

Gold Leaf Challenge

A challenge, assist, and recognize local climate action for all types of communities in Minnesota.

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Executive Summary

In its 2020 Strategic Plan, the GreenStep Cities & Tribal Nations ("GreenStep") 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 was to support local climate action. The GreenStep 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 and Tribal 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 Challenge 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 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, Tribal, and regional 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 non-state governments.



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

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 44 climate actions under the

categories of mitigation, planning, adaptation, and community. Once a participant receives a leaf, it can be displayed on a tree model or online image to showcase a community's climate efforts. Notably, a 'gold leaf' is achieved when a community or statewide goal is met. The climate action program differs from original GreenStep "Steps" in that these high-priority, high-impact actions and integrated goals 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 the Challenge.

Background

The <u>GreenStep</u> program is a voluntary challenge, assistance, and recognition program that helps communities 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

2) Milestone:

Demonstrating

local commitment

State's <u>Next Generation</u> <u>Energy Act of 2007</u> and opportunities for community-based energy projects. The idea for a locally-focused sustainability program came from these listening sessions, a <u>report</u> was

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

3) Achievement:

Meeting State-

wide sustainability action standards

provided to the Minnesota Legislature, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), the Minnesota Department of Commerce, and CERTs were directed to develop a voluntary program. In

1) Resolution

Committing to local sustainability

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 <u>Tribal Nations</u> and <u>Schools</u> in 2020.

GreenStep offers a set of <u>29 Best Practices</u> 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.

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



4) Quantification:

Measuring

community-wide impact of actions 5) Improvement:

Demonstrating

community-wide

success of actions



communities to enter various metrics and demonstrate progress each year, respectively.

At present, <u>143 cities and 4 pilot Tribal nations</u> participate in the GreenStep programs. Over 52% of Minnesota's population lives in a GreenStep-participating community (Figure 3).

Context

Preparing for its <u>2020 Strategic Plan</u>, the GreenStep Cities and Tribal Nations 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 <u>Minnesota GreenCorps</u> 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 <u>Climate Action Framework</u>, an initiative under <u>Executive Order 19-37</u>, 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 and Tribal governments in climate action (see <u>Appendix B</u>). 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 and Tribal governments in tandem toward climate action. It is important to work specifically with cities because <u>approximately 75% of all carbon emissions come from cities (Greenhouse Gas Protocol, 2021</u>). This puts local and Tribal 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. A group of stakeholders consisting of city staff, state agency representatives, and GreenStep program and other partners, were first engaged in December 2021. This



Advisory team (see <u>Acknowledgements</u> for a full list) provided feedback before, during, and after the Gold Leaf Pilot project was launched. The pilot ran from December 1, 2022, to September 1, 2023 with 11 participating communities (see <u>Carrying Out the Pilot Program</u>).

GreenStep hired a GreenCorps member for the 2023-2024 service term to help develop and launch the final form of the Gold Leaf program. GreenStep staff gathered feedback from pilot communities, GreenStep partners, and the GreenStep Climate Program Advisory Committee in the Fall of 2023. Staff updated the program based on this information and will be ready to officially launch the "Gold Leaf Challenge" in early 2024.

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 or Tribal Government staff, or amount of financial or technical support should not act as barriers for communities to participate. The selected framework for this program should accommodate communities at all levels of capacity.
- 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 reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building climate resilience.
- **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 community can look back on its climate action journey. Through sharing, this program will also build momentum and become a resource for other communities 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 additional actions.
- **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, 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 that having a local leader to champion climate action in their community is a major determinant of local government climate action success. 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 fewer city or Tribal Government staff, resources, or

greater political barriers. These communities tend to have lower populations and/or location in greater Minnesota (although communities of all sizes and location struggle with capacity). While developing this program, we endeavored to find a balance between including actionable options and reducing requirements to meet all communities where they are at.

- Language. GreenStep regional coordinators indicated some language used in development could 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 communities 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.** Staff, especially from communities 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 communities. The advisory committee did not believe that this program should only be open to Step 5 GreenStep Cities & Tribal Nations, or even limited to GreenStep participants. Regardless of where a community is at in their sustainability journey, it should be able to participate in this program. "Communities" is defined broadly – including whatever you consider a community that would benefit from joining the Challenge.

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 communities would not be interested in participating. We validated 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 needed 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 <u>Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory</u>, prepared as a joint effort between the MPCA

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 <u>Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory: 2005 to 2018</u> is a biennial report to the Minnesota Legislature outlining greenhouse gas emissions sources and trends.

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

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

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
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★ 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.

multiple actions at once, or to communities that report all actions at once, even if those actions were not taken that year.

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) <u>Sustainable City Award</u> accepts nominations from participating 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.



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

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.

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

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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.

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 community 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; 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, 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).







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 community could achieve one leaf for adding a project in one year and another for a separate project a different year (Figure 8).

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 for this structure over 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 was recommended to implement the new program. These participants should include (if interest is expressed):

- at least one Step 5 community
- at least one community at 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 <u>Appendix A</u>) 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 were asked questions to determine the program's successes and areas to be improved. Questions to ask participants included:

- 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 community's involvement with GreenStep actions?





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



- (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 and Tribal Nations steering committee explored 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 ongoing bandwidth of both GreenStep program and participant staff to take on the Gold Leaf program continues to be evaluated. While we don't expect a significantly larger commitment required for this program than what GreenStep already necessitates from staff, the pilot program did provide feedback about the extra time necessary. 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 <u>Appendix A</u>). The program will continue to 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 period. This is not part of the official Challenge at this time, but can be used as a guidance tool or added officially at a later date.
- **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. To best serve GreenStep Tribal Nations participants, tribal representatives were invited to participate in the



program pilot and are encouraged to provide program feedback.

- Expanded Participation: This Challenge started as a program extension for (GreenStep) cities and Tribal nations. Throughout development, 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. Following the Pilot program and further development, the program is open to working with any 'community' as defined broadly. Because only cities and a Tribal nation participated in the Pilot, additional programmatic changes may be necessary as the Challenge takes place.
- **Funding:** While no immediate funding needs have been identified to launch the Gold Leaf program, sustainable funding sources 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**: While ample guidance materials and resources are already available through GreenStep best practices, the Challenge also provides guidance that can more specifically support the Gold Leaf actions listed in <u>Appendix A</u>, as well as explain the Gold Leaf program overall.

Carrying Out the Pilot Program

Participants

The Gold Leaf Pilot program ran from December 1, 2022, to September 1, 2023. The 11 participating communities were:



Community Name	GreenStep Level	Region (CERTs)	Population	Sustainability Staff
Rochester	Step 5	Southeast	121,395	Yes
Duluth	Step 5	Northeast	86,697	Yes
Edina	Step 5	Metro	53,494	Yes
Maplewood	Step 5	Metro	42,088	Yes
Roseville	Step 5	Metro	36,254	Yes
Saint Anthony Village	Step 5	Metro	9,257	No

La Crescent	Step 4	Southeast	5,276	Yes
Faribault	Step 2	Southeast	24,453	No
Grand Rapids	Step 2	Northeast	11,126	No
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Step 3 at time of Pilot, now a Step 5 community	North Central	10,967	Yes
Vadnais Heights	Step 0 (Not a GreenStep City)	Metro	12,623	No

The Gold Leaf Program Proposal (see <u>Pilot Program</u>) set goals for what types of communities would participate. The Pilot was able to achieve these goals. The participants reflected the wide variety of communities across Minnesota and their differing GreenStep levels.

However, a twelfth community participant had applied to join the pilot but withdrew prior to its launch. Even with GreenStep support, some communities still lack capacity to take climate action. The community also indicated that the Gold Leaf program may complicate their efforts in the GreenStep program and the Sustainability Commission's focus.

Offerings

The Gold Leaf pilot provided a space to explore new ways to support and engage participants. A few offers were provided throughout the pilot:



- Scheduled check-ins were coordinated prior to the start of, at the mid-point, and at the close of the pilot. Check-ins were used to help participants select the actions they were interested in pursuing and to gather feedback on the pilot program and its offerings.
- **Exchanges** were offered every other month on various topics for pilot participants to learn from each other, share updates, and explore new resources. The Exchanges were optional 1-hour long Zoom calls offered every other month. Topics included: resiliency, funding for action, climate action planning, Partners in Energy and energy action planning, peer sharing, community forestry, federal funding opportunities, EV Smart fleet analyses, Minnesota legislative updates, public building energy efficiency projects, and youth engagement & collaboration.
- Virtual open office hours were held most Fridays and provided an unscheduled time for participants to check in, ask questions, or request support.
- <u>Partners in Energy</u>, an Xcel Energy program with support from Center for Energy and the Environment, provided Gold Leaf participants with free, one-on-one and cohort-based support

for developing energy goals and starting energy action plans. The offer was open to any community, regardless of which electric utility serves them.

- Summer interns were coordinated in partnership with the <u>Sustainability Corps</u> program through the University of Minnesota. Ten pilot communities hosted eight interns. Interns did a variety of work, including researching project ideas, supporting plan development, and community engagement opportunities.
- **Workplans** were created using a <u>template</u> for each participant. The templates included information based on conversations with pilot participants which could then be used by the community to identify, prioritize, and plan how to accomplish the Gold Leaf actions of choice.
- **Reporting options** were flexible for pilot participants so that we could learn which method was most preferred. Participants were encouraged to report actions by sharing a story (written or verbal), reporting it as a GreenStep action, sending an email summary, or by updating their workplan.

