of transit route** (5.8); 88% **live within ½ mile or 10 minute walk of parkland** (8.3)

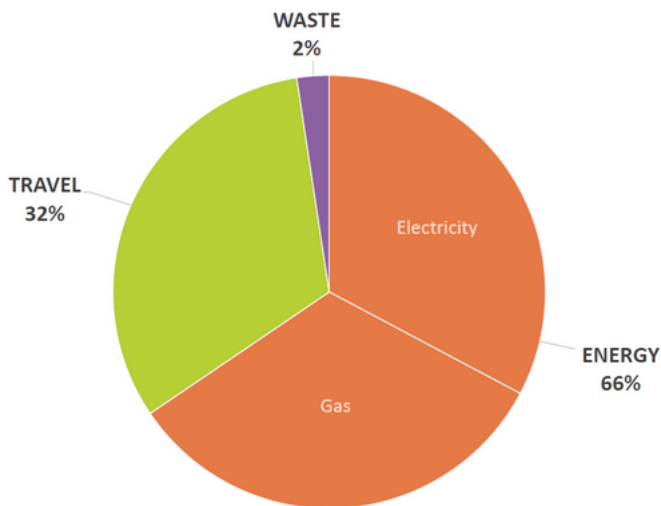
See how cities compare on 21 key metrics in the [Step 4 & 5 Metric Dashboard](#).

# TRENDS FROM RII CITIES

The Regional Indicators Initiative (RII) began in 2010, along-side the GreenStep Cities program as a tool measure city-wide greenhouse gas emissions through energy, water, travel, and waste data. Since then, the program has provide full or partial data for 105 cities in Minnesota, with a focus of providing information for GreenStep Cities at Steps 4 and 5. The following is from a 2023 program report.

## RII's purpose is to provide data and tools for community climate action that:

- Deepen cities' understanding of opportunities to save energy and money
- Promote a public understanding of cities' impact on climate change
- Improve cities' competitiveness for federal and state funding opportunities
- Inform cities' analyses, plans, and policy decisions
- Enable cities to track their progress over time - connecting policies and best practices to actual outcomes



Greenhouse gas emissions data from Regional Indicators Initiative for 31 cities in 2020. Non-travel energy is the largest contributor to community-wide emissions.

## Trends from RII Cities:

RII includes data from cities representing nearly half of Minnesota's population - including our largest, medium, and rural cities as small as 500 people. With over 10 years of data, the following trends have emerged.



### Energy:

- We use more gas than electricity.
- We use more energy in non-residential buildings than we do in homes.
- Electricity use is decreasing. Gas use is not.

### Travel:



- Prior to 2020, slightly cleaner cars offset an increase in vehicle travel.
- Vehicle travel and emissions dropped around 20% in 2020 before rebounding somewhat in 2021.
- Local action, regional efforts, and market-scale transformation are all needed to make a lasting impact.



### Waste:

- Waste sent to landfills and incineration facilities has decreased.
- Recycling rates have increased, but still have potential to grow.
- Waste management trends vary by county, but most have potential to reduce waste generation.

