

# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Minnesota  
**GreenStep**

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

## SUMMARY

The April 2023 - April 2024 reporting year continued strong! There were 148 city and Tribal nation participants in the program, covering 54% of the state's total population (see [Page 5](#)).

The Cities of Plymouth, Spring Lake Park, and Vadnais Heights joined the program at Step 1 and 37 other cities advanced to Steps 2 or 3 or maintained their Step 4/5 status (see [Page 2](#)). Across all participants, 225 new best practice actions were reported on the website among all 29 Best Practices (see [Page 3](#)).

We hosted 5 virtual workshops that covered multiple topics, delivered 7 GreenStep road signs, and had 16 volunteers at the State Fair (see [Page 7](#)). We also launched the new Gold Leaf Challenge for local climate action which has 11 participants (see [Page 8](#)).

Finally, we highlight Eliza Messinger, our 2023-2024 GreenCorps member who lead work crucial to supporting participants on their climate and sustainability efforts (see [Page 10](#)).

Thank you for another great year!



Mayor Charles Cadenhead (right) and City Planner Sophia Jensen (left) celebrate the City of Lake Elmo's Step 3, 4 & 5 awards at the League of Minnesota Cities conference in Rochester on June 26, 2024.

Congratulations to **Lake Elmo** for moving up **THREE** steps in one year! The City **achieved Steps 3, 4, and 5** between April 2023-April 2024.



Minnesota  
**GreenStep**

# 2024 *Step Advances!*

Total unique communities  
advancing a step in 2024:

**40**

That's 27% of  
total GreenStep  
participants!

## Step 1:

- **Plymouth**
- Spring Lake Park
- **Vadnais Heights**

## Step 4:

- Robbinsdale\*

## Step 2:

- **Plymouth**
- **Vadnais Heights**

## Step 4 & 5:

- Apple Valley
- Bloomington
- Burnsville
- Coon Rapids
- Cottage Grove
- Duluth
- Eagan
- Eden Prairie
- Edina
- Falcon Heights
- Fridley
- Golden Valley
- Hopkins
- Hutchinson
- Inver Grove Heights
- **Lake Elmo\***
- Mahtomedi
- Maplewood
- Minnetonka
- Moorhead
- New Brighton
- Northfield
- North Saint Paul
- Oakdale
- Rochester
- Roseville
- Saint Anthony Village
- Saint Louis Park
- Savage
- Shoreview
- South Saint Paul
- Woodbury

## Step 3:

- Crosslake
- Lake Crystal
- **Lake Elmo**
- Mendota Heights
- Saint James

**bold** - indicates a city that progressed more than one step this year  
\* - indicates a city that has reached Step 4 or 5 for the first time



GreenStep Cities participants and partners at the 2024 League of Minnesota Cities annual conference.



- **Mendota Heights' Rain Garden Program** offered for residents whose property is part of a street improvement project.
- **Mora's electronic Council and PUC packets** have saved over 10,000 pages of paper being printed.
- **Minnetonka installed 6 public EV chargers** at three city-owned properties in 2022 for city fleet and public use.
- **New Ulm become a Water Sense Partner** in 2019 and have purchased and given away over 350 sink aerators.
- **Robbinsdale diverted over 1,000 pounds of organic waste** from City Hall in 2023 by adding organics recycling in the staff lunchroom and two restrooms.
- Saint James' Climate Smart Community Group includes city/county officials, school representatives, and community members that discuss sustainability issues.
- **Vadnais Heights relines an average of 5180 feet of sanitary sewer** every year as part of the Inflow & Infiltration Program.

## Notable Actions reported this year:

- **Columbia Heights City Hall vertical mixed-use development** built in 2023 and includes 266 apartments, a 3,500 square foot café space, and a community room.
- **Crosslake annual tree sale** started in 2015 and has resulted in 16,000 trees and shrubs sold and planted in critical watershed areas to reduce water runoff.
- **Eden Prairie's Students on Commissions** program allows high school juniors and seniors to attend meeting, provide feedback, present at City Council, participate in community environmental events, and work on student-led projects during their term.
- **Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa's Invasive Species Department manages 116 acres** of land to mitigate the spread of non-native species, including a Pollinator Corridor Restoration Project.
- **Golden Valley updates to Medley Park** in 2021 included a 40-plot ADA-accessible raised garden and supplies, added 8.8 acre-feet of additional flood storage, removes an additional 16.4 pounds of phosphorus, adds 1.2 acres of open water habitat, and restored 0.6 acres of wetland prairie and 0.6 acres of upland prairie habitat.
- **La Crescent Police use and electric-bicycle** for patrol.
- **Lake Crystal hosted a Styrofoam recycling event** in 2023 for residents and businesses to drop off.
- **Lake Elmo has 100% of city operations electricity** supplied by a solar community garden.