Evaluation

GreenStep staff then evaluated the program in September and October. They interviewed or received written feedback from all participants, utilizing the questions laid out in the Program Proposal (see <u>Pilot Program</u>). The feedback from communities can be found in <u>Appendix D</u>. GreenStep staff organized this information and summarized the major findings. Feedback was divided into two groups: GreenStep participants at Steps 4 or 5 and GreenStep participants at Steps 1, 2, or 3, along with non-GreenStep participants. These two groups share many characteristics and often had similar feedback, so it made sense to group them together to best understand what the final form of the Gold Leaf Program should look like. For example, all but one step 4-5 community has a sustainability staff member, while only one 0-3 step community does. Step 4-5 participants also tend to have a higher population than step 0-3 participants.

Findings

- 1. Were you able to complete at least 2 NEW Gold Leaf actions of your choice during the Pilot period?
 - Nine communities reported being able to accomplish two or more new Gold Leaf actions, and two communities reported only some progress on Gold Leaf Actions (Figure 10). Of these latter communities, one reported not being able to accomplish the actions due to staffing and programmatic issues, while the other chose actions that are large-scale, multi-year projects so could not be completed within the pilot project year. Communities also recorded the total number of actions accomplished and progress made in their workplans, which is another way to gauge success.



Figure 10. Number of actions in progress or accomplished by the 11 Gold Leaf Pilot participants.

2. How has the Gold Leaf Pilot program supported your community in taking climate action?

- Step 4-5 communities were already engaged with or addressing many of the Gold Leaf actions, so it was easy for them to participate in the program. Communities still indicated that there was a value-add to participating. Some felt like it gave them the authority and initiative to make requests of city council or management and to do more, faster. The Gold Leaf actions also served as a framework to focus action on. Finally, city councils and commissions shared positive interactions with the program.
- Step 0-3 communities utilized the program to discuss sustainability topics and push councils and management forward on these issues. Where the city council embraced it, the Gold Leaf Pilot was helpful in advancing climate action as it served to focus priorities and efforts. It also served as a tool to engage with the community around this topic.

3. Did the Gold Leaf Pilot program provide meaningful incentive for participation?

- Step 4-5 participants were already completing a number of the Gold Leaf actions through their own sustainability programs, so the identified priority actions themselves were not a direct incentive for them to join. Pilot participants did find other incentives to participate, including the summer intern, recognition (which Councils in particular liked), the opportunity for sharing information and mentorship, and the usefulness of having an organized framework. There was concern that historically marginalized communities would not be adequately recognized for their work.
- There was limited feedback from step 0-3 communities on this topic. It was useful to city
 managers looking to reduce costs, city councils like it, and the intern could be an incentive.
 The community that accomplished 10 actions seemed excited by the number of leaves and
 recognition they had earned.

4. (For Step 4-5 communities) Did this program increase your involvement with GreenStep actions?

- Step 4-5 participants reported areas where Gold Leaf could increase their involvement with the GreenStep program. They want the GreenStep and Gold Leaf actions to be connected and have the same reporting periods. Additionally, they provided feedback that reporting new actions for Gold Leaf meant GreenStep participants reached out to ask them about the actions. It helped councils prioritize the most important actions to take and focused people on best practice actions, not just reporting.
- 5. (For Step 1-3 communities) How did this program affect your involvement with the main GreenStep program, if at all?
 - Step 0-3 communities liked that the Gold Leaf program gave them the opportunity to become more familiar with the GreenStep program. However, for a community with limited staff, Gold Leaf took some staff time away from GreenStep program participation.
- 6. Did you feel supported throughout your involvement in the Gold Leaf pilot program?
 - Only Step 4-5 participants reported meaningful feedback for this question. They didn't need much support but, when they did, they were able to access it through open office hours, peer Exchanges, or by emailing when they needed it. Mostly smaller participants would have like to have more support and communication around how to host an intern.
- 7. Did you have extra support during this pilot (i.e., AmeriCorps members, temporary staff, interns, etc.)?
 - All but one participant hosted a summer intern. One community had two interns, and one had a GreenCorps member.
- 8. What difference do you think the extra support made in your ability to participate in the Gold Leaf Pilot program? Did it increase the number of specific actions taken and/or the speed at which they were implemented for your community?
 - Step 4-5 communities liked having interns and were able to fully utilize their interns because they had enough work to involve them in immediately, although most created specific Gold Leaf workplans for their interns. It did increase the participant's capacity to take climate action.
 - Step 0-3 communities wanted more support on creating workplans and how to manage interns. However, having interns did add extra capacity to create sustainable changes. These communities do not typically have intern programs and may not have pursued looking for an intern otherwise. These communities seemed to dislike hybrid/ remote internships and wanted someone located in the community. One suggested having interns who aren't yet about to graduate so they won't get jobs and leave before the internship starts.

9. Did you run into any barriers or difficulties during the Pilot?

- Workplans are an optional spreadsheet participants could use to track their actions. All
 participants ended up using them. However, communities struggled both with deciding
 which Gold Leaf actions to focus on and how to set up a workplan for the intern. Each
 handled creating workplans in a different way. Some communities that already have a
 climate action plan and sustainability coordinator were able to more easily hand-off existing
 projects as they already fit into the Gold Leaf actions (feedback from Q1). Other step 4-5
 participants also wanted guidance on how to create a workplan and pick priorities. Smaller
 communities especially seemed to struggle with how to manage an intern and wanted help
 creating a workplan and identifying priorities.
- There weren't any other consistent roadblocks for the other participants. Some Step 4-5 communities struggled to show progress on large-scale, long-term projects that were outside of the timeline of the pilot. The main issue for step 1-2 communities is the lack of capacity to focus on sustainability as none of these communities have sustainability coordinators on staff.

10. Do you have additional feedback or recommendations for improvements of the program?

- **Capacity:** Step 4-5 communities want help specifically on obtaining more money and grants. Smaller communities want help too, but they don't have staff capacity to think about specific funding asks.
- Guidance: Step 4-5 communities want more guidance on each action, the connected metrics, and specific technical assistance needs. Step 0-3 participants want guidance for managing interns, both remotely and in person, how to guide Green Teams and public interaction on this topic, and how to pick out best practices (i.e., more workplan guidance).
- **Mentoring:** There is strong interest in mentoring, information sharing, and potentially cohorts across all participants, but especially with the step 4-5 communities. However, they did not define what that meant to them.
- Integrating GreenStep and Gold Leaf Programs: Participants want consistency and integration between the two program actions and metrics.
- **Challenging Participants:** Step 4-5 participants are competitive, experienced, and want to be further challenged in the climate arena.
- Incentives: Communities really like the awards and recognition aspect of the program, but the current Gold Leaf model may not provide enough incentive to accomplish the most difficult and impactful best practice actions.

Updated Gold Leaf Challenge Program

After considering input from Pilot Program participants, the <u>goals</u> of the Gold Leaf program, <u>rejected frameworks</u> from Pilot development, and previous feedback from the GreenStep Climate Program Advisory Committee, GreenStep staff recommends these changes to the Gold Leaf program:



Name: "Gold Leaf Challenge"

- **Program Adjustment:** The Gold Leaf Program will be renamed the Gold Leaf Challenge.
- Reasoning: Gold Leaf is not just a Step 6 of the GreenStep Cities & Tribal Nations program. It is a distinct program that is meant to provide communities with a limited set of actions that result in climate action. The Gold Leaf Challenge will provide an opportunity for communities to focus on climate mitigation and to meet the moment with ambitious action, which is required to meet Minnesota and the world's climate goals, while also increasing resilience and planning for climate impacts. We want communities to be as ambitious as possible in accomplishing these actions and be celebrated for their successes. The reward structure will also differentiate the two programs because Gold Leaf rewards all actions taken and goals accomplished. Communities should be trying to accomplish as many actions as possible each year. Thus, the word "challenge" is a more fitting name for the program.
- **Gold Leaf Pilot Feedback:** Some felt that Gold Leaf was like a Step 6 of GreenStep. Others gave the feedback that the program should emphasize action and meet this enormous moment of our climate challenge. Turning Gold Leaf into an explicit challenge to collect "leaves" (actions) differentiates it further from GreenStep and challenges participants to take swift climate action.

Start with a "Green Team"

- Program Adjustment: When communities choose to enter the Gold Leaf Program, the first action they commit to will be to create a Green Team if they don't have one or document that they already do. A "Green Team" refers to any established group of people who meet regularly to support sustainable changes in a community. For a Green Team that addresses climate topics, Gold Leaf action CC1 can be used. For a Green Team that addresses sustainability more broadly, GreenStep Communities action 24.1 (at a 1-, 2-, or 3-star level) can be used. This team could be made up of community members and/or staff members (a "Green Team") or a panel of appointed experts and community members (a "Sustainability Committee" or "Commission"). (Note: both of these options will be referred to as a "Green Team" throughout).
- **Reasoning:** A coordinated team is critical to the long-term success of a community adopting actions and seeing outcomes. Requiring this type of support for a community's sustainable actions is considered best practice by other programs because it centers environmental decisions in the community's needs and creates an organization to carry out that vision, even through turnover. For example, creating a "Green Team" is a requirement for communities to

join <u>The Sustainable Jersey Program</u>, New Jersey's version of GreenStep. The <u>Minnesota</u> <u>GreenStep Schools</u> program also requires a "Green Team" to participate in their program. Having a "Green Team" is a requirement for Minnesota GreenStep Communities to reach <u>Step 3</u> of the program.