### GHG Emissions:

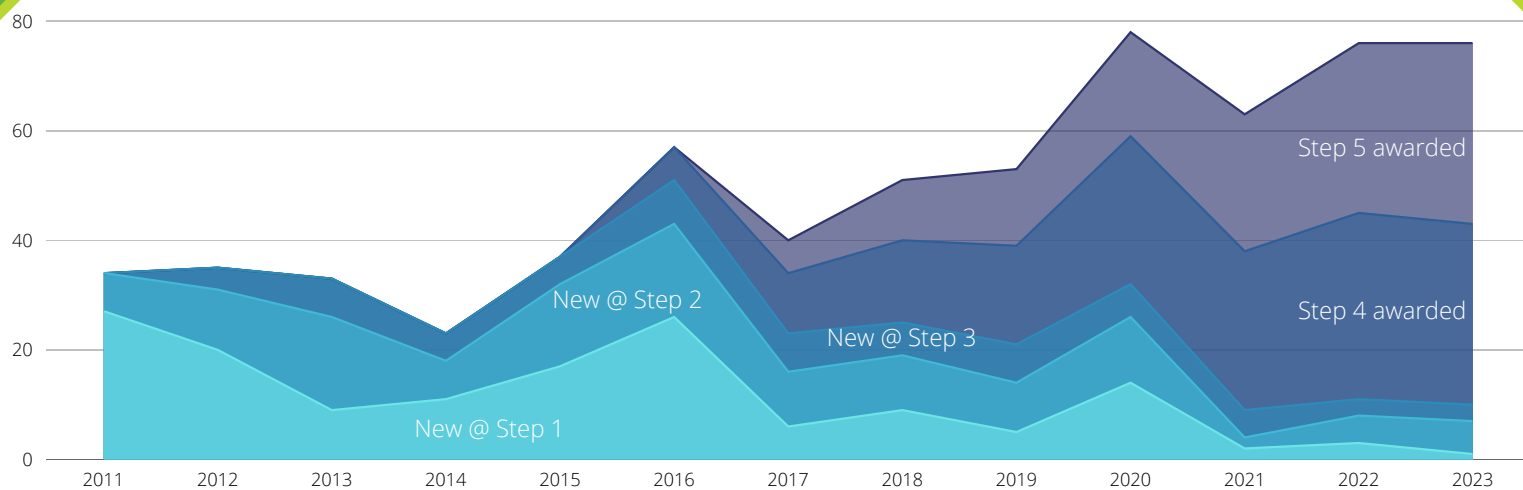


- City-wide greenhouse gas emissions are decreasing more rapidly than state-wide emissions.
- The energy used in buildings continues to be the largest contributor to city-wide emissions.
- Emissions from gas used in buildings and from vehicle travel are now on par with emissions from electricity use.

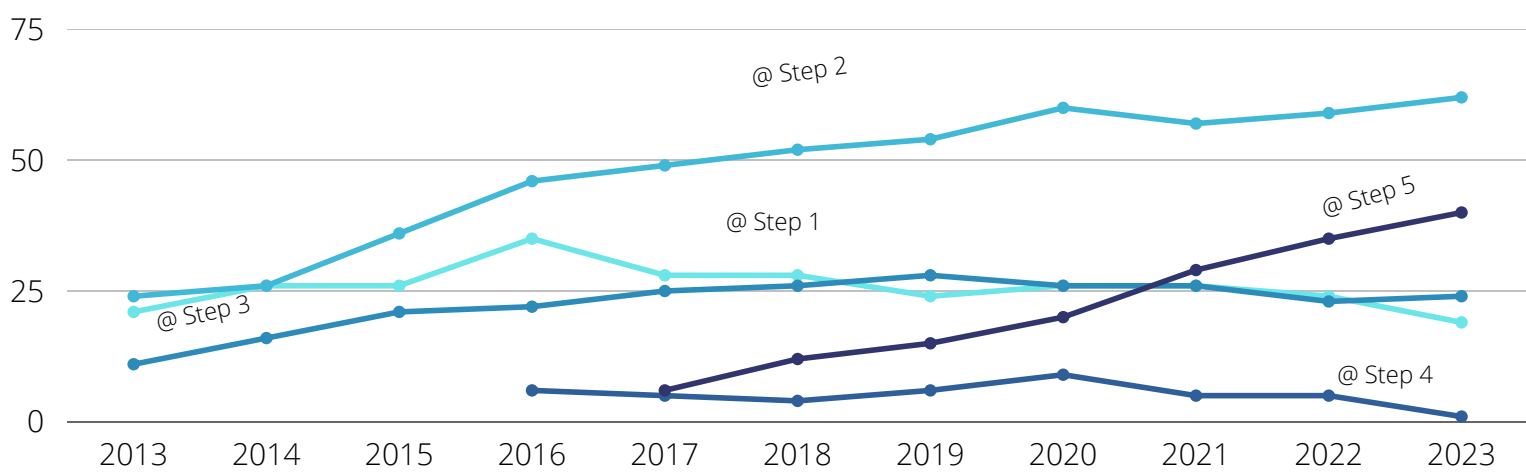
## Source:

Information on this page comes from the Regional Indicators Initiative Report, June 2023, prepared by Becky Alexander and Maureen Colburn of LHB, and funded by the Minnesota Department of Commerce. You can request a copy of the report.