5363

Total cumulative actions for all cities

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

1017

Total actions reported at the 3-star level

225

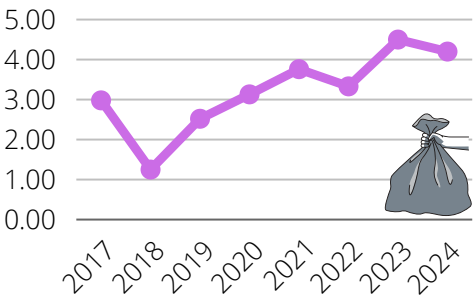
New actions reported this year

# STEP 4 & 5 METRICS

In 2024, **33 communities completed Step 4** and **32 also completed Step 5** metrics reporting. All communities submitting metrics received recognition. **One community reached both Steps 4 and 5** this reporting year. For two communities, this was their first time reporting Step 4 metrics and **one reached Step 5 for the first time** this year. (Metric numbers are shown in parenthesis.)

## WHAT DO THE METRICS TELL US?

Percent of **LED streetlights** owned by the community have increased to an average of 73%, up from 14% in 2016. (1.4)



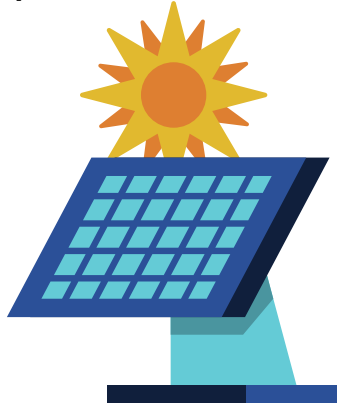
Cities reported an average of 4.2 pounds of **solid waste generated** per city resident/per day, a slight decrease over 2023 metrics (13.1)

Communities reported adding an average of 13% **affordable housing units** (of total housing added) (7.6)



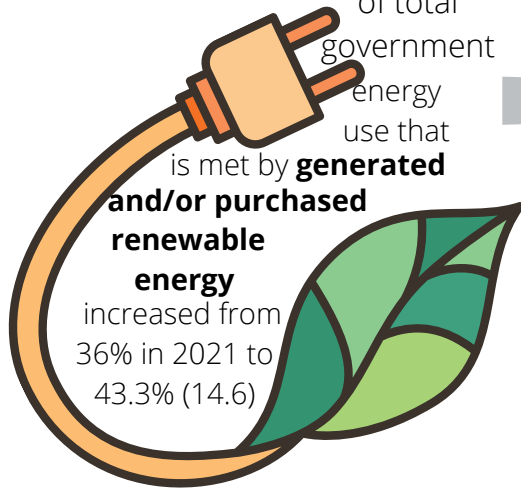
See more metric summary & individual city accomplishments on our [Recognition page](#).

A collective total of 5,232 **municipal and private renewable energy generation sites** reported - an increase of 834 sites compared to the previous year (14.1)

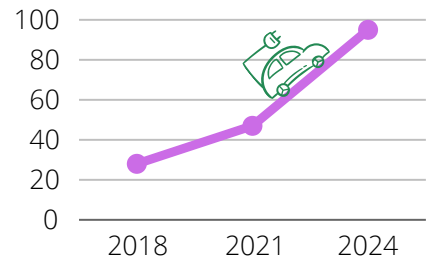


18 Step 5 communities reported a reduction in **kBtu usage in public facilities** (1.1)

The average % of total government energy use that is met by **generated and/or purchased renewable energy** increased from 36% in 2021 to 43.3% (14.6)



Cities report owning or leasing 95 **electric vehicles in the city fleet**; up from just 28 in 2018. (3.5)



57.5 miles of

**new or**

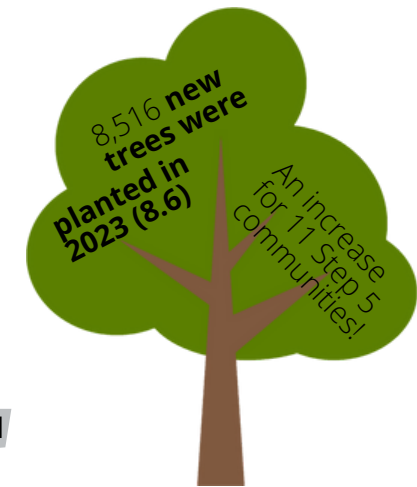
**reconstructed**

**sidewalks or**

**trails** were

completed in

2023 (4.1)