 Gold Leaf Pilot Feedback: The Gold Leaf Pilot participants showed how essential this organizational support was to the communities that accomplished Gold Leaf actions. Green Teams already exist in many Gold Leaf Pilot communities, and they helped make these communities successful during the Pilot (see Figure 11). They solve some of the capacity issues small and rural communities face in making sustainable changes. Because many step 0-3 communities didn't have a Green Team in place, they struggled with creating a work plan for a summer intern and picking out Gold Leaf actions to



Figure 11. Sustainability staff and Green Team or Environmental Commissions occurring in Gold Leaf participating communities.

accomplish. A Green Team can help alleviate these issues. It provides extra support for government staff in carrying out best practice actions. Green Teams can pick out which actions the community should take, will be a repository for knowledge of current Gold Leaf projects, and will push for continued action when staff cannot. Green Teams' ongoing projects can also provide staff with ready-made work for interns. Step 4-5 participants already rely on Green Teams for this type of support. Some step 4-5 communities wanted help picking out best practice actions but, because most of them have sustainability staff and/ or a Green Team, they had ongoing sustainability work that fit into best practice actions and created work out of that for interns.

 Green Teams are especially important for step 0-3 participants, which tend to be rural and smaller communities. In our pilot, 3 out of 4 step 0-3 participants had a Green Team but only 1 of the 4 had sustainability staff. The community that didn't make progress on their Gold Leaf actions was the one that has no sustainability staff and no Green Team. They had plans for which actions they were going to accomplish, but staff felt overwhelmed and were not able to accomplish the Gold Leaf actions. On the other hand, a step 2 community was able to accomplish 10 Gold Leaf actions without sustainability staff because they had the support of an environmental commission that knew about past planning efforts. This Green Team played an essential part of picking out the best practice actions for their community, and thus had work ready to go for the summer intern.

Connecting Goals to Actions

- **Program Adjustment:** Participating in the Gold Leaf Program allows communities to incorporate their own climate goals into their Gold Leaf Program planning and documentation. If the community already has identified and publicized climate goals through a Climate Action (CAP) or other plan or document, they can incorporate those goals using the Gold Leaf work plan. Additionally, relevant Minnesota Climate Action Framework (CAF) goals will be associated with the Gold Leaf actions (See <u>Appendix C</u>). While some CAF goals may not have hard targets to hit, communities could show through their documentation of how they believe they have accomplished these goals for additional recognition. Alternatively, the CAF can serve as the larger framework for how a community carries out Gold Leaf actions.
- **Reasoning:** Integrating a community's own climate goals and State CAF goals into the Gold Leaf Program will incentivize them to be more ambitious in accomplishing both these goals because it puts the Gold Leaf actions into the wider context of these goals. Communities will then be rewarded both for taking Gold Leaf actions and reaching overarching sustainability goals. This will also incentivize participants to report their actions in Gold Leaf as it helps them show their progress towards achieving these larger goals. Communities want the recognition that will come with the Gold Leaf program, and this is another way to publicize their efforts.
- Integrating communities' and CAF goals into the Gold Leaf Program will give communities a sense of working within larger climate solution frameworks. And it shows how a community's Gold Leaf actions fit into the state's climate work. There are many national and international programs that could provide a framework to communities, but utilizing Minnesota's own framework means that Gold Leaf can help build momentum towards accomplishing the CAF with one vision across the state while also allowing communities the flexibility to pick actions. Integrating these goals into Gold Leaf will also provide evidence of where communities are struggling and succeeding in accomplishing climate goals, which will inform how GreenStep staff support participants. GreenStep staff already track energy and climate goals through the Minnesota Sustainability Index, so goals can continue to be updated and shared for peer communities.
- Gold Leaf Pilot Feedback: Step 4-5 communities want to be engaged and challenged to
 accomplish ambitious climate goals. They reported that the Gold Leaf Pilot was an effective tool
 to promote climate actions within local or tribal governments but were already accomplishing
 many of these actions prior to the Pilot. Step 0-3 communities may not yet have a CAP, so
 linking to CAF gives them broader goals to work for and can help guide which Gold Leaf actions
 they work on. Many participants also wanted a greater framework to work within. Some
 mentioned outside frameworks like LEED or international standards.

Rewards and Incentive Structure:

 Program Adjustment: The first year, Gold Leaf participants will receive a wooden tree award. (See more under <u>Awards</u>.) They will then receive wooden leaves inscribed with the year and the

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action they accomplished that they can add to the award. For the larger goals of accomplishing CAFs and their own CAP goals, they will receive gold color leaves.

- Reasoning: Pilot participants were motivated by the idea of receiving leaves for their work. There are many examples of what these trees look like, as this is a common way to publicly recognize efforts (i.e. donation tree, growth award, etc.). However, communities may accomplish many actions (and thus leaves) quickly. Rewarding gold leaves for only the most impactful accomplishments differentiates Gold Leaf actions from the greater challenge of hitting climate goals.
- **Gold Leaf Pilot Feedback:** Communities like rewards and public recognition, but they need more incentives to accomplish the most difficult and impactful actions.

Ongoing Efforts

There were two themes that developed from the pilot project and the subsequent feedback sessions held. These topics both warrant serious thought and action. Since both topics are relevant to the Gold Leaf Challenge and GreenStep programs, these efforts will be addressed ongoing.

Tribal Nation Participants

The Gold Leaf Pilot received thoughtful feedback about how the program can meaningfully include Tribal nations in both Gold Leaf and GreenStep. The feedback to staff was to consistently use inclusive language and branding, consult and consider Tribal nations at all stages of program planning, implementation, and recognition, and ensure best practices and other resources are relevant to Tribal nations. Some of this feedback can be directly integrated into the Gold Leaf Challenge because it is a new program currently under development. Many of these changes can also be integrated into the GreenStep program as resources are updated. Other feedback requires more learning about what types of engagement and resources Tribal nations are looking to participate with the Gold Leaf and GreenStep programs, and how those lessons can be thoughtfully integrated into the programs. GreenStep staff are committed to ensuring these changes, both short-term and long-term, happen, and to continue the dialogue about how Gold Leaf and GreenStep can best serve Tribal communities.

Fostering Connection and Peer Learning

One of the main points of feedback we heard was that communities want opportunities for connection and peer learning. The word "mentorship" was mentioned numerous times by multiple pilot participants. Because it isn't clear what all these communities mean by mentorship, staff are working to understand what this means for both Gold Leaf and GreenStep programs, and at what capacity mentorships can be developed.



Continuous Improvement

One of the goals of The Gold Leaf Challenge is to continuously improve the program and adjust it for the many community types that can join. In order to obtain high-quality feedback from our participants, the GreenStep Climate Program Advisory Committee will be transformed into the Gold Leaf Challenge Advisory Committee. Program staff will aim to have a representative from each Gold Leaf community type join this Committee.

Gold Leaf Launch

The Gold Leaf Pilot Program will launch early in 2024. Program staff will work to develop Gold Leaf action guidance and resources, update the website, and generate excitement for the launch.

Awards

The GreenStep Program staff will develop awards to give out for Gold Leaf Actions (Firgure 12). Staff will work with local companies to create these awards. The participant will be given the plaque within their first year in the program, along with leaves representing the actions they have accomplished. When they accomplish larger goals from their own climate action plans or the State's Climate Action Framework, they will receive "gold" leaves.



Future Considerations

Once the Gold Leaf Program is implemented, GreenStep staff will work with participants to receive feedback on the program to ensure it is working as intended. Questions to pose when the program is re-evaluated in the future include:

- Is the program accomplishing the goals that were identified?
- Are the changes following the Pilot effective at addressing participants' feedback?
- How are we supporting small and rural communities?







- Are communities' CAPs ambitious enough to achieve the state's Climate Action Framework goals?
- How can we further support communities to take climate action?
- Which communities need the most support?
- What metrics can be used to help tell the success/failure of the Gold Leaf Challenge?

Appendix A: Gold Leaf Actions

Below is a list of actions for this program, categorized by the way in which they address climate change. There are a total of 44 actions between four categories: <u>Climate Mitigation</u>, <u>Climate Planning</u>, <u>Climate Adaptation</u>, and <u>Community Connectedness for Minnesota's changing climate</u>.

Find guidance documents for each Gold Leaf Action with additional information.

Climate Mitigation

Gold Leaf Action	Associated GreenStep Cities & Tribal Nations Best Practices	Leaf Recognition Criteria*
CM1 – Efficient public building operations: For one government-owned/school building, complete 12 months of facilities operations utilizing the B3/SB 2030 Energy Efficient Operations Manual (B3 EEOM).	<u>1.6</u>	Per building documented (1/lifetime); 1+/year
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).	<u>1.6, 2.4</u>	Per building documented (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CM3- Private sector incentives: Show a private party has newly completed significant energy/sustainability improvements using local/tribal government-provided incentives.	2.4, 2.6, 3.4	Per project implemented for each incentive (1/lifetime); 1+/lifetime
CM4 - Resilient growth: Document a project that has newly developed an infill lot or redeveloped an existing but underutilized property using local/tribal government-incentives or as the result of a local/tribal policy.	<u>5.5, 7.4</u>	Per project implemented for each incentive/ policy (1/lifetime); 1+/year
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 documented (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CM6 - Public energy efficiency projects: Invest in a new and significant energy efficiency project through performance contracting or other funding in government-owned/school buildings.	<u>1.3</u>	Per project completed (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CM7- Alternatives to car travel: Become a Bicycle Friendly or a Walk Friendly community by implementing green and living street principals.	<u>11.2, 11.3,</u> <u>12.1, 12.6</u>	Per certification (1/lifetime); 1+/year

CM8 - Active living campaign: Conduct an active living campaign like Safe Routes to School, Age Friendly Communities, etc.	<u>12.2</u>	Per campaign at each site (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CM9 - Micromobility: Develop a new challenge campaign, create a new transportation hub, start a new rideboard, and/or incorporate "smart" mobility.	<u>12.4</u>	Per campaign (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CM10 - Telecommuter Forward: Be certified as a Telecommuter Forward! Community.	<u>12.5</u>	Per certification (1/lifetime); 1/year
CM11 - Renewable energy purchasing: Purchase 100% clean energy used by government operations via the municipal utility, green tags, community solar garden, or 3rd party agreements.	<u>15.2</u>	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/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.	<u>26.4, 26.5</u>	Per project implemented (1/lifetime); 1+/year

