

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Minnesota
GreenStep

www.MNGreenStep.org

SUMMARY

The April 2024 - April 2025 reporting year continued strong! There were 154 city and Tribal nation participants in the program, covering 54% of the state's total population (see [Page 5](#)).

The Cities of Alexandria, Eagle Lake, Hugo, Long Beach, and Vergas and the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa joined the program at Step 1! In addition, 37 other cities advanced to Steps 2 or 3 or maintained their Step 4/5 status (see [Page 2](#)). Across all participants, 287 new best practice actions were reported on the website among all 29 Best Practices (see [Page 3](#)).

We hosted 7 virtual workshops that covered multiple topics, delivered 11 GreenStep road signs, and had 13 volunteers at the State Fair (see [Page 8](#)). We also launched the new Peer Exchange Pods for GreenStep coordinators, which has 15 participants (see [Page 10](#))!

Finally, we welcomed Erica Bjelland to the GreenStep staff team in July 2024 (see [Page 7](#)) and we highlight Nicole Smiley, our 2024-2025 GreenCorps member (see [Page 13](#)) who helped make recommendations for Step 4 & Step 5 program improvements.

Thank you for another great year!



Mayor Mike Pfeiffer celebrates the City of Long Beach's Step 1, 2, and 3 awards at the League of Minnesota Cities conference in Duluth on June 25, 2025.

Congratulations to **Long Beach** for moving up THREE steps in one year! The City **achieved Steps 1, 2, and 3** between April 2024-April 2025.



Minnesota
GreenStep

2025 *Step Advances!*

Total unique communities
advancing a step in 2025:

44

That's 29% of
total GreenStep
participants!

Step 1:

- Alexandria
- Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
- Eagle Lake
- **Hugo**
- **Long Beach**
- **Vergas**

Step 2:

- **Hugo**
- **Lake City**
- **Long Beach**
- **Vergas**

Step 3:

- Ely
- **Lake City**
- **Long Beach**
- New Prague
- Saint Cloud

Step 4 & 5:

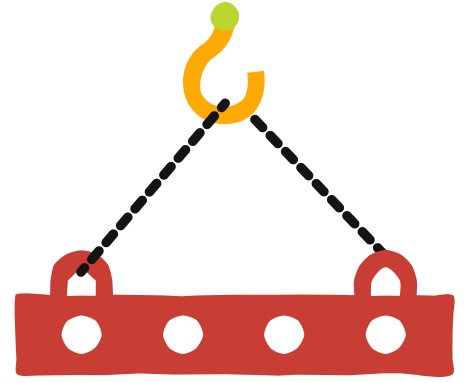
- Apple Valley
- Bloomington
- Burnsville
- Coon Rapids
- Cottage Grove
- Duluth
- Eagan
- Eden Prairie
- Edina
- Falcon Heights
- Fridley
- Golden Valley
- Hopkins
- Hutchinson
- Jordan
- Lake Elmo
- Mahtomedi
- Maplewood
- Marshall
- Minnetonka
- Moorhead
- New Brighton
- Northfield
- North St. Paul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

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 2025 League of Minnesota Cities annual conference.



Notable Actions reported this year:

- **Ely's Incredible Ely Health and Wellness program** works to develop walking and biking route maps and signs.
- **Falcon Heights adopted a Climate Action Plan** in 2025.
- **Farmington updated their Emergency Operations Plan**, to be updated annually and available in multiple languages, including braille.
- **Fergus Falls Natural Resources Advisory Committee** was designated as the city's GreenStep Committee.
- **Hugo's 10 stormwater projects** store and reuse water for irrigation on public and private land.
- **La Crescent's Annual Neighbors Day** event organizes neighbors to help each other in work around the community, at their homes, and in public spaces such as prairie restoration and clean ups.
- **Lake City's Eagle Vista Lane living street** prioritizes walkability through reduced pavement width, improved pedestrian pathways, and the integration of sustainable landscaping features.
- **Long Beach's Community Resilience Hub** is designed to be city offices, rentable community space, the wastewater utility shop, and critical resource distribution center and shelter, replacing a 70 year-old City Hall.
- **New Prague has buried 90% of municipal power lines** underground to increase protection and increase aesthetics in the community.
- **St. Cloud expects to save \$35 million from city investments in renewable energy** during 2020-2045.
- **Vergas constructed a walking trail** from downtown to the lake park and added a boardwalk and floating bridge.