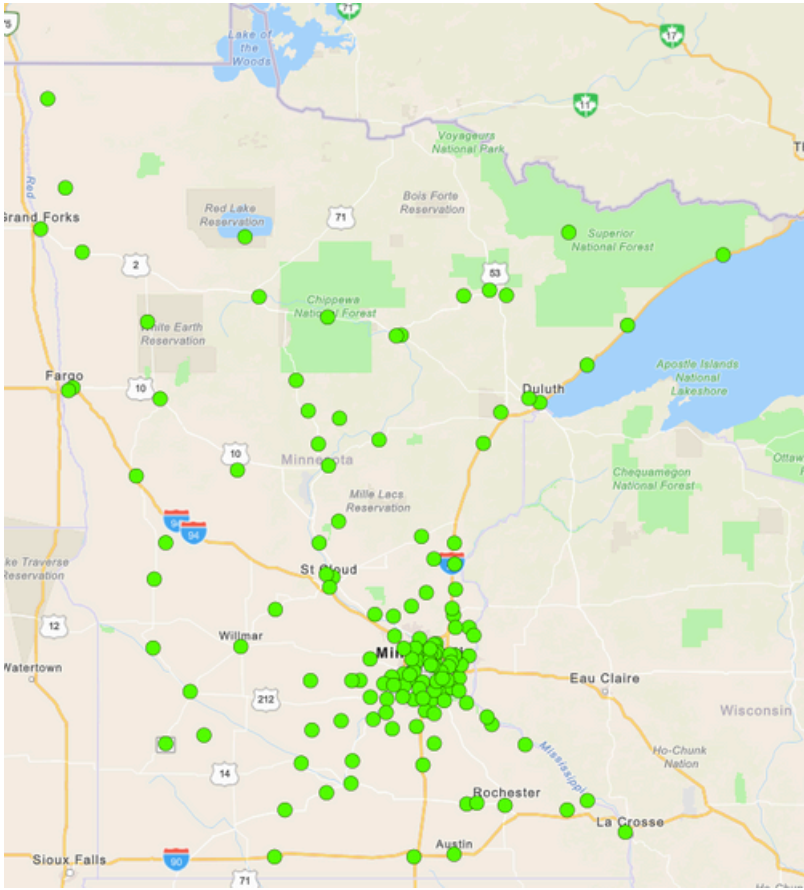


An average of 97.3% of residents in reporting communities **live within one mile of a bike route** (4.2); **78.6% live within ¼ mile of transit route** (5.8); **89.5% live within ½ mile or 10 minute walk of parkland** (8.3)