Climate Planning

Gold Leaf Action	Associated GreenStep Cities & Tribal Nations 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.	<u>29.1</u>	Per shelter with a plan (1/lifetime); 1+/year
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.	<u>29.3</u>	Per plan for each site (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CP3 - FEMA rating: Enroll in the FEMA Community Rating System and be recognized at a class rating of 6 through 1.	<u>19.8</u>	Per enrollment or updated rating (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CP4 - Climate/resilience plans: Adopt a new or newly updated climate adaptation/resilience plan that is used for local/tribal comprehensive planning, policymaking, and budgeting. Document how underserved communities were part of the planning effort.	<u>29.2</u>	Per plan adopted or updated (1+/lifetime); 1/year

CP5 - Climate risk assessment: Conduct a new climate risk assessment or resilience project planning for local infrastructure (i.e., sewer, stormwater, roads/bridges, water supply, wastewater, municipal powerlines, public facilities, etc.) and/or ecosystems (i.e. watershed, forest, etc.)	29.7	Per assessment/ resilience project plan (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CP6 - 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.	<u>6.5</u>	Per goal adopted or updated (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CP7 - Climate action plan: Adopt a new or updated Climate Action Plan or be part of a regional Climate Action Plan effort (document participation).	<u>6.5</u>	Per plan adopted or updated (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CP8 - Climate priority resolution: Newly adopt or strengthen a resolution declaring a climate emergency and prioritizing climate action.	<u>6.5</u>	Per resolution adopted or updated (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CP9 - Climate action budget: At least 1% of the current annual budget is allocated to climate action.	24.2, 29.2	Per annual budget documented (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CP10 - Climate staff: Have a new or rehire a paid staff position with climate action as a main responsibility.	24.1	Per (re)hire (1/lifetime); 1+/year
 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: a) receive local/tribal/regional financial support, b) require regulatory approval (planned unit development, conditional use permit, rezoning, variance), or c) are public (i.e. school) 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 adopted or updated (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CP12 – Land use policy: Newly adopt or strengthen a policy limiting annexations or infrastructure extensions to encourage infill and redevelopment.	<u>5.5</u>	Per policy adopted or updated (1+/lifetime); 1/year

Climate Adaptation

Gold Leaf Action	Associated GreenStep Cities & Tribal Nations Best Practices	Annual Recertification Criteria*
CA1 - Urban heat relief: In an area of environmental justice concern or high heat vulnerability, newly complete a project such as: cool	<u>29.6</u>	Per project implemented at each

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%.		site (1/lifetime); 1+/year
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.	<u>29.5</u>	Per project implemented at each site (1/lifetime); 1+/year
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.	<u>29.8</u>	Per system at each site (1/lifetime); 1+/year
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 local/tribal/regional incentives.	<u>17.5, 29.4</u>	Per project installed (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CA5 – Resilient trees: Plant and maintain at least 2-3 climate resilient trees for each public tree lost.	<u>16.3</u>	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CA6 - Building weather preparation: Newly modify/rebuild one public building to improve flood resilience, prevent damage, and sustain function during extreme weather events.	<u>29.5</u>	Per building (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CA7 - Property buy-out: Newly complete the buy-out of one or more properties at risk of flood damage through a buyout program.	<u>19.8</u>	Per property (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CA8 – Resilient public water systems: Newly implement a strategy to reduce climate change risk and increase resilience for public water or wastewater operations or a specific asset (such as a lift station, headwork, water intake/distribution/storage, booster stations/pump, treatment plant, etc.)	<u>29.7</u>	Per project at each site (1/lifetime); 1+/year

Community Connectedness for Minnesota's changing climate

Gold Leaf Action	Associated	Annual
	GreenStep	Recertification
	Cities &	Criteria*
	Tribal Nations	
	Best Practices	

CC1- Combined green team: Have a green team with government and community member representation that meets regularly (at least 4 times every year) and address topics related to Minnesota's changing climate.	<u>24.1</u>	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CC2 - Youth involvement: Have at least two filled youth/student positions on an environmental commission, green team, or other advisory body that addresses topics related to Minnesota's changing climate.	<u>24.6</u>	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CC3 - Youth collaboration: A school environmental club has an ongoing connection with a commission or green team for involvement in topics related to Minnesota's changing climate.	24.6	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CC4 - Student internship: A student internship includes issues related to Minnesota's changing climate in their work.	24.6	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CC5 - Community restoration: Host one or more events that engage community members in annual restoration or cleanup of public natural areas.	<u>18.8</u>	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CC6 - Community science: Create or participate in a community science program related to the environment and Minnesota's changing climate.	<u>18.8</u>	Per program (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CC7 - Accessible public green spaces: Newly document that at least 20% of total 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.	<u>18.3</u>	Per documentation (1/lifetime); 1/year
CC8 - Tree Steward community: Participate in the Tree Steward Program.	<u>16.6</u>	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CC9 - Local purchasing: Require and document that 10% of government purchases to be made from local businesses with special consideration for minority, disability, and women-owned businesses.	<u>15.3, 25.7</u>	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/year
CC10 - Food Security: Conduct a campaign and/or provide incentives to promote the increased local production and/or buying of local foods by community service providers. Report the use of organic, whole food, and plant-based options.	<u>15.3, 25.7,</u> <u>27.4</u>	Per campaign or incentive at each site (1/lifetime); 1+/year
CC11 - Community visioning: Conduct a Community Visioning process (i.e., MN Main Streets, D4CR, etc.) that engages community members through 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.	<u>5.2, 8.1, 29.3</u>	Per process (1/lifetime); 1+/year
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.	<u>25.1</u>	Per annual documentation (1+/lifetime); 1/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. See individual guidance documents for additional reporting information.

Appendix B: GreenStep Communities Climate Action Mapping

The table below reviews the GreenStep Cities and Tribal Nations 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 Cities & Tribal Nations Best Practice Actions	Gold Leaf Climate Actions	<u>MN Climate</u> <u>Action</u> <u>Framework</u>	<u>High-Impact</u> <u>Actions for Low</u> <u>Carbon Cities</u>	<u>USDN's High</u> Impact Practices	<u>UN's Sustainable</u> <u>Development</u> <u>Goals</u>
BP 1 – Efficient Existin	g Public Buildings	0	0		0
1.1					
1.2					
1.3					
1.4					
1.5					
1.6					
1.7					
BP 2 – Efficient Existin	g 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 Redev	elopment	1			
5.1					
5.2					
5.3					
5.4					
5.5					
BP 6 – Comprehensive	e Plans				
6.1					
6.2					
6.3					
6.4					
6.5					
BP 7 – Efficient Growt	h				
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 Highw	ay- and Auto-Oriented [Development		
9.1				
9.2				
9.3				
9.4				
BP 10 – Design for Na	tural Resource Conserva	ition		
10.1				
10.2				
10.3				
10.4				
10.5				
10.6				
10.7				
BP 11 – Living & Com	olete Streets			
11.1				
11.2				
11.3				
11.4				
11.5				
11.6				
BP 12 – Mobility Optio	ons		 	
12.1				
12.2				
12.3				
12.4				

12.5						
12.6						
BP 13 – Efficient Fleet	S		-			
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							
47.2							
17.2							
17.3							
17.4							
17.5							
17.6							
BP 18 – Parks & Trails	°			0			
18.1							
18.2							
18.3							
18.4							
18.5							
18.6							
18.7							
18.8							
BP 19 – Surface Water	ſ						
19.1							
19.2							
19.3							
19.4							
19.5							
19.6							
19.7							
19.8							
BP 20 – Efficient Wate	BP 20 – Efficient Water & Wastewater Facilities						
20.1							
20.2							
20.3							

20.4						
20.5						
20.6						
20.7						
BP 21 – Septic System	S		·			
21.1						
21.2						
21.3						
21.4						
21.5						
21.6						
21.7						
BP 22 – Sustainable Co	onsumption & Waste					
22.1						
22.2						
22.3						
22.4						
22.5						
22.6						
22.7						
22.8						
BP 23 – Local Air Qual	ity		-			
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 Busine	ss Development					
25.1						
25.2						
25.3						
25.4						
25.5						
25.6						
25.7						
BP 26 – Renewable Er	hergy			<u>.</u>		
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			

Appendix C: Gold Leaf Goal Mapping

The Gold Leaf Challenge encourages participants to connect their actions to goals through the integration of local community-specific goals and/or statewide climate goals. For communities without their own goals identified, the <u>Minnesota Climate Action Framework</u> (State of Minnesota, 2022) can serve as a guide for goal-setting. In addition, these statewide goals are helpful for communities to connect with and align their own goals, when possible. This map explores the relationships between Gold Leaf Challenge actions and the Climate Action Framework's measures of progress and sub-initiatives. Participants will also find this information in the Gold Leaf guidance documents.