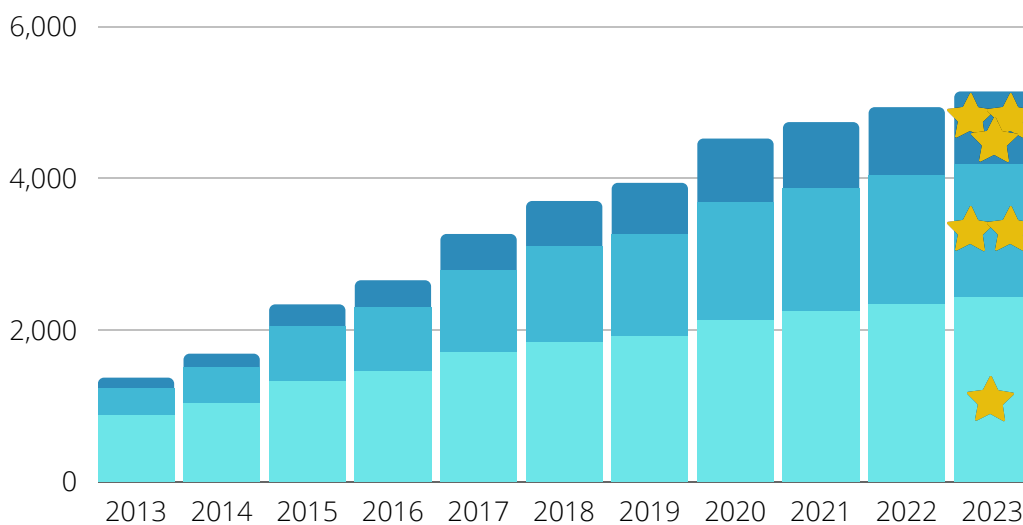
# Trend-Setting



Annual GreenStep Community Recognitions



Total GreenStep Communities by Step



That's 5138 total actions!

Total Best Practice Actions Reported

# Program 2023 Accomplishments

We hosted **13 virtual workshops** that included 272 attendees (and 509 registrants were sent the video recording):

- August 2022:
  - Best Practices for Community Organics Composting Collection and Sites & Glacial Ridge Tour
  - Smart Salting: Roads Certification Training
- October 2022:
  - Local Outdoor Air Quality & Best Practices to Improve It
- November 2022:
  - Biological Integrity
- December 2022:
  - EV Smart Communities
  - Smart Salting: Property Management Certification Training
- January 2023:
  - Deciphering Demographics
- February 2023:
  - Dark Sky Communities & Places
- April 2023:
  - Minnesota Waste Wise Programs
  - Financing Public Energy Efficient & Renewable Energy Projects
- May 2023:
  - Repurposing Buildings: Adaptive Reuse in Minnesota
- June 2023:
  - Smart Salting for Community Leaders

We provided **ongoing outreach and education** throughout the year that included:

- 4 e-newsletter mailings sent to an audience of 1,453 contacts
- 104 messages sent through LMC's MemberLink email listserve for GreenStep Coordinators
- 86 tweets led to an average of 143 impressions per post on Twitter
- 81 members are connected through the private LinkedIn group
- 88 posts led to an average 108 users reached per post on Facebook
- 10 road signs delivered to 5 cities



GreenStep partners at the LMC Annual Conference, June 2022: Colby Abasz - CERTs, Danielle Cabot and Don Reeder - LMC, Emily Hartwell and Kristin Mroz - MPCA, Brian Strub and Pete Berger - Dept. of Commerce

14 volunteers from GreenStep Cities and program partners spent a morning or afternoon at the State Fair to chat with fair-goers visiting the Eco Experience building.



Shann Finwall, Environmental Planner with the City of Maplewood, Jonee Brigham, GreenStep Schools coordinator, and RAHS Progressives

MN GreenStep Cities is a **Sustainable States Network** Member:

- Lola Schoenrich and the Great Plains Institute is the Network Coordinator
- Kristin Mroz was elected to serve as co-chair of the network from December 2020-present
- The network held a gathering in Buffalo, NY with over 35 attendees across the U.S.
- The network hosts regular learning opportunities and cohorts for member programs



# Gold Leaf Pilot Program

## What was it?

The GreenStep Cities program launched a pilot the proposed Gold Leaf program, which focuses on pathways for communities to take local climate action through the GreenStep program. Read more about the background, process, and program goals in the [Gold Leaf Program Proposal](#) document.