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



# program participants

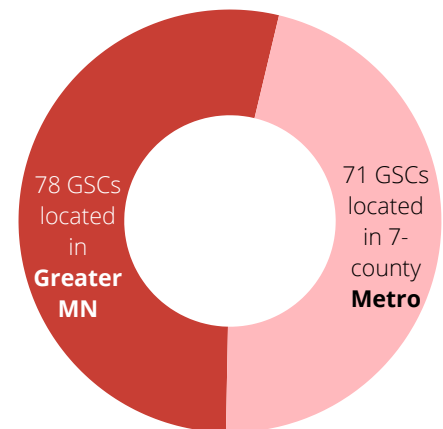
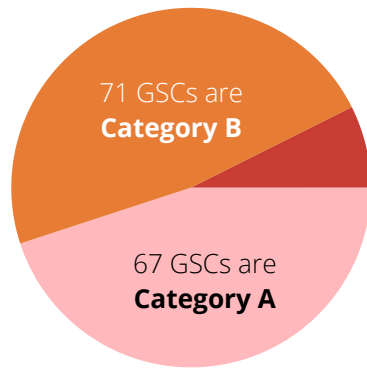
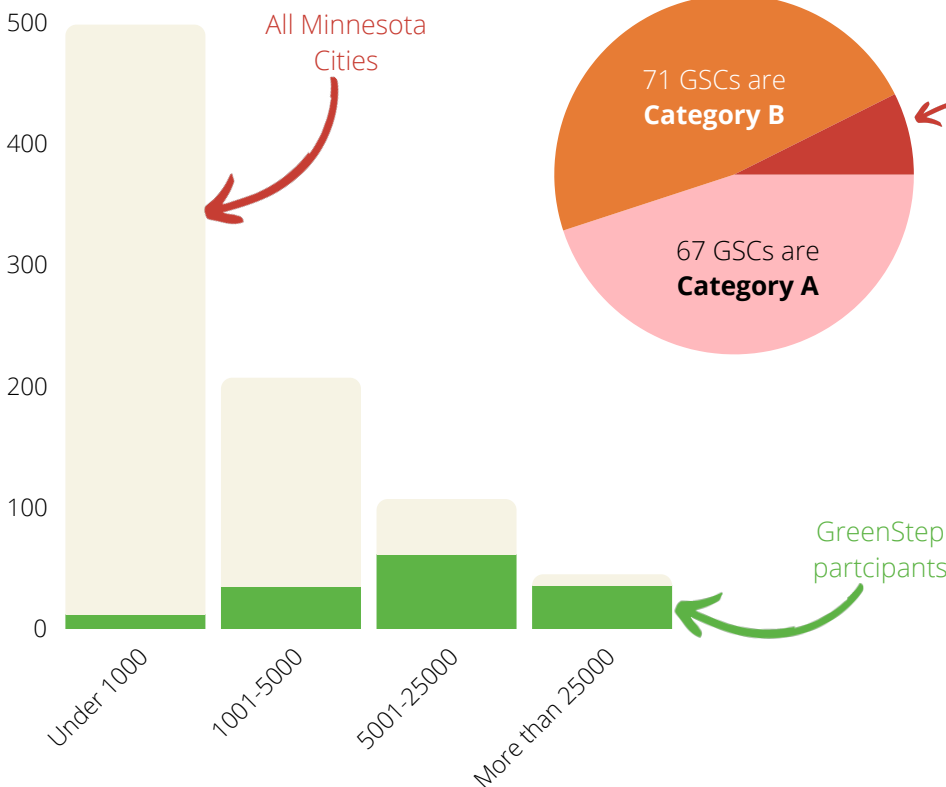


