



Minnesota GreenStep Tribal Nations

Summer 2024

Background on the GreenStep Tribal Nations Pilot Program

During summer 2014 Minnesota's Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs, a GreenStep Cities program partner organization) funded University of MN-Duluth students Veronica Kingbird and Lucus Bratvold. Natives of the Red Lake Indian Nation, they worked with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO) to advance and document Tribal sustainability and clean energy actions. LLBO's Division of Resource Management (DRM) – especially Brandy Toft - was very engaged and, on August 20th submitted a *Letter of Commitment to Participate in the Minnesota GreenStep Tribal Program*.

Prior to 2014, staff of the Indian Health Service and the LLBO DRM had used the list of GreenStep best practice actions to prioritize implementation of select solid waste management actions. That experience led LLBO to request formal participation in the GreenStep program.

Despite the fact that GreenStep actions are designed to work for Minnesota cities, not tribal communities, the GreenStep program steering committee enthusiastically welcomed LLBO and has developed an evolving set of guidelines for other tribal communities who wish to join the program as members of a GreenStep Tribal Nations pilot program. Tribal Nations members utilize GreenStep information resources and are recognized for their accomplishments as added to their GreenStep web page.

Currently four Tribal Nations are participating: Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Red Lake Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and Prairie Island Indian Community. Given this tribal interest in the GreenStep framework, the GreenStep partner organizations plan to better clarify and define guidelines and issues for tribes. On an ongoing basis, as we learn from tribal communities, we will update our learnings, below, on how the GreenStep Program can be best utilized by Tribal Nations.

Minnesota's GreenStep Tribal Nations



Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

Step: 5

Joined: Aug 2014



Red Lake Nation

Step: 1

Joined: Jun 2015



**Fond du Lac Band of Lake
Superior Chippewa**

Step: 2

Joined: Feb 2017



Prairie Island Indian Community

Step: 2

Joined: Feb 2020

Tribal Nations Pilot Program Options

Because the GreenStep Tribal Nations (GSTN) program grew out of the Cities (GSC) program as a pilot program, there has never been a comprehensive planning effort to fully develop the GSTN program that includes the engagement process that the GSC program went through prior to its launch.

Three options have been identified as potential next phases of the GSTN pilot program:

1. Leave the program as is (pilot program of the GSC program)

- Participating Tribal communities make use of city-oriented resources and best practices.
 - Assist tribal communities with GSC partners and efforts such as doing an initial assessment of how a tribal community's actions could align with the GSC best practice actions.
 - Celebrate program success individually with participants as requested.

2. Develop a GreenStep Tribal Nations program (beyond a pilot phase of GSC)

- Model a GSTN program after GSC framework but make changes as necessary to better reflect the needs of Tribal communities.
- Develop specific best practice actions and a website landing page to promote that program on its own.
- Identify key partners, create a GSTN steering committee and identify best practice advisors.
- Identify a venue through which we can share recognition of GSTNs for their best practice actions (outside of the League of Minnesota Cities conference that is used to recognize GSCs).
- One-time funding needed to develop a framework, best practice actions, and website.
- Ongoing staff needed to facilitate the program.

3. Participate in a regional effort

- Identify and partner with a regional organizations that can provide a sustainability program for Tribal communities beyond Minnesota boundaries.



Minnesota GreenStep Tribal Nations

Guidelines and Issues for Participation in the GreenStep Tribal Nations Pilot Program

Tribal Commitment to Participate in GreenStep

Recognition of a city at Step One participation in the GreenStep program requires a city council resolution. For Tribal communities, a Letter of Intent or a Resolution to Participate is equivalent, and need not come from the Tribal Council, but could come from a division of tribal governance – from example, from the director of the Division of Resource Management.

In the case of LLBO, the Director of Resource Management speaks for the entire Nation. In the case of Red Lake Nation, the Tribal Council adopted a GreenStep participation resolution. See each Tribal Nation resolution or letter listed at <https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/all-cities> and by clicking on the Tribal community.