5650

Total cumulative
actions for all
cities

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

1054

Total actions
reported at the
3-star level

287

New actions
reported this year

STEP 4 & 5 METRICS

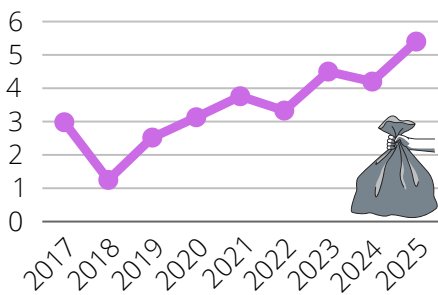
In 2025, **34 communities completed Step 4** and all also completed **Step 5** metrics reporting. **All communities submitting metrics received recognition.** One community reached both Steps 4 and 5 for the first time this reporting year. For one community, this was their first-time reporting Step 4 metrics and two reached Step 5 for the first time this year.

(Metric numbers are shown in parentheses.)

WHAT DO THE METRICS TELL US?



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



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

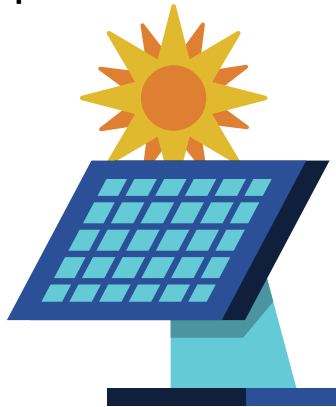
Communities reported adding an average of 18% **affordable housing units** (of total housing added) (7.6)



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

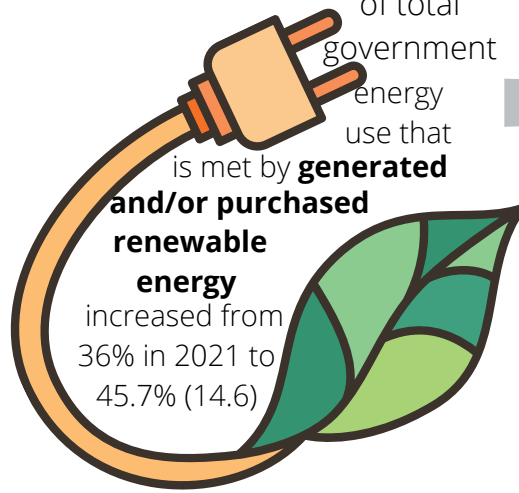
A collective total of 6,233 **municipal and private renewable energy generation sites** reported -

an increase of 1,001 sites compared to the previous year (14.1)

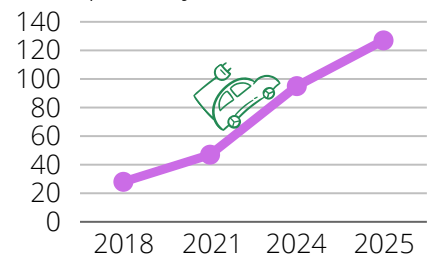


23 Step 5 communities reported a reduction in **kBtu usage in public facilities** (1.1)

The average % of total government energy use that is met by **generated and/or purchased renewable energy** increased from 36% in 2021 to 45.7% (14.6)

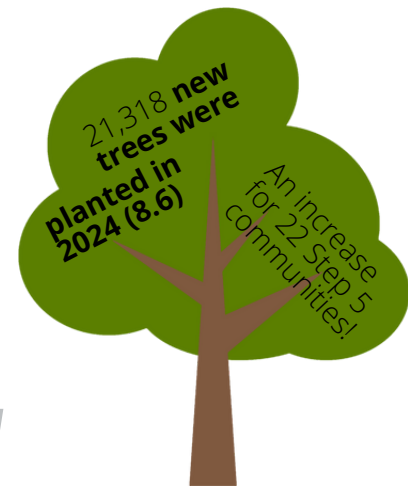


Cities report owning or leasing 127 **electric vehicles in the city fleet**; up from just 28 in 2018. (3.5)