		Minnesota Climate Action Framework Goals	Minnesota Climate Action Framework
	Gold Leaf Actions	(Measures of Progress)	Sub-Initiatives
CM1	Efficient Public Building Operations: For one government- owned/school building, complete 12 months of facilities operations utilizing the B3/SB 2030 Energy	By 2035, reduce GHG emissions from existing buildings by 50% compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.) By 2030, reduce thermal GHG emissions by at least 20%, compared to	4.2.1: Increase efficiency and reduce emissions in existing buildings.
CIVIT	Efficient Operations Manual (B3 EEOM).	2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.) By 2030, reduce energy use by 10% and total waste heat and waste electricity by 15%, compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	
CM2	Certified Green Building Operations: Document the certification of a public or private building at gold-	By 2035, reduce GHG emissions from existing buildings by 50% compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	4.2.1: Increase efficiency and reduce emissions in existing buildings.
0.012	equivalent or better under a green building operations framework (such as the LEED O+M rating system).		
	Private Sector Incentives: Show a private party has newly completed significant energy/sustainability	By 2040, all of Minnesota's electricity is carbon-free. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	3.3.1: Plan for climate adaptation in residential and commercial development.
	improvements using local/tribal government-provided incentives.	By 2030, weatherize a quarter of dwellings where occupants earn 50% or less of the state median income. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	3.1.2: Deliver necessary funding.
CM2		By 2035, reduce GHG emissions from existing buildings by 50% compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	4.1.1: Transition to 100% carbon-free electricity.
CIVIS		By 2030, reduce thermal GHG emissions by at least 20%, compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	4.2.2: Design and build climate-smart new buildings.
		By 2030, reduce energy use by 10% and total waste heat and waste electricity by 15%, compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	5.2.2: Support climate-smart healthcare systems.
			6.1.1: Become a national leader in clean innovation.
	Resilient Growth: Document a project that has newly developed an infill lot or redeveloped an existing but	Decrease vehicle miles traveled 20% per capita by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 26.)	1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking, walking, transit, and telecommuting.
CM4	underutilized property using local/tribal government-incentives or as the result of a local/tribal policy.	Achieve 30% overall tree canopy cover in Minnesota communities by 2030 and 40% by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	4.2.3: Building reuse and preventing waste.

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.	Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	4.1.1: T ransition to 100% carbon-free electricity.
CM6	Public Energy Efficiency Projects: Invest in a new and significant energy efficiency project through performance contracting or other funding in government-owned/school buildings.	By 2035, reduce GHG emissions from existing buildings by 50% compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.) By 2030, reduce thermal GHG emissions by at least 20%, compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.) By 2030, reduce energy use by 10% and total waste heat and waste electricity by 15%, compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	4.2.1: Increase efficiency and reduce emissions in existing buildings.
CM7	Alternatives to Car Travel: Become a Bicycle Friendly or a Walk Friendly community by implementing green and living street principals.	Reduce GHG emissions from the transportation sector 80% by 2040. (MN CAF, pg 26.) Decrease vehicle miles traveled 20% per capita by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 26.)	1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking, walking, transit, and telecommuting.1.1.2 Plan land use that supports multimodal transportation.
CM8	Active Living Campaign: Conduct an active living campaign like Safe Routes to School, Age Friendly Communities, etc.	Reduce GHG emissions from the transportation sector 80% by 2040. (MN CAF, pg 26.) Decrease vehicle miles traveled 20% per capita by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 26.) By 2030, reduce the age- adjusted rate of heat- related ER visits to 10 per 100,000. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	 1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking, walking, transit, and telecommuting. 5.1.2: Protect culturally important activities.
CM9	Transportation Mode-Shift: Develop a new challenge campaign, create a new transportation hub, start a new rideboard, and/or incorporate "smart" mobility.	Reduce GHG emissions from the transportation sector 80% by 2040. (MN CAF, pg 26.) Decrease vehicle miles traveled 20% per capita by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 26.)	1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking, walking, transit, and telecommuting.
СМ10	Telecommuter Forward: Be certified as a Telecommuter Forward! Community.	Reduce GHG emissions from the transportation sector 80% by 2040. (MN CAF, pg 26.) Decrease vehicle miles traveled 20% per capita by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 26.) By 2030, reduce energy use by 10% and total waste heat and waste electricity by 15%, compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking, walking, transit, and telecommuting.
CM11	Renewable Energy Purchasing: Purchase 100% clean energy used by government operations via the municipal utility, green tags, community solar garden, or 3rd party agreements	By 2040, all of Minnesota's electricity is carbon-free. (MN CAF, pg 50.) Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	4.1.1: Transition to 100% carbon-free electricity.
СМ12	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.	Reducing GHG emissions by 50% by 2030. (MN CAF, pg 13.) Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	 2.5.2: Promote forest products that store carbon and reduce GHG emissions. 2.5.4: Reduce waste and promote beneficial use of materials.

		By 2040, all of Minnesota's electricity is carbon-free. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	3.2.2: Plant beneficial vegetation on urban land.
		By 2030, reduce the energy burden so at least 80% of Minnesotans spend less than 5% of their household income on energy costs. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	4.1.1: T ransition to 100% carbon-free electricity.
		Increase the number of clean technology businesses and the number of jobs they provide. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	4.1.2 Utilize waste heat
	Safe Shelter: Designate a new safe shelter with a plan that	By 2026, at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community resiliency are fully funded. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	3.1.1: Provide needed technical assistance, tools, and data.
	arranges for adequate provisions and backup power sufficient to meet daily run-time requirements as a shelter	By 2030, reduce the age- adjusted rate of heat- related ER visits to 10 per 100,000. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	3.1.3: Share best practices through learning networks.
CP1	for one week or longer during utility grid failure.	By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	3.2.3: Protect and improve water quality and quantity.
			3.3.4: Reduce the urban heat island effects.
			5.1.1: Support healthy communities and workplaces.
			5.2.1: Increase public health capacity and adaptation resources.
	Community Resilience Hub: Create a plan for a new	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	3.1.1: Provide needed technical assistance,
	resilience hub that describes community services to be	Identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	tools, and data.
	provided throughout the year, as well as specific services provided during disruption and into recovery after natural	per 100,000. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	3.3.4: Reduce the urban heat Island effects.
CP2	hazard events.	By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	5.1.1: Support healthy communities and workplaces.
			5.2.1: Increase public health capacity and adaptation resources.
	FEMA Rating: Enroll in the FEMA Community Rating System and be recognized at a class rating of 6 through 1.	By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored annually in natural and working lands, compared to 2014-2018 average levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.)	3.1.1: Provide needed technical assistance, tools, and data.
СР3		By 2026, at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community resiliency are fully funded. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	3.3.2: Fund resilient infrastructure and critical facilities.
		By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	1.1.3: Maximize resiliency and GHG mitigation infrastructure projects.
	Climate Adaptation/ Resilience Plans: Adopt a new or	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	3.1.1: Provide needed technical assistance,
CP4	used for local/tribal comprehensive planning	identity climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	1001s, and data.
CP4	policymaking, and budgeting. Document how		3.1.2. Deriver necessary running.
	underserved communities were part of the planning		networks.

	effort.		3.2.3: Protect and improve water quality and
			quantity.
			3.3.2: Fund resilient infrastructure and critical facilities.
			5.2.1: Increase public health capacity and adaptation resources.
	Climate Risk Assessment: Conduct a new climate risk	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	2.4.1: Manage agricultural landscapes to hold
	assessment or resilience project planning for local	identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	nitrogen and retain rainfall and snow melt.
CP5	infrastructure (i.e. sewer, stormwater, city roads/bridges, water supply, wastewater, municipal powerlines, public		3.2.3: Protect and improve water quality and quantity.
	facilities, etc.).		3.3.2: Fund resilient infrastructure and critical facilities.
	Climate Goals: Newly adopt or strengthen existing climate or energy goal(s) (i.e. renewable energy, GHG	Reducing GHG emissions by 50% by 2030. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking, walking, transit, and telecommuting.
	emissions, carbon neutral, etc.) with a deadline of 2030 or sooner.	Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	1.2.3: Increase electric vehicle availability and access.
		Reduce GHG emissions from the transportation sector 80% by 2040. (MN CAF, pg 26.)	4.1.1: Transition to 100% carbon-free electricity.
		Decrease vehicle miles traveled 20% per capita by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 26.)	5.1.1: Support healthy communities and workplaces.
		Reach 20% EVs on Minnesota roads by 2030. (MN CAF, pg 26.)	5.2.1: Increase public health capacity and adaptation resources.
		By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored	
CP6		annually in natural and working lands, compared to 2014-2018 average levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.)	
		By 2040, all of Minnesota's electricity is carbon-free. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	
		By 2035, reduce GHG emissions from existing buildings by 50%	
		compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	
		By 2030, reduce thermal GHG emissions by at least 20%, compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	
		By 2030, reduce the energy burden so at least 80% of Minnesotans	
		spend less than 5% of their household income on energy costs. (MN	
		By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal	
		climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg	
		57.)	
	Climate Action Plan: Adopt a new or updated Climate Action Plan or be part of a regional Climate Action Plan	Reducing GHG emissions by 50% by 2030. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking, walking, transit, and telecommuting.
CP7	effort (document participation).	Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	1.2.3: Increase electric vehicle availability and access.
			4.1.1: Transition to 100% carbon-free

			electricity.
			5.1.1: Support healthy communities and workplaces.
			5.2.1: Increase public health capacity and adaptation resources.
	Climate Priority Resolution: Newly adopt or strengthen a resolution declaring a climate emergency and prioritizing climate action	Reducing GHG emissions by 50% by 2030. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking, walking, transit, and telecommuting.
		Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	1.2.3: Increase electric vehicle availability and access.
CP8			4.1.1: T ransition to 100% carbon-free electricity.
			5.1.1: Support healthy communities and workplaces.
			5.2.1: Increase public health capacity and adaptation resources.
	Climate Action Budget: At least 1% of the current annual budget is allocated to climate action.	By 2026, at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community resiliency are fully funded. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	1.1.3: Maximize resiliency and GHG mitigation in infrastructure projects.
СР9		By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	3.1.1: Provide needed technical assistance, tools, and data.
		Increase jobs in all sectors of the clean economy, including new and emerging sectors such as land management, transportation, long-lived wood products, etc. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	3.1.2: Deliver necessary funding.
			3.2.3: Protect and improve water quality and quantity.
			3.3.2: Fund resilient infrastructure and critical facilities.
			5.2.1: Increase public health capacity and adaptation resources.
СР10	Climate Staff: Have a new or rehire a paid staff position with climate action as a main responsibility.	Increase the diversity of state agencies' leadership to reflect the state's changing demographics. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	
		In 2023, create a clean economy workforce and economic development plan with trackable metrics. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	
CP11	Sustainable Building/ Renovation Policy: Customize a	Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking,
	includes the SB 2030 energy standard and adopt the	By 2030, reduce the energy burden so at least 80% of Minnesotans	3 3 1: Plan for climate adaptation in residential
	language to govern private new/renovation projects that:	spend less than 5% of their household income on energy costs. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	and commercial development.
	a) receive local/tribal/regional financial support, b) require regulatory approval (planned unit	By 2030, reduce statewide primary energy usage by 10%, compared to 2005 levels. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	4.1.1: T ransition to 100% carbon-free electricity.
	development, conditional use permit, rezoning, variance),	Increase the number of clean technology businesses and the number of	4.2.2: Design and build climate-smart new