Participants of the pilot Gold Leaf program were recognized as they achieved 'gold leaves' for completing any NEW actions from: [44 high-priority, high-impact climate actions](#) (page 17) under the categories of:

*Climate mitigation*    *Climate planning*  
*Climate adaptation*    *Community Connectedness*

## What were the expectations for participating in the Pilot?

- Participate in the nine-month pilot (Dec. 1, 2022 - Sept. 1, 2023)
- Commit to completing and reporting at least 2 NEW actions (see Appendix A in the Proposal) during the pilot period.
- Provide feedback on the program structure and support during and following the pilot period.
- Serve as ambassadors of the official program launch (tentatively Dec. 2023).

## What's next?

- The Advisory Committee and participants will review feedback and inform the program launch.
- A full program report will be shared later in 2023.
- A partnership with the University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment provided 9 summer interns for pilot communities and a 2024 opportunity is underway.
- Guidance documents and additional resources are under development with partners.

Pilot Community	GreenStep Step	CERTs Region	Population
Duluth	Step 5	Northeast	86,697
Edina	Step 5	Metro	53,494
Faribault	Step 2	Southeast	24,453
Grand Rapids	Step 2	Northeast	11,126
La Crescent	Step 4	Southeast	5,276
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Step 2/3	Central	10,967
Maplewood	Step 5	Metro	42,088
Rochester	Step 5	Southeast	121,395
Roseville	Step 5	Metro	36,254
Saint Anthony Village	Step 5	Metro	9,257
Vadnais Heights	-	Metro	12,623



# 2023 Annual Survey

**57%**  
RESPONSE RATE

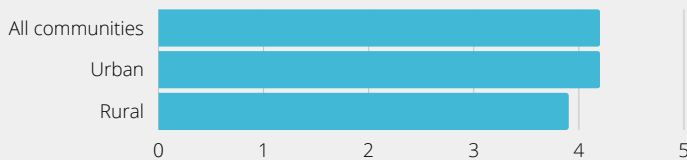
**93**  
PARTICIPANTS REQUESTED ASSISTANCE