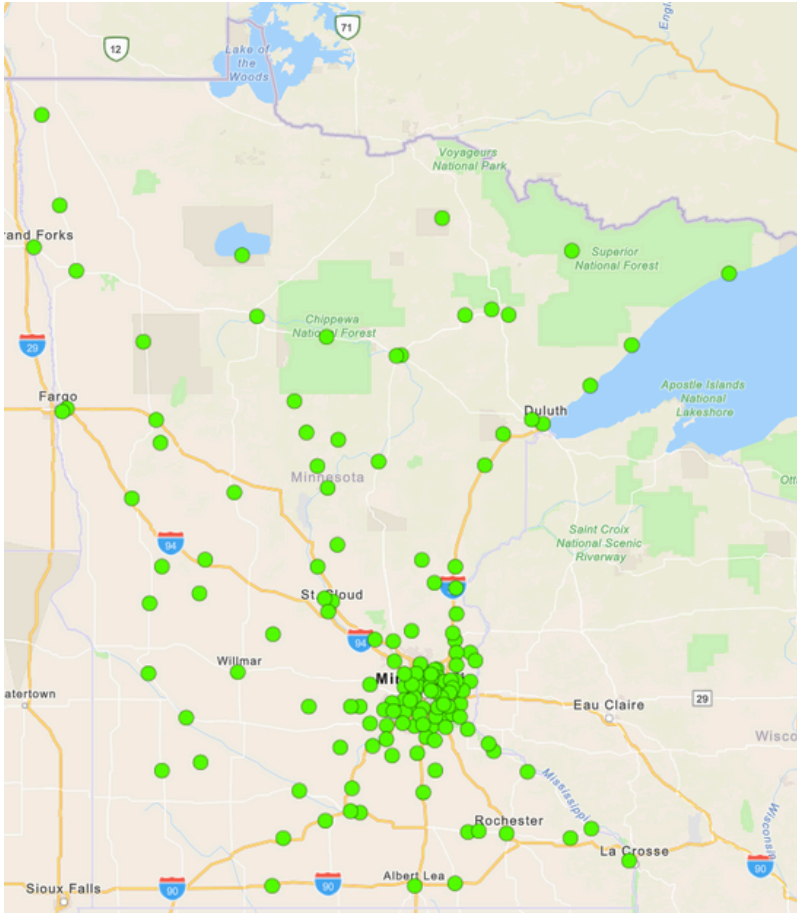
70.93 miles of **new or reconstructed sidewalks or trails** were completed in 2024 (4.1)

An average of 95.4% of residents in reporting communities **live within one mile of a bike route** (4.2); 76.3% live within **¾ mile of transit route** (5.8); 86.1% 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