	or	jobs they provide. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	buildings.
	c) are public (i.e. school) projects; OR		4.2.3: Building reuse and preventing waste.
	Require that all buildings be certified/rated under an		6.1.1: Become a national leader in clean
	identified 3rd-party green building framework.		innovation.
	Land Use Policy: Newly adopt or strengthen a policy	Decrease vehicle miles traveled 20% per capita by 2050. (MN CAF, pg	
CP12	limiting annexations or infrastructure extensions to	26.)	
	encourage infili and redevelopment.		4.4.2. Maximize positionary and OLIC mitigation
	concern or high heat vulnerability, newly complete a 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;	By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored	1.1.3: Maximize resiliency and GHG mitigation
		levels (MN CAF ng 33)	
		By 2035, reduce annual GHG emissions in the working lands sector by	2.1.1: Maintain, expand, and actively manage
		25% from 2018 levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.)	forestlands.
	roadside vegetative cover including resilient species	By 2026, at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community	2.1.2: Protect, restore, and manage peatlands
	increased by at least 40%.	resiliency are fully funded. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	and other wetlands.
CA1		Achieve 30% overall tree canopy cover in Minnesota communities by	2.1.3: Protect, restore, and manage
CAI		2030 and 40% by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	grasslands.
		By 2030, reduce the age- adjusted rate of heat- related ER visits to 10	2.2.3: Promote the benefits of natural lands in
		per 100,000. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	climate adaptation.
		By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal	2.3.3: Manage land for multiple benefits.
		57)	
			3.2.1: Expand tree planting and preservation
			3.3.4: Reduce the urban heat island effects
	Flood Mitigation: Newly complete an improvement	By 2026 at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community	1.1.3: Maximize resiliency and GHG mitigation
	project of green and/or gray infrastructure strategically	resiliency are fully funded. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	in infrastructure projects.
	designed to reduce localized flooding in an area of	By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal	2.1.1: Maintain, expand, and actively manage
	environmental justice concern or high flood risk such as:	climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg	forestlands.
	fix specific intersections, underpasses, culverts, or other	57.)	
	areas prone to flash flooding; resolve recent occurrences		2.1.2: Protect, restore, and manage peatlands
	of combined sewer overflow; add meaningful system		and other wetlands.
	capacity for extreme rainial events.		2.1.3: Protect, restore, and manage
CA2			grassianos.
			2.4.2. Manage agricultural landscapes to hold
			3 1 1: Provide needed technical assistance
			tools, and data.
			3.2.2: Plant beneficial vegetation on urban
			land.
			3.2.3: Protect and improve water quality and
			quantity.
			3.3.2: Fund resilient infrastructure and critical

			facilities.
			3.3.3: Expand green infrastructure and stormwater management.
	Back-Up Energy System: Newly install islanding capability and storage for a clean energy system in a	Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 13.)	3.1.1: Provide needed technical assistance, tools, and data.
642	publicly accessible building to provide back-up power that can sustain function during extreme weather events.	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	4.1.1: T ransition to 100% carbon-free electricity.
		By 2026, at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community resiliency are fully funded. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
CAS		By 2040, all of Minnesota's electricity is carbon-free. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	
		By 2030, reduce the age- adjusted rate of heat- related ER visits to 10 per 100,000. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	
		By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg	
		57.)	
	Private Resilience Projects: Document a newly	By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored	1.1.3: Maximize resiliency and GHG mitigation
	installed residential/commercial/industrial/non-profit	annually in natural and working lands, compared to 2014-2018 average	in infrastructure projects.
	project flood or heat risk reduction best practice to	levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.)	
	increase resilience using local/tribal/regional incentives.	By 2035, reduce annual GHG emissions in the working lands sector by	2.1.1: Maintain, expand, and actively manage
		25% from 2018 levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.)	forestiands.
		Achieve 30% overall tree canopy cover in Minnesota communities by	2.1.2. Protect, restore, and manage peatiands
		By 2030, weatherize a quarter of dwellings where occupants earn 50% or	213: Protect restore and manage
		less of the state median income. (MN CAF, pg 50.)	grasslands.
		By 2030, reduce the age- adjusted rate of heat- related ER visits to 10	2.1.4: Encourage individual actions that
		per 100,000. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	increase carbon storage.
		By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal	2.2.2: Use land management practices that
CA4		climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg	enhance climate resilience.
CA4		57.)	
		Increase jobs in all sectors of the clean economy, including new and	2.3.1: Increase soil organic carbon content
		emerging sectors such as land management, transportation, long-lived	and reduce erosion.
		wood products, etc. (MIN CAF, pg 63.)	2.4.2: Managa agricultural landsonnas to hold
		increase the number of clean technology businesses and the number of iobs they provide (MN CAE pg 63.)	vater and reduce runoff
			2.5.4: Reduce waste and promote beneficial
			use of materials.
			3.1.2: Deliver necessary funding.
			3.2.2: Plant beneficial vegetation on urban
			land.
			3.2.3: Protect and improve water quality and
			quantity.

			3.3.1: Plan for climate adaptation in residential
			and commercial development.
			3.3.2: Fund resilient infrastructure and critical facilities.
			3.3.3: Expand green infrastructure and
			stormwater management.
			3.3.5: Support adaptation for local businesses.
			6.1.1: Become a national leader in clean
			innovation.
	Resilient Trees: Plant and maintain at least 2-3 climate	By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored	2.1.1: Maintain, expand, and actively manage
	resilient trees for each public tree lost.	annually in natural and working lands, compared to 2014-2018 average levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.)	forestlands.
CA5		By 2026, at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community	3.2.1: Expand tree planting and preservation.
		resiliency are fully funded. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
		Achieve 30% overall tree canopy cover in Minnesota communities by	
		2030 and 40% by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
	Building Weather Preparation: Newly modify/rebuild	By 2026, at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community	1.1.3: Maximize resiliency and GHG mitigation
	one public building to improve flood resilience, prevent	resiliency are fully funded. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	in infrastructure projects.
	damage, and sustain function during extreme weather	By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal	3.3.2: Fund resilient infrastructure and critical
CA6	events.	climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg	facilities.
		57.)	2.2.2. Evenend and an infractive and
			stormwater management
	Drought Tolerance: Newly implement a strategy to	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	3.1.1: Provide needed technical assistance
	minimize the impacts of drought and/or recharge	identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	tools, and data.
	groundwater storage with projects such as: incentives to	By 2026, at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community	3.2.1: Expand tree planting and preservation.
CA7	use water conserving fixtures, harvesting rainwater,	resiliency are fully funded. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
	reusing water, restricting the use of water for	By 2025, ensure at least 40% of the benefits of certain state and federal	3.3.2: Fund resilient infrastructure and critical
	non-essential uses, infiltrating stormwater, etc.	climate investments are in disadvantaged communities. (MN CAF, pg	facilities.
		57.)	2.2.2. Evenend areas infrastructure and
			stormwater management
			stornwater management.
	Resilient Public Water Systems: Newly implement a	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	
	strategy to reduce climate change risk and Increase	By 2026, at least 25 adoptation projects that increase community	
CA8	specific asset (such as a lift station, headwork, water	by 2020, at least 25 adaptation projects that increase community	
	intake/distribution/storage, booster stations/pump.		
	treatment plant, etc.)		
	Combined Green Team: Have a green team with	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	5.1.2: Protect culturally important activities.
CC1	government and community member representation that	identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
	meets regularly (at least 4 times every year) and address	Increase the diversity of state agencies' leadership to reflect the state's	

	topics related to Minnesota's changing climate.	changing demographics. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	
	Youth Involvement: Have at least two filled	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	
CC2	youth/student positions on a city environmental	identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
	commission, green team, or other advisory body that	Increase the diversity of state agencies' leadership to reflect the state's	
	addresses topics related to Minnesota's changing	changing demographics. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	
	climate.		
	Youth Collaboration: A school environmental club has	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	
	an ongoing connection with a commission or green team	identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
CC3	for involvement in topics related to Minnesota's changing	Increase the diversity of state agencies' leadership to reflect the state's	
	climate.	changing demographics. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	
	Student Internship: A student internship includes issues	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	
	related to Minnesota's changing climate in their work.	identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
		Increase the diversity of state agencies' leadership to reflect the state's	
		changing demographics. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	
CC4		Increase jobs in all sectors of the clean economy, including new and	
CC4		emerging sectors such as land management, transportation, long-lived	
		wood products, etc. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	
		Increase the number of apprentices in the construction trades' registered	
		apprenticeship programs and the percentages of people of color and	
		women who enroll in and complete the programs. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	
	Community Restoration: Host one or more events that	By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored	2.1.1: Maintain, expand, and actively manage
	engage community members in annual restoration or	annually in natural and working lands, compared to 2014-2018 average	forestlands.
	cleanup of natural areas.	levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.)	
CC5		By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	2.2.1: Conserve and enhance biodiversity.
		identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
		Achieve 30% overall tree canopy cover in Minnesota communities by	
		2030 and 40% by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
	Community Science: Create or participate in a	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	2.1.1: Maintain, expand, and actively manage
	Community Science program related to the environment	identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	forestlands.
CC6	and Minnesota's changing climate.	Increase jobs in all sectors of the clean economy, including new and	2.2.1: Conserve and enhance biodiversity.
		emerging sectors such as land management, transportation, long-lived	
		wood products, etc. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	
	Accessible Public Green Spaces: Newly document that	By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored	5.1.2: Protect culturally important activities.
	at least 20% of total land area is in protected green	annually in natural and working lands, compared to 2014-2018 average	
	space, or that 90% or more of residents are within a	levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.)	
CC7	10-minute walk, or within one-half mile of, a park or other	By 2035, reduce annual GHG emissions in the working lands sector by	
	public green/blue space.	25% from 2018 levels. (MN CAF, pg 33.)	
		Achieve 30% overall tree canopy cover in Minnesota communities by	
		2030 and 40% by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
		By 2030, reduce the age- adjusted rate of heat- related ER visits to 10	