**4.2/5**  
OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAM

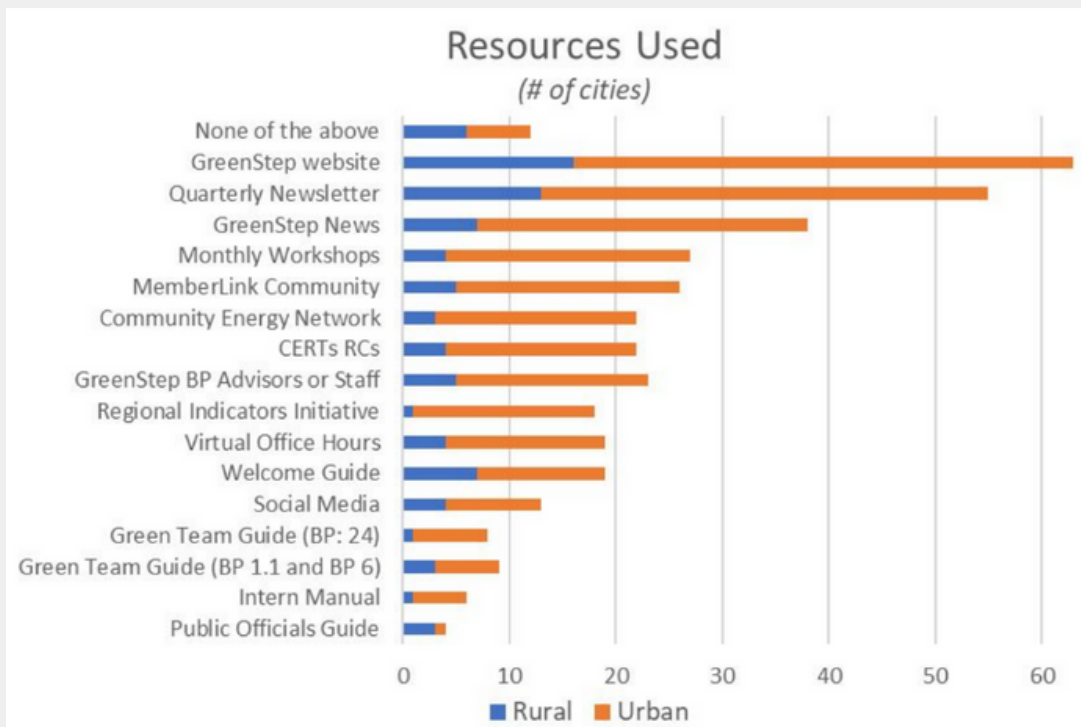
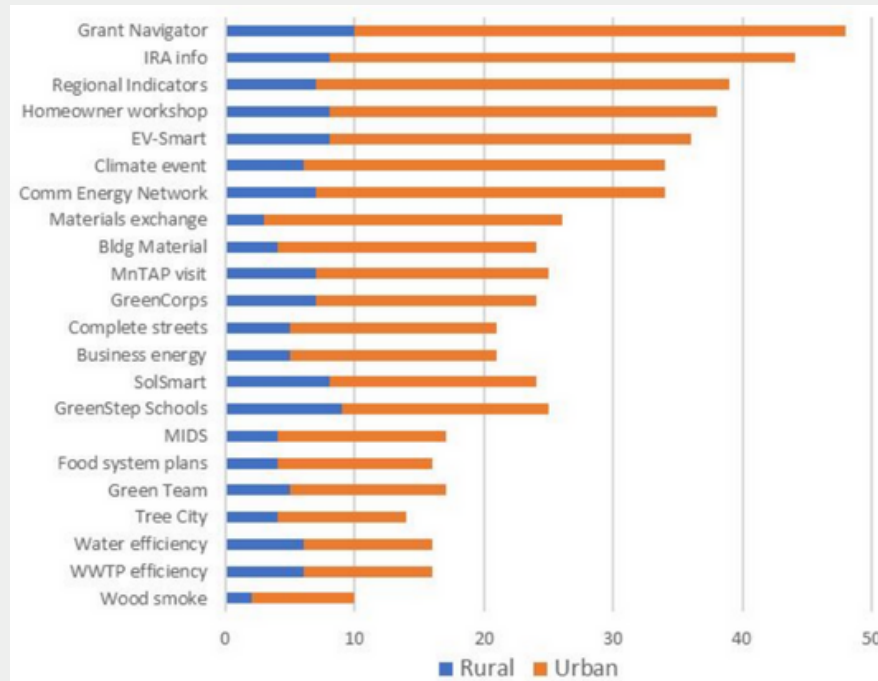
At the beginning of each calendar year, the GreenStep Cities and Tribal Nations program distributes an online survey to participating communities. The survey gathers information about overall program use and satisfaction, helps participants identify program offerings, and encourages participants to share their accomplishments and feedback.

22 specific offerings provided by partners for 2023 were highlighted in the survey. Assistance through the League of Minnesota Cities Grant Navigator was the highest requested offering.

83 participants responded to the annual survey (57%), which was our lowest response rate of any year. This year, we reviewed survey responses by splitting up participants into urban (Twin Cities metropolitan area) and rural.



Urban participants report higher program satisfaction with the GreenStep Cities program (not their involvement in the program) than rural participants.



The website and GreenStep Newsletter continue to be the most used resources. Urban communities use all GreenStep resources heavily, while rural communities are frequent users of the Welcome and Public Officials guides.



# LET'S TAKE A STEP INTO THE FUTURE



The Green STEP into the Future report outlines a strategic vision to support statewide sustainability. Through GreenStep, Minnesota can be a leader as it deepens service and impact to local communities, grows programs to expand participation, and leverages local action to meet statewide challenges - like climate action to protect our communities and thrive in the growing green economy.