Geographic Extent

Unlike cities, Tribal community boundaries may extend beyond a geographically-defined area. Tribal communities may choose to define the area where they intend to focus implementation of GSTN best practice actions. Portions could include specific tribal facilities, multiple cities or region within Reservation or Community boundaries, the entire Reservation or Community area, etc. The choice depends upon the vision and leadership of Tribal community leaders. If, however, only one city wishes to join, that city would come in under the GreenStep Cities program.

Currently all four GSTN participants have chosen to work within their entire Reservation territory.

Self-Selection into GreenStep Categories

Criteria for recognition of GreenStep participants at Steps Two and Three depends in part on what “capacity,” or in which Category, a city falls. Cities answer 11 questions on a [spreadsheet](#) and a Category – A, B or C – is automatically calculated. In general, Category C cities are small – under 1500 people – and Category A cities are large – over 3000 people. For GSTNs, some of the questions are not relevant, and so Tribal communities should use their judgment in categorizing themselves.

Currently all four GSTN participants have categorized themselves as Category B communities.

Best Practice Actions

The GreenStep program challenges cities and tribal communities to complete actions from a list of about 175 actions. Between 4 and 8 actions fall under each of the 29 Best Practices. Some actions focus on internal city/tribal operations, such as facilities management, planning and goal setting, and energy benchmarking. Other actions focus on community-wide efforts such as environmental management, transit, and climate adaptation.

GSTNs should feel free to interpret each action within a tribal context and report their completion accordingly. Since tribal communities do on-line reporting along with cities, using actions that were written for the city context, some actions as written do not quite fit the tribal context. Thus, GSTN coordinators should broadly interpret each action and report accomplishments under the closest existing action on the GreenStep web site. As needed, GSTN coordinators should [contact](#) the GreenStep program coordinators for guidance.

Each action has city-specific implementation guides/resources, but not tribal-specific resources. Unfortunately, current GreenStep staff in St. Paul do not have the time nor skill to pick out the most useful tribal-specific resources. But many of the city-specific resources are still useful.

An example of tribal-specific resources that would be part of a GSTN web site is the EPA Region 5 - Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa joint creation of a [Community-Based Social Marketing Training Guide](#).

One Key Best Practice Action: the B3 Building Energy & Water Use Tool

The first GreenStep action (best practice action [1.1](#)) is to record monthly energy and water use at [city] tribal-owned government buildings and facilities on what's called the Minnesota [B3 Benchmarking database](#). When tribes join GreenStep they will be given B3 access. This powerful, free web-based tool helps tribal staff pinpoint areas of potential energy and water conservation so as to spend improvement dollars where they will return the best investment in energy/water and dollars saved every month.

GreenStep Tribal Recognition

Currently, GSTNs are publicly recognized along with GSCs at the annual League of Minnesota Cities conference in June. This recognition – at Steps 1 through 5 – is formally given by the League. Additional recognition of GSTN accomplishments may happen in the future at a Minnesota-wide tribal gathering, as determined by tribal leaders in Minnesota or at individual ceremonies at tribal meetings or events, as desired by individual GSTNs.

GSTNs should use the criteria for recognition at Steps 2 through 5 that are written for cities, but these Step criteria should be interpreted liberally to fit the tribal context. As needed, GSTN coordinators should contact the GreenStep program coordinators for guidance.

Support

Some of the GreenStep work with LLBO was supported through a paid internship arranged by CERTs. Future work in GSTNs could be funded by a tribe, by Minnesota Extension, with work-study funds at Tribal Colleges or community colleges, and through funds from the Indian Health Service office out of Bemidji.

As needed, the GreenStep program staff will support any tribal fundraising for GreenStep participation.

Improvements and Corrections to the GSTN Pilot Program

GSTNs and those working with them should feel free to offer corrections, suggestions and improvements to this current summary of and guidance to tribal community participation in the GreenStep program. Please send feedback to the [GreenStep program coordinators](#).