		per 100,000. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	
	Tree Steward Community: Participate in the Tree	By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored	
	Steward Program.	annually in natural and working lands, compared to 2014-2018 average	
		Achieve 30% overall tree canopy cover in Minnesota communities by	
		2030 and 40% by 2050. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	
		By 2030, reduce the age- adjusted rate of heat- related ER visits to 10	
		per 100,000. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	
		Increase jobs in all sectors of the clean economy, including new and	
		emerging sectors such as land management, transportation, long-lived	
		wood products, etc. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	
	Local Purchasing: Require and document that 10% of	Reduce GHG emissions from the transportation sector 80% by 2040.	6.1.1: Become a national leader in clean
	government purchases to be made from local businesses	(MIN CAF, pg 20.)	
CC9	women-owned businesses.	26)	
		Increase the number of clean technology businesses and the number of	
		jobs they provide. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	
	Food Security: Conduct a campaign and/or provide	Reduce GHG emissions from the transportation sector 80% by 2040.	2.5.3: Support local food markets, urban
	incentives to promote the increased buying of local foods	(MN CAF, pg 26.)	agriculture, and emerging farmers.
	by schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and event centers.	Decrease vehicle miles traveled 20% per capita by 2050. (MN CAF, pg	5.1.1: Support healthy communities and
	Report the use of organic, whole food, and plant-based	26.)	workplaces.
CC10	options.	By 2035, increase by 25% the amount of carbon sequestered and stored	6.1.1: Become a national leader in clean
		annually in natural and working lands, compared to 2014-2018 average	innovation.
		Increase jobs in all sectors of the clean economy including new and	
		emerging sectors such as land management, transportation, long-lived	
		wood products, etc. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	
	Community Visioning: Conduct a Community Visioning	By 2030, 100% of Minnesotans live in communities with plans that	1.1.1: Create more opportunities for biking,
	process (i.e. MN Main Streets, D4CR, etc.) that engages	identify climate risks and actions to build resiliency. (MN CAF, pg 42.)	walking, transit, and telecommuting.
	community members though a series of events that	Increase the diversity of state agencies' leadership to reflect the state's	3.1.1: Provide needed technical assistance,
	Include discussion of Minnesota's	changing demographics. (MN CAF, pg 57.)	tools, and data.
CC11	meetings in diverse and accessible locations and provide		3.3.4: Reduce the urban heat island effects.
	translators and interpreters, childcare, stipends, and/or		5.1.1: Support healthy communities and
	meals for participants as needed.		5 1 2: Protect culturally important activities
			5.2.1: Increase public health capacity and
			adaptation resources.
	Green Businesses and Jobs: Document the growth of	In 2023, create a clean economy workforce and economic development	2.5.1 Invest in climate-smart agriculture and
6612	new/emerging green businesses and green jobs through	plan with trackable metrics. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	develop markets for climate-benefitting
CC12	the targeted assistance and new workforce development		products.
	actions.	Increase jobs in all sectors of the clean economy, including new and	6.1.1: Become a national leader in clean

	emerging sectors such as land management, transportation, long-lived wood products, etc. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	innovation.
	Increase the number of apprentices in the construction trades' registered apprenticeship programs and the percentages of people of color and women who enroll in and complete the programs. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	
	Increase the number of clean technology businesses and the number of jobs they provide. (MN CAF, pg 63.)	

Appendix D: Gold Leaf Pilot Participants' Feedback

1) Were you able to complete 2 NEW Gold Leaf actions?

<u>Summary:</u> Nine communities except accomplished this goal. One community that did not accomplish the goal is a step 2, B level community without sustainability focused staff. They said they "moved ahead on some things that were already happening. Had more of a plan at first but was not able to accomplish it." The other community didn't accomplish this goals because their projects were large-scale, long-term, and could not be completed within the pilot program time. Another step 2 community accomplished 10 actions.

2) How has Gold Leaf supported your community's climate action?

<u>Summary:</u>

Step 4-5 communities were already doing a lot of these actions, so it was easy for them to participate in the program. These communities still felt like there was a value-add to participating. Some felt like it gave them the authority and initiative to make requests of city councils or management and do more, faster. The Gold Leaf Best Practices also served as a framework to focus action on. Finally, city councils really like the program.

Step 0-3 communities found the program was a good way to bring up sustainability topics and push city councils and management forward. While this feedback could also be said of GreenStep in general, the more limited Best Practices and goals of Gold Leaf may be easier to grasp for a community thinking about joining. Gold Leaf served as a framework for the city council and staff to think about sustainability and engage the community around this topic.

a) Step 4-5 Community Feedback:

- It provided a framework for prioritization but didn't increase speed of implementation.
- We were doing a lot of these things already, so it was easy to participate in the program.
- The actions taking place were already in our CAP, so it didn't create any new actions.
- It moved the city's energy and climate goals forward because it is "authority" to use to make the ask. The council is supportive, and management is hesitant.
- It increased the Sustainability Program's awareness of other sustainability initiatives being pursued by other programs/divisions/departments.
- The best practice achieved wasn't on our sustainability to do list before Gold Leaf.
- Commission LOVED it.
- Like having something to point to take action a framework to use to provide direction, push decisions forward more quickly, and advocate for next steps.

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• Appreciated seeing the full list of actions to start on and would like to use it to address climate action more.

b) Step 0-3 Community Feedback:

- Good way to bring up sustainability topics in city council meetings.
- Gold Leaf helped the council make smaller changes vs. all or nothing, and having a deadline helped speed up and focus decisions.
- Helped to hire for a sustainability position.
- Best Practices helped council focus and compile a list of what they feel would be attainable and impactful initiatives, while keeping in mind current financial and staff resources available.
- Helped public recruitment for Green Team so got more done.
- Government staff used it to accomplish 10 high- impact actions and identified additional actions that are achievable. They used it to narrow the focus of the GreenStep program, and additional incentive to accomplish the identified actions.

3) Has Gold Leaf provided meaningful incentive for participation?

<u>Summary:</u>

Step 4-5 communities were already completing a lot of the Gold Leaf actions through their own sustainability programs, so the Best Practices themselves didn't incentivize them to join. The incentives were the intern, recognition (which councils liked), the opportunity for sharing information and mentorship, and the usefulness of having an organization and framework.

There was limited feedback from step 0-3 communities on this topic. It was useful to managers looking to reduce costs, councils liked it, and the intern could be an incentive. It helped communities focus in on actions. One high achieving community was motivated by the leaves.

a) Step 4- 5 Community Feedback:

- Need More Incentives:
 - Have completed so many actions already so need to have a tool to track completed and needed actions.
 - Potentially need additional requirements for increased incentives.
 - Feel big enough to have capacity to do these things anyway and access the funds needed. This might be most beneficial for smaller communities or those that are just starting.
- Program Participation:
 - o Good to have a program to participate in.
 - Liked how it was self-driven and flexible.
 - Led to additional efforts and prioritization, which was an incentive.
- Connection Between Communities:
 - Like sharing platform between communities.
 - Liked sharing successes with other communities and serving as a mentor for others.
- Recognition:

- Like recognition for council and leadership.
- City councils likes competing with other communities and receiving awards.
- o Leadership excited to hear about it, wants updates.
- Our community is not usually recognized for their efforts and participation in the same ways that others are.
- Intern:
 - Intern was a good incentive.
 - Would not have joined but for intern.

a) Step 0-3 Community Feedback:

- Councils loved it, and facilities director is interested in cost savings and improvements. Helped narrow down GreenStep program.
- Having an intern wasn't necessarily an incentive to participate, but it could be to smaller communities just getting started.

2) (For Step 4-5 communities) Did this program increase your community's involvement with GreenStep actions?

<u>Summary:</u> Step 4-5 communities reported areas where Gold Leaf could increase their involvement with GreenStep. They want the GreenStep and Gold Leaf actions to be connected and have the same reporting periods. And they reported that reporting new Best Practices for Gold Leaf meant GreenStep communities reached out to ask them about the actions. It helped city councils prioritize the most important actions to take and focused people on Best Practice actions, not just reporting. However, it may decrease participation if it just feels like a GreenStep 6.

a) Feedback:

- If the reporting time is the same for GreenStep and Gold Leaf.
- Helpful to connect Gold Leaf and GreenStep actions.
- Yes. When we uploaded new Best Practice Actions, other communities reached out to us and led to mentorship opportunities and connection with newer communities and their staff, which we value.
- Made us want to know what was after Step 5 in GS.
- Good wish list to incorporate broader GreenStep program.
- Yes. Helps connect the dots for council priority and provide the high priority actions. Able to help reduce duplication.
- Yes. It focused back on action and away from metrics.
- Yes, it helped us focus on GreenStep Actions again, but it made us less likely to do GreenStep Reporting as Gold Leaf seems like a natural continuation.