Funded! A onetime appropriation is included in HF2310 Omnibus

Level IB was proposed in 2023 Bills SF2350 & HF2626 but didn't pass this year

**Level IA**  
**+ 1 FTE (\$190k)**

**Outcomes:**

- Deeper assistance with current participants across the state
- Enhanced climate and equity support

**Level IB**  
**+ 2.5 FTE (\$600k)**

**Outcomes:**

- Develop GreenStep Schools program beyond pilot to full program
- Expand participation of schools/districts

**Level II**  
**+ 4 FTE (\$810k)**

**Outcomes:**

- Track metrics and outcomes for participants and programs
- Leverage federal funding opportunities
- Improve connections with partners to better connect goals and resources to participants

**Level III**  
**+ 6 FTE (\$1,240k)**

**Outcomes:**

- Support local and regional connections
- Coordinate a community of practice with technical experts and resource providers

**Level IV**  
**+ 10 FTE (\$1,850k)**

**Outcomes:**

- Develop new resources
- Increase education and training
- Expand new programs beyond GSC, GSTN, and GSS
- Provide incentives
- Improve local capacity

**Full Vision Total Need:**  
**\$4,690,000**

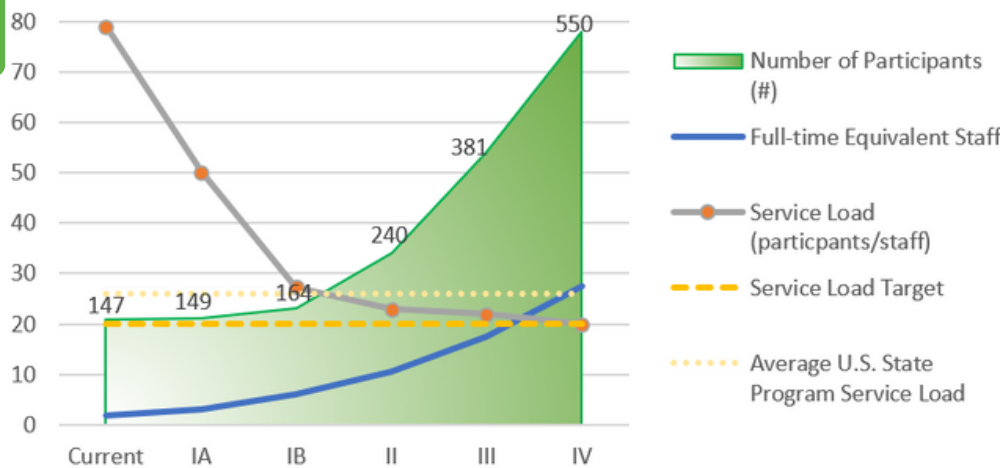
**Currently**  
**1.85 FTE (\$190k)**

**Outcomes:**

- 5138 actions reported by GSC & GSTN
- Pilot programs: GSTN, GSS, Gold Leaf program

**GSC** = GreenStep Cities    **GSTN** = GreenStep Tribal Nations  
**GSS** = GreenStep Schools    **FTE** = Full-time equivalent (staff)

Growing GreenStep: Quantity & Quality



**How are we doing so far?** We have been able to accomplish a lot, with a little. At 1.85 FTE across program partners and 146 GreenStep participants, our current service load (participants per staff) is at 80. Among other statewide programs (CT, NJ, NY, MA, PA), our peers average 26 participants per staff. Our goal is to provide deep assistance and specialized resources at a load of 20 participants per program staff across the Minnesota GreenStep partnership.



# Program Partners

The GreenStep Cities program is coordinated through a Steering Committee of 9 partner organizations:

- Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs)
- Great Plains Institute (GPI)
- Izaak Walton League - MN Division (IWL)
- League of Minnesota Cities (LMC)
- Minnesota Department of Commerce (Commerce)
- Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB)
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- Rethos
- Urban Land Institute Minnesota (ULI)