**149** Cities and Tribal Nations participate in the program

**54%** of the state's population live in a GreenStep City or Tribal Nation

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

**28%** of GreenStep Cities are at the highest Step - Step 5

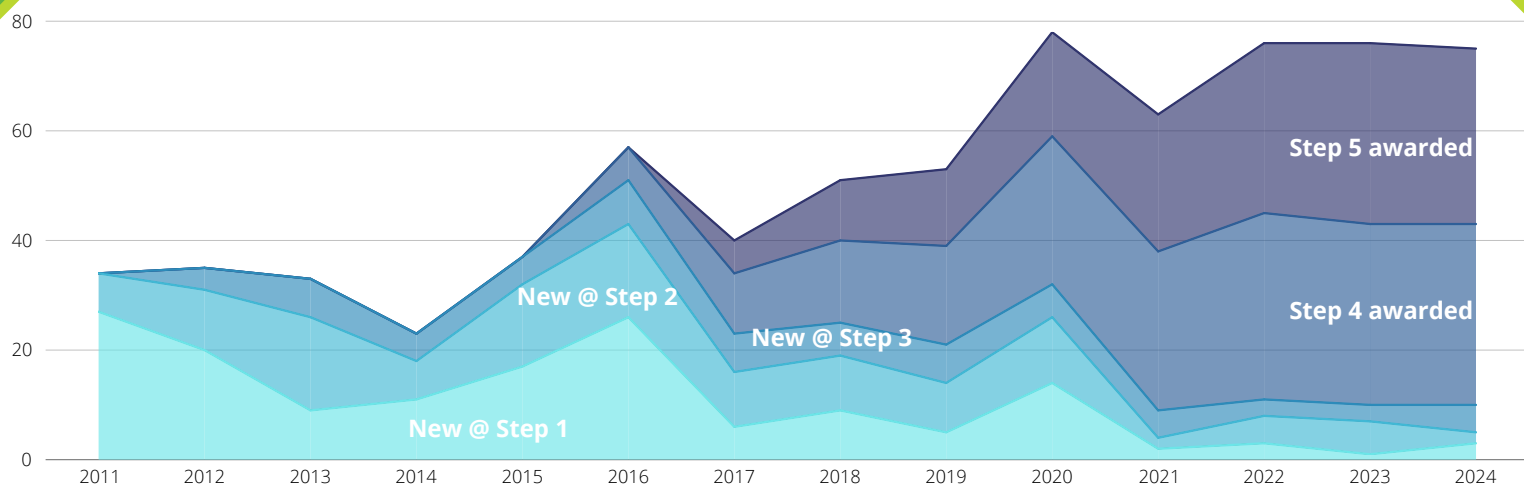


## Program Participants:

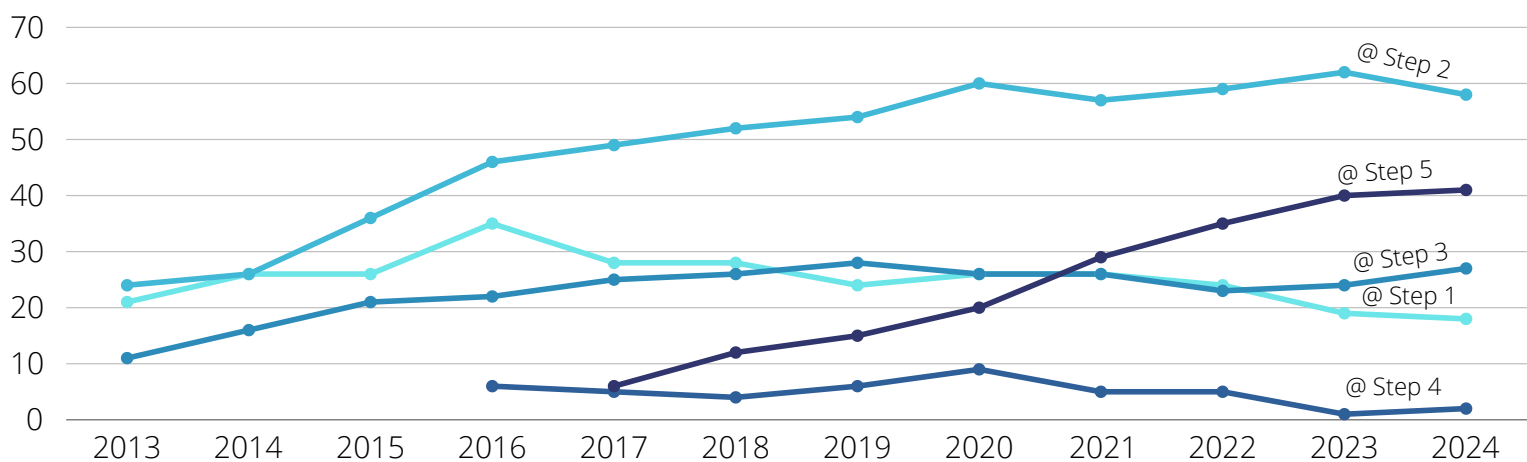
- are large (St. Paul, pop. 311,527) and small (Hewitt, pop. 251)
- are located in 57 of the state's 87 counties (66%)

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

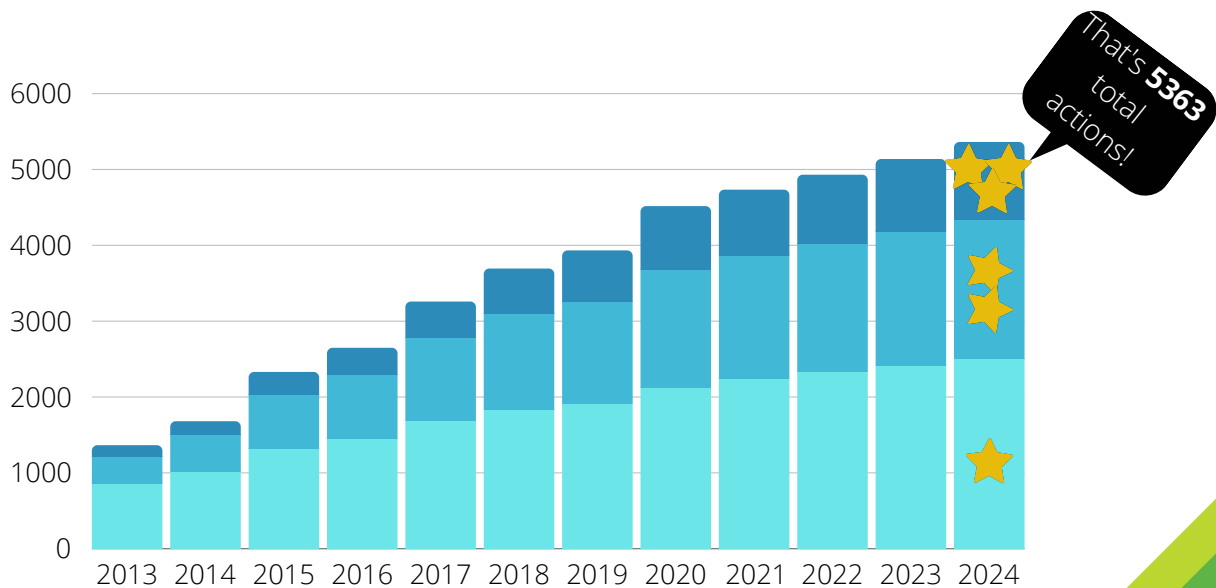
# Trend-Setting



Annual GreenStep Community Recognitions



Total GreenStep Communities by Step



Total Best Practice Actions Reported

That's 5363 total actions!