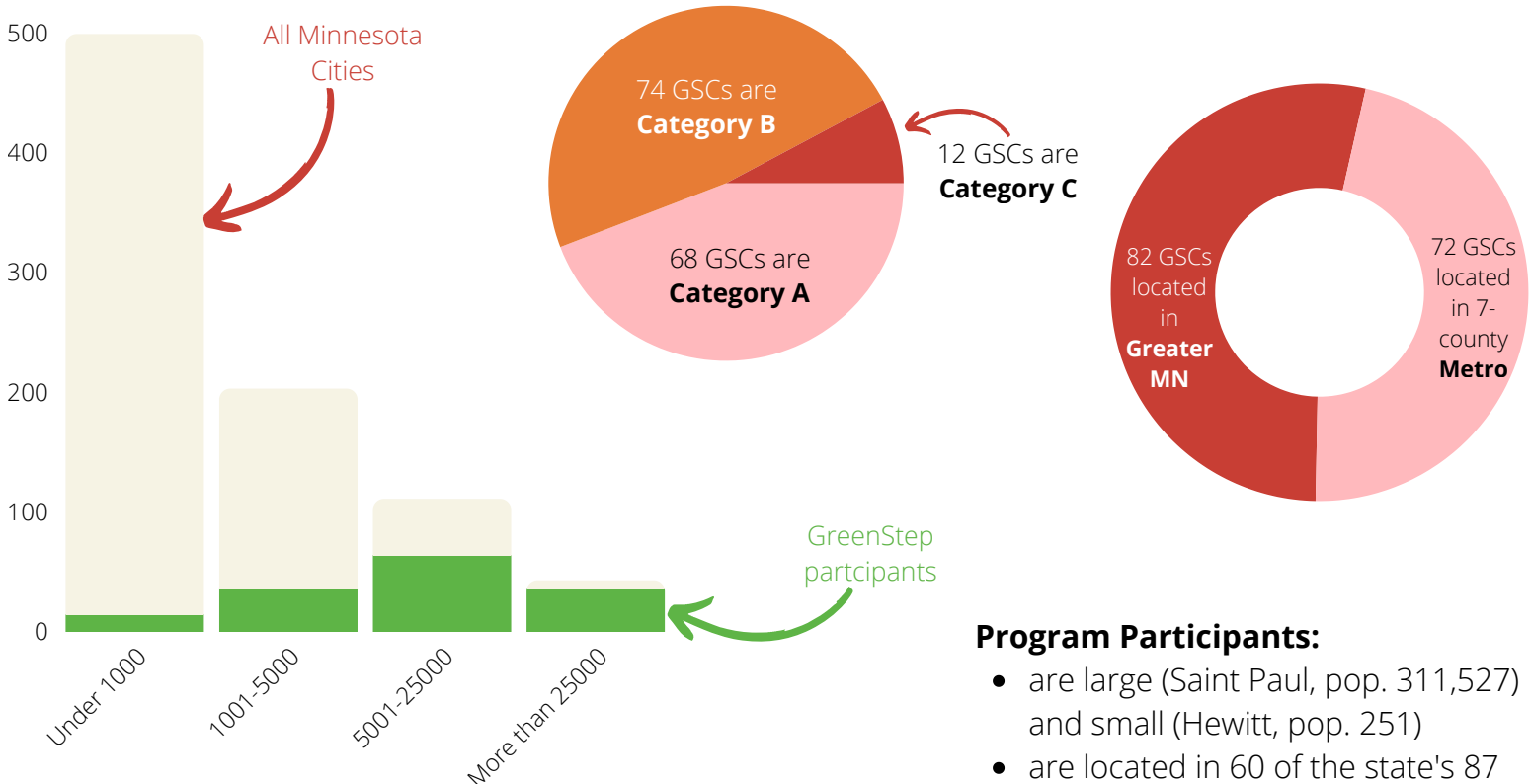


154 Cities and Tribal nations participate in the program

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

18% of Minnesota's 856 cities are a GreenStep City

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

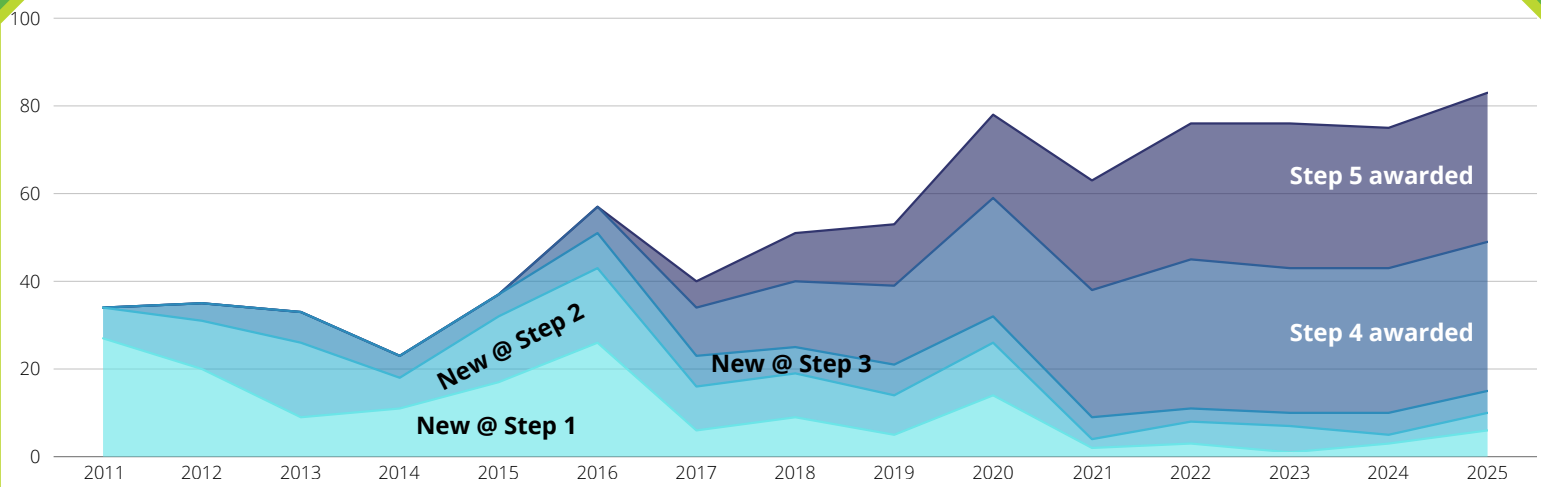


Of all Minnesota cities, 84% of the largest (25,000+ pop.), 58% of the medium (5,001-25,000 pop.) and 7% of small (under 5,000 pop.) cities participate.