3) (For Step 1-3 communities) How did this program affect your involvement with the main GreenStep program, if at all?

<u>Summary:</u> Step 0-3 communities liked that Gold Leaf gave them the opportunity to become familiar with the GreenStep program. However, for a community with limited staff, Gold Leaf took some staff time away from GreenStep.

a) Feedback:

- Gave opportunity to familiarize with the GreenStep program.
- Maybe took some time away from working on GreenStep actions and efforts.
- It is still a goal for the city to become a GreenStep participant.

4) Did you feel supported in your involvement in Gold Leaf?

<u>Summary:</u> Step 4-5 communities only reported meaningful feedback for this question. They didn't need much support, but when they did, they were able to access it through open office hours, the Exchange, or just emailing when they needed it. Mostly smaller communities needed more support and communication around how to host an intern.

a) Feedback:

- Didn't need that much support, but it was there when I needed it.
- Used open office hours.
- More communication from April June would have been helpful.
- Like the Exchange offerings and communication from across the state.
- Didn't use exchanges because no time and not on topic for what we are doing right now.
- Need more cohorts around cities hosting interns.
- Lack answers from most Step 0-3 communities.

5) Did you have extra support during this pilot (i.e., AmeriCorps members, temporary staff, interns, etc.)?

Summary: All but one had an intern. One community had two interns. One had a GreenCorps member.

6) What difference do you think the extra support made in your ability to participate in Gold Leaf? And did it increase the number of specific actions taken and/or the speed at which they were implemented?

<u>Summary:</u>

Step 4-5 communities liked having interns and were able to fully utilize their interns because they had enough work to involve them in immediately, although most created specific Gold Leaf work plans for their interns. It did increase the communities' capacity to take sustainable changes.

Step 0-3 communities wanted more support on creating work plans and how to manage interns, but it did add extra capacity to create sustainable changes. These communities do not typically have intern programs and may not have pursued looking for an intern otherwise. These communities seemed to dislike hybrid/ remote internships and wanted someone located in the community. One community

suggested having interns who aren't yet about to graduate so they won't get jobs and leave before the internship starts.

a) Step 4-5 Community Feedback

- Easily have enough going that it is easy to have interns jump into things, including help with GreenStep reporting and actions.
- The intern wouldn't have been doing the project she was doing without Gold Leaf.
- It created extra capacity for sustainability and Gold Leaf related projects.

b) Step 0-3 Community Feedback:

- The intern was helpful, would NOT have looked for an intern otherwise.
- Intern sharing was difficult, would like to have one closer to the community.
- Virtual work was hard but worked out.
- Consider having undergrads or people with some years left in school so don't get jobs and ghost.

1) Did you run into any barriers or difficulties during the Pilot?

<u>Summary:</u> A lot of the communities struggled with work plans. This seemed like an issue both in deciding what Best Practices to focus on and how to set up a work plan for the intern. Each community handled creating work plans a different way. Some communities with CAPs and sustainability coordinators were able to just hand-off existing projects as they already fit into the Gold Leaf Best Practices (feedback from Q1). Other step 4-5 communities also wanted guidance on how to create a work plan and pick priorities. Smaller communities especially seemed to struggle with how to manage an intern and wanted help creating a work plan and identifying priorities.

There weren't any other consistent roadblocks for the other communities. The main issue for step 1-2 communities is the lack of capacity to focus on sustainability. None of these communities have sustainability coordinators.

a) Feedback on work plans:

- Positive:
 - (a) Did have enough of a work plan ready for the summer.
 - (b) Summer intern reviewed plans in the area and identified key themes to highlight. Recommend for future. Having a list ahead of time was helpful and flexible.
 - (c) Climate Action Framework draft completed last Spring was helpful and looked at how to prioritize Gold Leaf actions.
 - (d) Added priority and effort involved to the work plan.
- Challenges:
 - (a) Challenge to have a self-directed program because it's still a large list to narrow down focus on. Work plan can help- working with cities to identify strengths and needs.
 - (b) Unclear about how to delegate work and how much or little authority to give.
 - (c) Potentially too much freedom in the work plan. Want more accountability about intern's work.

- (d) Gold Leaf could help identify potential projects for interns to work on that might be supported well virtually and asynchronously. (Had intern explore a couple of their interests and then matched with what the community could do. Put together an action plan for those actions.) Would like to understand their role in their classes and such.
- (e) Difficult to match skills and projects at the time.
- (f) Need to have more conversations on work plans.
- b) Other Step 4-5 Feedback was specific to those communities:
 - Participation time is a consideration.
 - Need support to use the metrics to better inform the actions.
 - Intern took institutional knowledge of what she did with her.
 - Think about file sharing and logistics ahead of time.
 - Large-scale, long-term projects not conducive to showing progress in a few months.
- c) Other Step 0-3 Feedback was specific to those communities:
 - Existing staff couldn't handle the work.
 - Intern didn't show up, but Green Team/staff still able to accomplish goals.
 - Involved residents are passionate but there is a disconnect between volunteers and city government (i.e., formal commission or not). Need support to think about roles and responsibilities. Divide happening within residents too.

1) Do you have additional feedback or recommendations for improvements of the program?

<u>Summary:</u> Step 4-5 cites want help specifically on obtaining more money and grants. Smaller communities want help too, but they don't have staff capacity to think about specific funding asks.

- a) Feedback about capacity:
 - Curious of how many other communities were relying on temporary capacity. Is there a way to keep the main staff involved throughout the process?
 - Money and grants seed grants to do whatever might help.
 - Need more money for grants for clean energy.
 - Need to have a staff position with a job description who can also oversee reviewing funding opportunities!
- b) Feedback about guidance:

i) Step 4-5 Communities:

<u>Summary:</u> These communities want more guidance on each action and the connected metrics and have specific technical assistance needs. They also have good suggestions for some best practice updates.

- Need guidance for each GL action.
- Question on what qualifies in the end.
- Look into more formal regular check-ins with. One-on-one but a small cohort might work.
- Like having a connection of actions to metrics/outcomes. More guidance on this will be helpful.

- Want more information on:
 - Lawn equipment 2 stroke engines. Incorporate into program and provide better incentives and guidance. Include noise pollution, air, etc.
 - Turf conversions to alternative landscape opportunities for improvements especially in ROW and utility areas.
 - EV transitions charging and fleet and incentives.

ii) Step 0-3 Communities:

<u>Summary:</u> These communities want guidance for managing interns, both remotely and in person, how to guide Green Teams, and how to pick out best practices (i.e., more work plan guidance).

- Participating in GPI EV Smart program and liked that Lindsay and Rebecca's work plan started with an initial assessment and put into a customized work plan and recommended actions to focus on. (Asking the waiter "what do you recommend" on the menu!).
- So many routes and projects to focus on. Can be overwhelming to figure out how to prioritize the opportunities. Need help with planning and prioritizing on an annual basis.
 Offer facilitation or community visioning services.
- Liked having Adam at ABM (Gold Leaf Advisory Team member) come to the city. Was helpful to have the Gold Leaf and GreenStep actions identified.
- •___Need guidance for managing interns (remote and in-person) and creating work plans.
- •___Need to have a GreenStep 101.
- Involved residents are passionate but there is a disconnect between volunteers and city government (i.e., formal commission). Need support to think about roles and responsibilities. Divide happening within residents too.

<u>c)</u>Feedback on Mentoring and Communication

<u>Summary:</u> There is strong interest in mentoring, information sharing, and potentially cohorts across all communities, but especially with the step 4-5 communities. However, they did not define what that meant to them.

- Consider pairing up similar sized communities or those at the same step to serve as mentor. Or pairing cities working on similar actions or one that has already completed a particular action. Encourage 1-on-1 conversations. Sharing between 2 cities was ok but a smaller city might benefit from it more.
- If we identified cities working on similar actions and created a small cohort of cities working on those specific actions, that might have been helpful.
- Exchange with other Pilot communities to learn what everyone has worked on.

d) Feedback on Integrating Gold Leaf and GreenStep Programs

<u>Summary:</u> Communities want consistency and integration between the two program actions and metrics.

- Include relationship to metrics in the Gold Leaf actions IE add Gold Leaf actions to the GSC BPAs and metrics.
- Consider using the metric data as.
- Good to connect back to actions and build off Step 4/5.

• Keep Gold Leaf open to non-GreenStep cities.

e) Feedback on Leadership

<u>Summary:</u> Step 4-5 communities are competitive, sophisticated, and want to be further challenged in the climate arena.

- Continue looking at GreenStep Graduate/ Mentorship program.
- Step 5 city is interested in how their local work scales up to county, met council, and state. Like having the connection to the States Climate Action Framework.
- Frustrated that non-Step 5 cities could participate. They didn't put in the work to get to this point so why can they get recognition.
- Step 5 cities are often leading in climate action and often have leadership and buy-in to do these things. Curious what the State NEEDS Step 5 cities to do.

f) Feedback on Incentives:

<u>Summary:</u> Communities really like the awards and recognition aspect of the program, but the current gold leaf model may not be enough incentive to accomplish the most difficult and impactful best practice actions.

- Didn't feel held accountable to make changes.
- Maybe didn't focus as much on the climate piece of it and focused more on low hanging fruit.
- Get Gold leaves! Draft resolution or proclamation for city council.
- Get so many gold leaves and you get an invite to a special invite only workshop or event.
- Like the idea of setting a timeline of 2-3 years to promote swift action.
- Award multiple gold leaves for the harder/longer actions? Or larger leaves for bigger actions? Consider other incentives for taking the harder actions.