# Program 2024 Accomplishments

Weekly GreenStep and Gold Leaf **Virtual Open Office Hours** started in December 2023. 12 attendees used the time to discuss their questions about the program.

Spring 2024 intern, Lauren Rova, developed a **GreenStep Communication Database** for community newsletters and more.

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

- 4 [e-newsletter](#) mailings sent to an audience of 1,469 contacts
- 106 messages sent through LMC's MemberLink email listserve for GreenStep Coordinators
- 99 members are connected through the private [LinkedIn](#) group
- 71 posts led to 180 content interactions on [Facebook](#)
- 7 [road signs](#) delivered to 1 city

We hosted **5 virtual workshops** that included 135 attendees (and 152 registrants were sent the video recording):

- October 2023:
  - [IRA Ambassador Training](#)
  - [GreenStep 101: a beginner's guide to the program](#)
- February 2024:
  - [Gold Leaf Challenge Launch](#)
- March 2024:
  - [Spring Into Solar](#)
  - [CHARGE! Updates and opportunities for EV charging equipment](#)



The City of Woodbury achieved the 2024 Sustainable Cities Award for their "Water Wise Implementation Plan".

[News Release](#) | [Video](#)



16 volunteers from GreenStep Cities and program partners volunteered time at the **State Fair** to chat with fair-goers visiting the Eco Experience building.



Jonee Brigham - GS Schools coordinator, Shann Finwall - Maplewood Environmental Planner, Kristin Mroz - GreenStep Cities Coordinator, a Ramsey County Recycling Ambassador, Emily Ziring - St. Louis Park Sustainability Manager, Catherine Kemp - Great Plains Institute Communities Program Manager, and Ellie Rabine, St. Louis Park Sustainability Specialist.

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

- Lola Schoenrich and the Great Plains Institute is the Network Coordinator
- Kristin Mroz was elected to serve as co-chair of the network from December 2020-2023
- The network held a gathering in Boston, MA with 50 attendees from across the U.S.
- The network hosts regular learning opportunities and cohorts for member programs





# Minnesota Gold Leaf

## Who can join the Gold Leaf Challenge?

The Gold Leaf Challenge is open to a wide variety of community types because all communities are faced with a changing climate and can take action to prepare for climate change, build resilience, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Community types that can join:

- Tribal Nations
- Regional Organizations/ Government
- Homeowners Associations (HOAs)
- Conservation and Watershed Districts/ Organizations
- Counties
- Cities
- Towns/ Townships
- Neighborhoods
- Educational Institutions
- County/State Fairgrounds
- Etc.

# TAKE THE CHALLENGE TODAY

## What is it?

The Gold Leaf Challenge focuses on pathways for communities to take local climate action. Using the GreenStep program resources, this new program aims to challenge, assist, and recognize your efforts for completing any NEW actions from:

- 44 high-priority, high-impact climate actions under the categories of:
  - Climate mitigation
  - Climate planning
  - Climate adaptation
  - Community connectedness for Minnesota's changing climate

Current  
Challenge  
Participants

Eagan  
East Central Regional  
Development Commission  
Falcon Heights  
Hackensack  
Hutchinson  
La Crescent  
Lake Elmo  
Maplewood  
New Brighton  
Roseville  
Saint Anthony Village

## Gold Leaf Challenge History

In its 2020 Strategic Plan, the GreenStep Cities steering committee outlined several visions and goals for the future of the program, as recommended by GreenStep participant feedback. One high priority identified by the GreenStep partners and participants identified climate response. The Gold Leaf Challenge program started development in 2022, launching in February of 2024. Learn more about the background, process, pilot program, and more in the [Gold Leaf Challenge Development Report](#) (PDF).