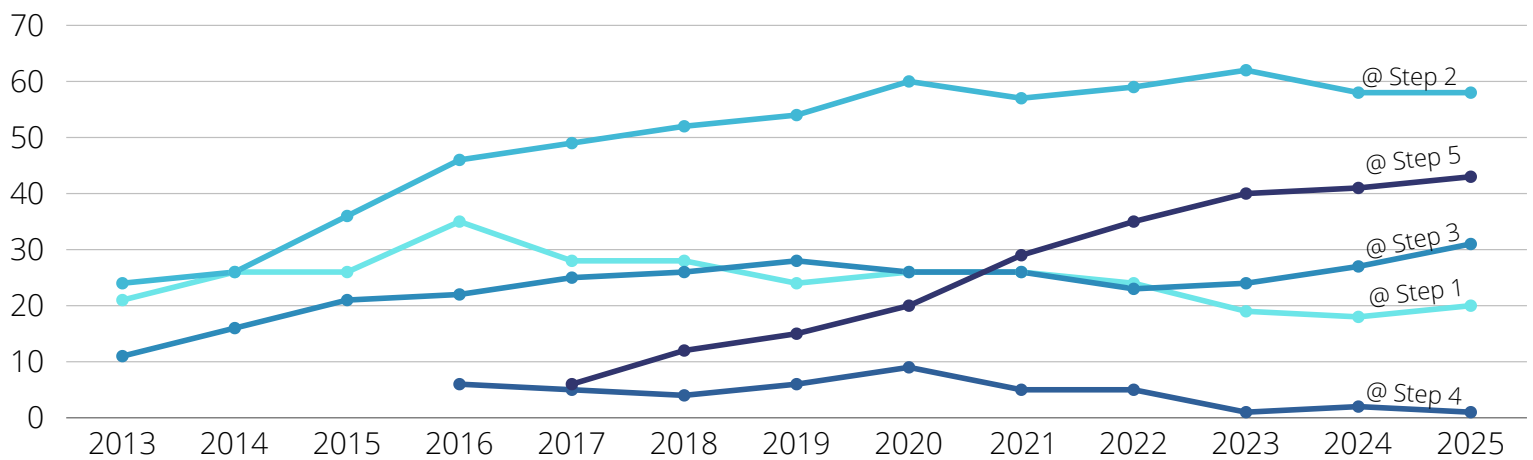
Program Participants:

- are large (Saint Paul, pop. 311,527) and small (Hewitt, pop. 251)
- are located in 60 of the state's 87 counties (69%)

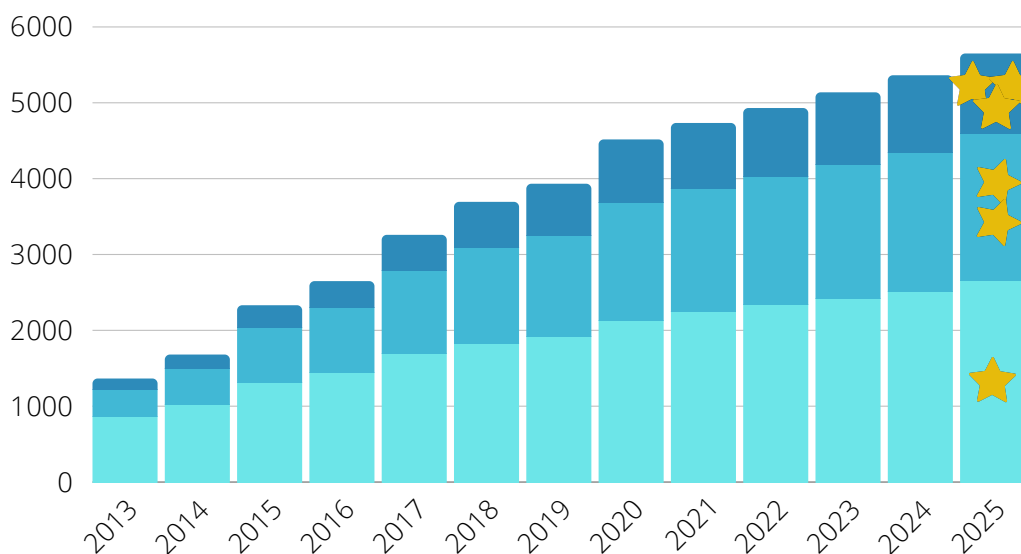
Trend-Setting



Annual GreenStep Community Recognitions



Total GreenStep Communities by Step



Total Best Practice Actions Reported

That's
5650
total
actions!

Welcome. Erica!

We were delighted to grow our team when Erica Bjelland (she/her) joined GreenStep at the MPCA in July, 2024! Erica's position was funded as a one-time appropriation through the Minnesota State Legislature in the 2023 Environment Budget & Policy Omnibus bill and her role brings much-needed capacity to the administration, continuous improvement, and growth of the GreenStep Cities, Tribal Nations, and Schools programs, along with the Gold Leaf Challenge.

Erica has a degree in Environmental Studies from Concordia College in Moorhead, MN and then spent most of her career in the beautiful Brainerd Lakes area in central Minnesota. For several years, she worked in program development and education outreach at a small nonprofit focused on solar equity and then as a Regional Planner with the Region Five Development Commission (R5DC). At R5DC, Erica worked with small cities on the creation and implementation of Energy and Environment Plans. Previous to joining the GreenStep team, Erica was working in the mountains of Boulder County, Colorado as a Land Use Planner.