**Learn more about the program partners in the 2022 Partners Profile**

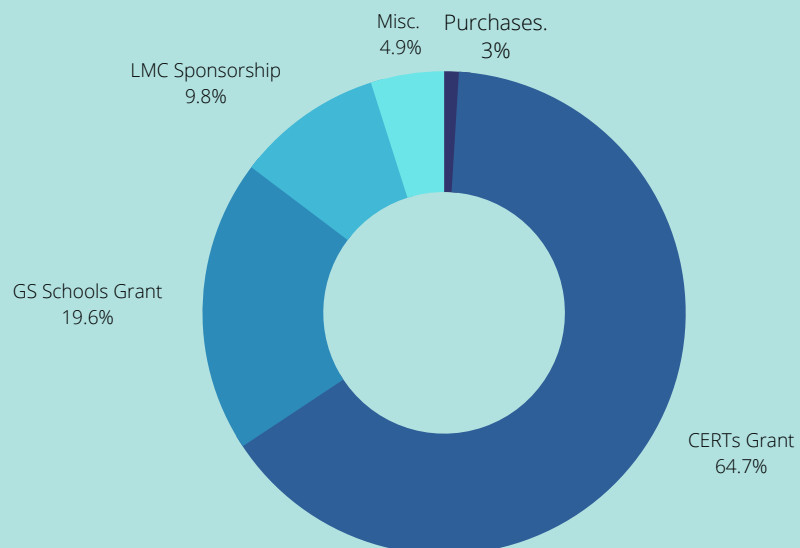


## PROGRAM \$\$\$

The GreenStep Cities program had a budget of \$50,000 in Fiscal Year 2023 (June 2022 to June 2023) provided by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. This funding was used for:

- Regional Outreach Grant to Clean Energy Resources Teams
- Phase III Grant to GreenStep Schools program
- Sponsorship for LMC Conference and 2023 award blocks
- Hosting Smart Salting trainings
- Purchasing GreenStep Cities Road Signs

In addition to staff time and dedicated funding contributed by Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, all partner organizations contribute valuable time and expertise.





# ABOUT US

**Vision:** Environmental sustainability is the norm for all Minnesota cities.

**Mission:** GreenStep Cities encourages and supports cities' efforts for substantive action and achievement of their sustainability goals through the implementation of best practices and sharing of metrics and outcomes.



2023 Annual Award Ceremony

During fall 2007, Minnesota's Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) held regional listening sessions around the state to discuss community-based energy opportunities and the state's Next Generation Energy Act of 2007. The idea was raised of creating a sustainable cities program, free to cities, that would challenge, assist and recognize cities that were "green stars." This idea was taken up by the 2008 Legislature, which directed the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Division of Energy Resources at the Minnesota Department of Commerce, and CERTs to recommend actions cities could take on a voluntary basis.

Representatives from dozens of cities, non-profit organizations, the University of Minnesota, businesses and state government agencies provided the outline for what has been developed as the Minnesota GreenStep Cities program, which began in June 2010. As a non-regulatory program, GreenStep learns from Minnesota cities and assistance providers, and continually refines the best practice actions and the resources for taking action.

Those recommendations are contained in the report, [Minnesota GreenStep Cities](#).

## PARTNER PROGRAMS

The [Minnesota GreenStep Tribal Nations](#) program, launched in 2014 as a pilot program to the GreenStep Cities program, is a free and voluntary statewide best practices framework, community of practice, and recognition program for tribal nations and communities located in Minnesota to reduce environmental impact and costs, and improve health and well-being of tribal members and staff.

The [Minnesota GreenStep Schools](#) program, launched in 2020, is a free and voluntary statewide best practices framework, community of practice, and recognition program for public and private K-12 schools and districts to reduce environmental impact and costs, improve health and well-being of students and staff, and provide effective environmental and sustainability education.



Minnesota  
**GreenStep Tribal Nations**



Minnesota  
**GreenStep Schools**

# Join GreenStep!

## ARE YOU A COMMUNITY LEADER?

Elected officials, commission/committee members, and other community leaders can help their city, tribal nation, or school/district join the GreenStep program. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- Make a list of the sustainable accomplishments your community has already made.
- Request a presentation from GreenStep staff for your staff or public meeting.
- Develop a “green team” of staff and/or community leaders to build knowledge and interest.
- Consider sustainability in community planning efforts like comprehensive and strategic plans.
- Connect with a neighbor city, tribal nation, or school/district that is already a GreenStep program participant.
- Visit the [GreenStep websites](http://www.mnstep.org) to learn more about the programs, benefits, and next steps.

## ARE YOU A COMMUNITY RESIDENT?

Residents and community leaders can help their city, tribal nation, or school/district join the GreenStep program. Here are some suggested to get you started:

- Make a list of why a sustainable community is important for you to live or work in.
- Request a meeting with a council member/ mayor or administrative/environmental staff.
- Speak at a public meeting.
- Take part in community planning efforts like comprehensive and strategic plans.
- Take a leadership role by joining a commission, committee, council, or other opportunity.
- See if there are other residents in your community interested in starting a community sustainability group.
- Write an op-ed in the local newspaper about how GreenStep can help your community be more sustainable.



# Minnesota GreenStep