# 2024 Annual Survey

**57%**  
RESPONSE RATE

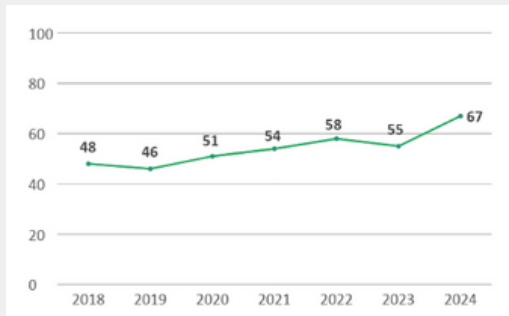
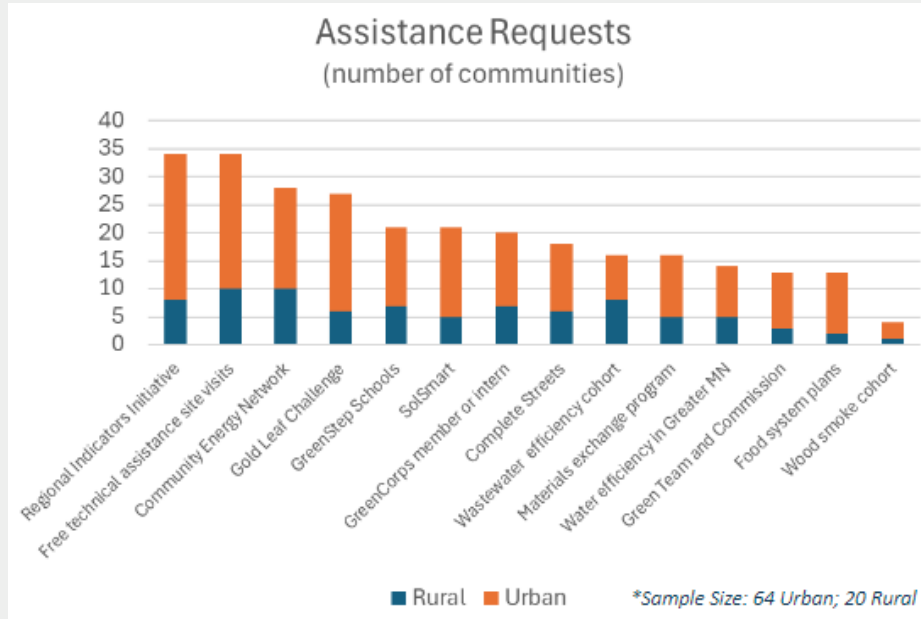
**62**  
PARTICIPANTS REQUESTED ASSISTANCE

**4.0/5**  
OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAM

14 specific **offerings provided by partners** for 2024 were highlighted in the survey. Assistance with the Regional Indicators Initiative and MnTAP site visits were the highest requested offerings.

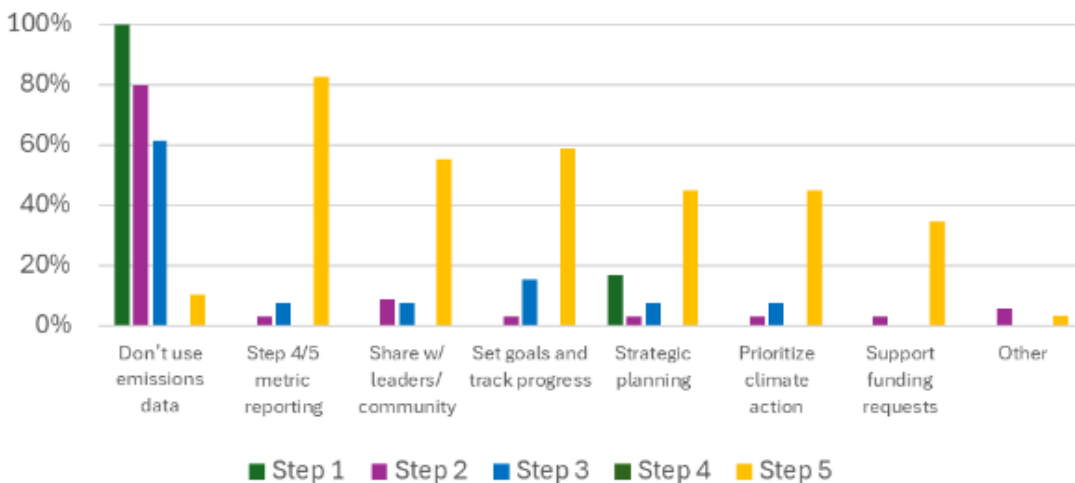
At the beginning of each calendar year, the GreenStep Cities and Tribal Nations program distributes an online survey to participating communities. The survey gathers information about overall program use and satisfaction, helps participants identify program offerings, and encourages participants to share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

86 participants responded to the annual survey (57%), which was the same response rate in 2024. We reviewed survey responses by splitting up participants into urban (Twin Cities metropolitan area) and rural.