Erica is excited to be back home to the lakes of Minnesota where she has spent much of her career and adult life. She enjoys playing music with friends, listening to audiobooks (especially on road trips to visit with GreenStep communities now!), playing pickleball, and generally spending time outside.



Erica facilitated the session "He who must not be named: Climate action in small MN cities" with La Crescent Sustainability Coordinator, Jason Ludwigson, Jennifer Lindahl, SE CERT Regional Coordinator, and (not pictured) Pat Branstad, Climate Smart St. James, and City of Comfrey Mayor Gary Richter, at the Small Cities Conference in Winona, MN, October 2024.

Through her work with small cities, she learned about the great work that GreenStep is doing in partnerships with communities of all sizes across Minnesota! Erica has already brought expertise into the GreenStep program by focusing our efforts to better support small and rural communities. She is great at listening and finding out what communities are challenged with and finding the right resources to support them. Erica has been a great advocate for small and rural communities in a number of presentations and workgroups, highlighting the unique needs and successes of communities across Minnesota!

Program 2025 Accomplishments

Summer 2024 intern Ahreum Ham developed a new Gold Leaf guide for small communities.

Spring 2025 intern Alexa Schendel researched and wrote stories highlighting GreenStep Cities.

We hosted 7 **virtual workshops** that included 122 attendees:

- October 2024:
 - Minnesota Local Leaders Forum: Exploring the Synergies Between GreenStep and LEED for Cities
- June 2025:
 - Offboarding & Succession Planning for Corps members
- Virtual Coffee Breaks (co-hosted with Dept. of Commerce Energy Office):
 - EECBG & State Competitiveness Fund
 - Emergency planning
 - AmeriCorps programs
 - MN Climate Action Framework
 - MNCIFA & RETAP

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

- 8 e-newsletter mailings sent to an audience of 1,339 contacts
- 144 messages sent through LMC's MemberLink email listserve for GreenStep Coordinators (313 contacts)
- 105 members are connected through the private LinkedIn group
- 84 posts led to 193 content interactions on Facebook
- 11 road signs delivered to 4 cities
- 4 people utilized the Virtual Open Office Hours



The City of St. James achieved the 2025 Sustainable Cities Award for their project "Building an Equitable & Active St. James: Advancing Transportation, Energy Efficiency, and Community Engagement".

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

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



Kristin Mroz - GreenStep Cities Coordinator, Cassie Bros - Eagan Climate Impact Corps member, Ellie Rabine, St. Louis Park Sustainability Specialist., Erica Bjelland - GreenStep Cities Associate Coordinator, and Shann Finwall - Maplewood Environmental Planner

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

- Lola Schoenrich and the Great Plains Institute is the Network Coordinator
- Kristin Mroz and Erica Bjelland attended the network's annual gathering in College Park, MD with 50 attendees from across the U.S.
- The network hosts regular learning opportunities and cohorts for member programs

LET'S GET TOGETHER



We were excited to find opportunities to gather across the regions in the first half of 2025! A big thank you to our partners at CERTs, Great Plains Institute, MN Dept. of Commerce, and of course the communities! Find recaps of the events below:

- **Long Beach** - [Local Solutions in Action](#), April 24
- **Metro** - [Community Energy Network](#) gathering, April 29
- **Crosslake** - [Community Solutions for a Resilient Future](#), May 6
- **St. James** - [EV Ride & Drive Event](#), May 17
- **Prairie Island Indian Community**, [Clean Energy Ideas Exchange](#), June 5



Minnesota Gold Leaf

*Celebrating Year 1
of the Challenge!*

2024 was the inaugural year of the Gold Leaf Challenge! We had 12 communities sign up in 2024 and 8 of them received recognition for a combined total of 26 reported actions.

You can learn more about the actions reported and the participating communities at the link to the right.

Participants were acknowledged at the regional gatherings hosted in early 2025 and at various public meetings and events.



Gary Dietrich, GreenStep and Gold Leaf Coordinator and Trista Olander, City Clerk, accepting the City of Hackensack's Gold Leaf Challenge award in June 2025.