**Green Teams** have increased among GreenStep participants! This year, 67% of respondents shared having a green team.

### Greenhouse Gas Emission Data (% by Step)



Sample Size: Step 1:6, Step 2:35, Step 3:13, Step 4:1, Step 5: 29

This year, we asked for information about how participants use **greenhouse gas emission data** to better inform the Regional Indicators Initiative and other tools. Most users were Step 5 communities. The majority of Step 1-3 participants do not use any GHG data but there is some use among them.

See the [2024 Annual Survey Report](#) for more information.



#OpentoWork  
- Hire Eliza!

# Eliza

# MESSINGER

2023-2024  
GREENCORPS MEMBER

Eliza (she/her) joined the GreenStep team in August of 2023 as a Minnesota GreenCorps member. Members serve full-time for 11 months (or 1,700 hours) with public and non-profit host sites around the state.

Eliza is serving in the 'Community Readiness and Outreach' topic area and her workplan included the launch of the Gold Leaf Challenge. She also conducted surveys with GreenStep participants, developed an Engagement and Communications Plan focused on re-engaging inactive participants, co-created a Climate Action Plan database to track city goals and actions, and joined the review team for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Local Climate Action grants.

Prior to Eliza's GreenCorps service, she was the Criminal Expungement Program Manager and Resource Attorney at Volunteer Lawyers Network in Minneapolis. In the last few years, she became passionate about sustainability and is excited for the opportunity to explore careers in this area through her GreenCorps service term.

## fun FACT

Eliza likes to knit but has too many sweaters, so she is now learning how to mend and upcycle clothes.



Eliza visits the City of Hackensack and Lucette!  
With Gary Dietrich (GreenStep Coordinator) and Emerson Lindley, UofMN Gold Leaf Intern, Summer 2024.

12 MN GreenCorps members served in GreenStep participating communities during the 2023/2024 service year, supporting multiple sustainability efforts and actions





# Program Partners

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

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

Learn more about the program partners in the [Partners Profile](#)

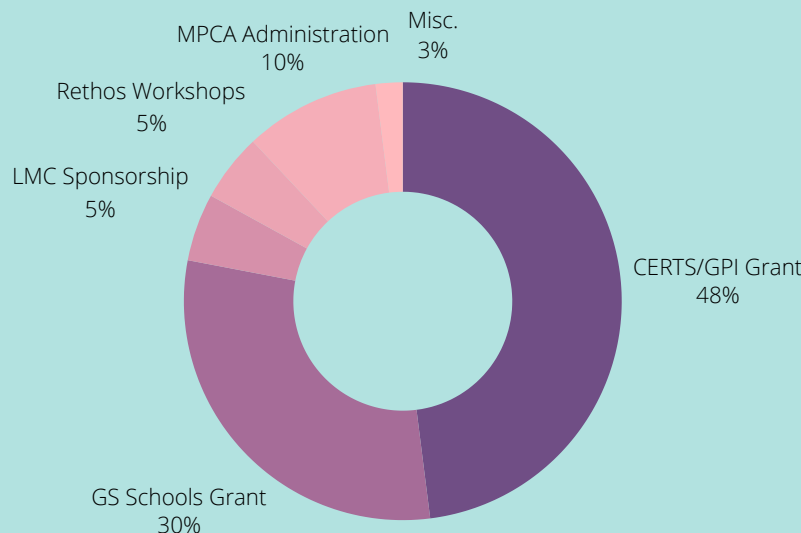


## PROGRAM \$\$\$

The GreenStep Cities program had a budget of \$100,000 in Fiscal Year 2024 (June 2023 to June 2024) provided by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and a one-time appropriation from the Minnesota State Legislature. This funding was used for:

- Regional Outreach Grant to Clean Energy Resources Teams
- Phase III Grant to GreenStep Schools program
- Sponsorship for LMC Conference and 2024 award blocks
- Hosting Homeowner workshops in 3 cities

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



# ABOUT US

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

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



2023 Annual Award Ceremony

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

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

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

## PARTNER PROGRAMS

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

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



Minnesota  
**GreenStep Tribal Nations**



Minnesota  
**GreenStep Schools**



# Join GreenStep!

## ARE YOU A COMMUNITY LEADER?

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

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

## ARE YOU A COMMUNITY RESIDENT?

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

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



Minnesota  
**GreenStep**