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 and their 2024
Gold-Leaf actions.*

Columbia Heights

Eagan - CC1, CC3, CP5, CP9, CP10

East Central Regional Development Commission

Falcon Heights - CC1

Hackensack - CA5, CC1

Hutchinson

La Crescent - CP10, CA5, CA7, CC1, CC5

Lake Elmo

Mahtomedi

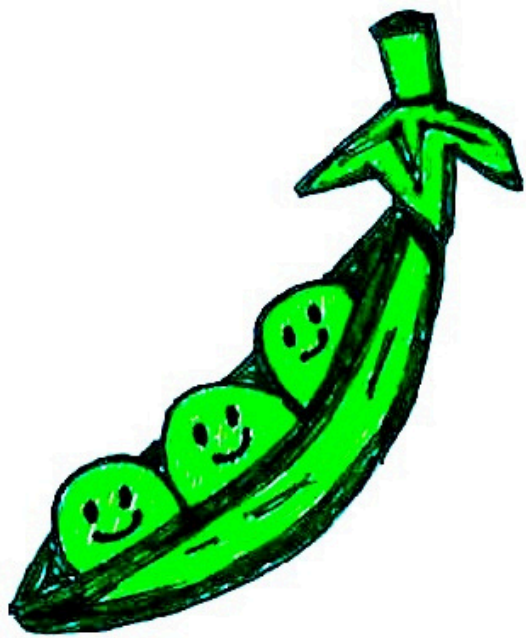
Maplewood - CC1

New Brighton - CA2, CC1

Ramsey County

Roseville - CC1, CC4, CC11, CP10

St. Anthony Village - CC1, CC2, CC3, CA2,
CP7, CP10



INTRODUCING PEER EXCHANGE PODS

Who can join a Pod?

This program is geared towards GreenStep Coordinators - normally the person/people tasked with posting the initial background information on the GreenStep Cities website, educating other staff, public officials, and the community about the GreenStep program; and completing the annual reporting.

Multiple GreenStep Coordinators from the same community can participate but will be matched with people outside each city or Tribal nation.

Groups of three to four people from different communities will be placed into pods with a mix of steps, roles, population size, location, and types of projects the community is working on.

Current Participants:

- Bridget Rathsack, Burnsville
- Emily Ziring, St. Louis Park
- Erin Spry, Vadnais Heights
- Hannah Dunn, Oakdale
- Hannah Lynch, Falcon Heights
- Kayla Betzold, Rochester
- Kayla Kirtz, Robbinsdale
- Kelsey Barajas, Eagan
- Marisa Bayer, Edina
- Mikala Larson, Hopkins
- Monika Miller, South St. Paul
- Noelle Bakken, Roseville
- Olivia Dorow Hovland, Coon Rapids
- Rachel Workin, Fridley
- Trish Crego, Hermantown

Like peas in a pod - the Exchange Program officially launched in June of 2025, thanks to help from our GreenCorps member, Nicole (see page 12)! The idea for a more formal peer exchange program came out of engagement around the Gold Leaf Challenge program and we are excited to finally launch it!

Share knowledge

Ask questions

Create a feedback loop

Join a Pod!



Go to the GreenStep Website under "more" or email GreenStep@state.mn.us

2025 Annual Survey

62%

RESPONSE RATE

88

PARTICIPANTS REQUESTED ASSISTANCE

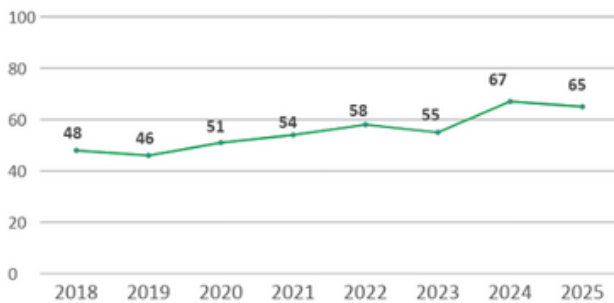
4.0/5

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAM

19 specific **offerings provided by partners** for 2025 were highlighted in the survey. Assistance with the Regional Indicators Initiative, AmeriCorps members or interns, and climate technical assistance 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.

91 participants responded to the annual survey (62%), which was slightly higher response rate than previous years. We reviewed survey responses by splitting up participants into urban (Twin Cities metropolitan area) and rural.

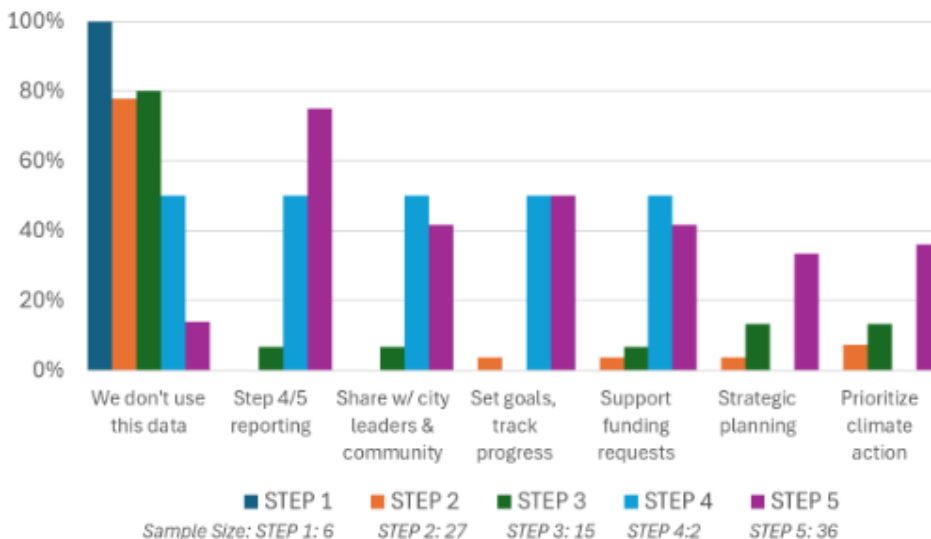


Green Teams have increased among GreenStep participants! This year, 65% of respondents shared having a green team.



Greenhouse Gas Emission Data

(% by Step)



Again 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, using the data in many ways. 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.



Nicole SMILEY

2024-2025

GREENCORPS MEMBER

Nicole (she/her) joined the GreenStep team from August 2024 to June 2025 as a Minnesota GreenCorps member in the 'Community Readiness and Outreach' topic area. During her service, Nicole worked with Step 4 and Step 5 GreenStep participants to learn more about how they use the program and evaluate if GreenStep is still motivating action, challenging participants, and recognizing them in meaningful ways. To do this, Nicole interviewed 43 GreenStep coordinators over 4 months and prepared additional feedback sessions with participants and the GreenStep Steering Committee before making final recommendations.

In addition, following up with suggestions made from GreenStep participants, Nicole engaged communities to develop a peer-to-peer learning program, the Peer Exchange Pods which create groups of 3-4 coordinators across varying Step levels, location, population size, and more. In fact, the happy peas in a pod logo used for the program was illustrated by our very own Nicole! See page 10 for more information about Peer Exchange Pods.

Nicole joined us with a BA in Political Science and a Masters in Public Affairs. She spent the last 18 years working at the University of Minnesota with the Law Clinic Program and as the Administrative Director for the Dept. of Soil, Water, and Climate. After a chaotic period of service when the national AmeriCorps program funding and staff were cut by the Trump Administration, Nicole wrapped up her service early, taking an opportunity to return to the Law Clinic Program as the Director of Law Clinics, where she brings her passion and expertise in all things sustainability to her colleagues.



Nicole tabling for the Gold Leaf Challenge at the City of St. James EV Ride & Drive event with Coordinator, Kristin Mroz, May 2025.

10+ MN GreenCorps members served in GreenStep-participating communities and organizations during the 2024/2025 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](#)

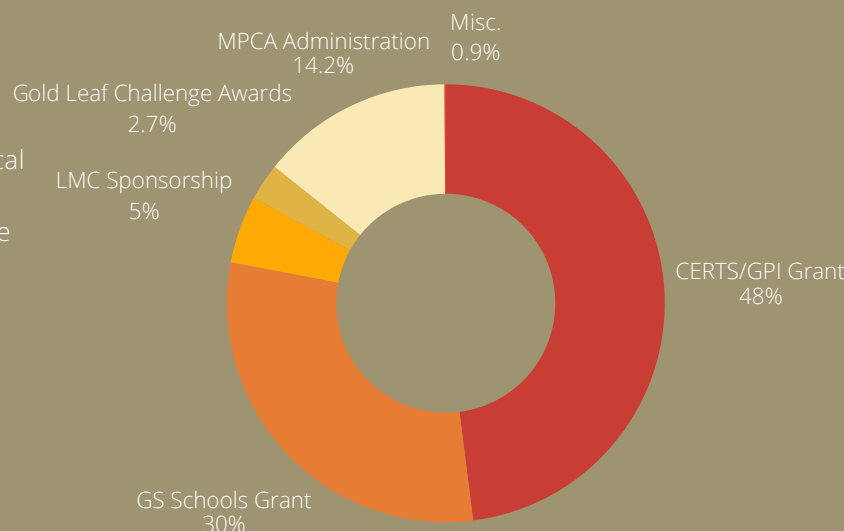


Program \$\$\$

The GreenStep Cities program had a budget of \$100,000 in Fiscal Year 2025 (June 2024 to June 2025) 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 Resource Teams
- Phase III Grant to GreenStep Schools program
- Sponsorship for LMC Conference and 2025 award blocks
- Gold Leaf Challenge awards for 2025

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