

2026 ANNUAL REPORT



www.MNGreenStep.org

SUMMARY

The April 2025 - April 2026 reporting year was another great one! There were 156 city and Tribal Nation participants in the program, covering 54% of the state's total population (see [Page 3](#)).

The Cities of Audubon and Champlin joined the program at Step 1! In addition, 41 other cities advanced to Steps 2 or 3 or maintained their Step 4/5 status (see [Page 2](#)). Across all participants, 201 new best practice actions were reported on the website among all 29 Best Practices (see [Page 4](#)).

We worked with multiple students, hosted 6 virtual workshops that covered multiple topics and had 15 volunteers at the State Fair (see [Page 8](#)). We also updated Step 4 & 5 reporting options (see [Page 5](#)) and launched our inaugural Impact Challenge focused on water in 2026 (see [Page 11](#))!

Finally, we thank Erica Bjelland for two years as our program associate (see [Page 10](#)) and we highlight Stephanie Schuebel, our 2025-2026 GreenCorps member (see [Page 9](#)) who helped launch the GreenStep & MemberLink 101 e-learning modules (see [Page 12](#)).

Thank you for another great year!



Council members Roger Thalman and Nicole Mace and City Administrator Martin Schultz celebrate the City of Alexandria's Step 2 and Step 3 awards at the League of Minnesota Cities conference in Rochester on June 24, 2026.

Congratulations to
Alexandria for
moving up TWO
steps in one year!
The City **achieved**
Steps 2 and 3
between April 2025-
April 2026.



Minnesota
GreenStep

2026 Step Advances!

Total unique
communities advancing
a step in 2026:
43

That's 28% of
total GreenStep
participants!

Step 1:

- Audubon
- **Champlin**

Step 2:

- **Alexandria**
- **Champlin**

Step 3:

- **Alexandria**
- Columbia Heights
- St. Peter

Bold - Indicates a city that progressed more than one step this year

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

Step 4:

- **Crosslake***
- Crystal*
- Lexington*
- Mendota Heights*
- New Hope*
- West St. Paul*

+ everyone on
the Step 5 list

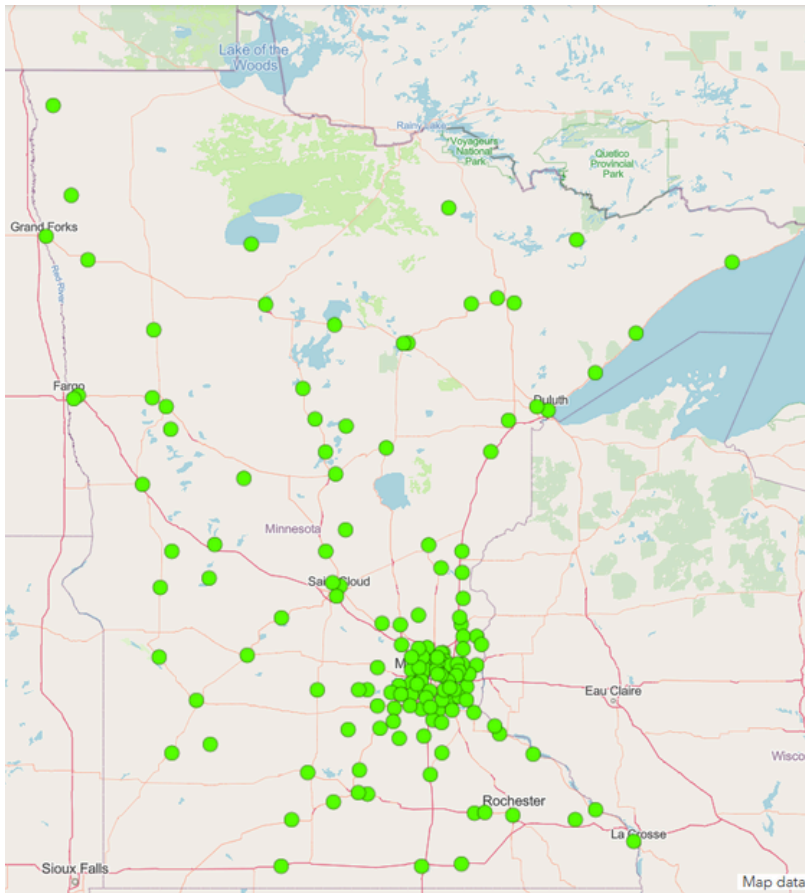
Step 5:

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



GreenStep Cities participants and partners at the 2026 League of Minnesota Cities annual conference.

program participants

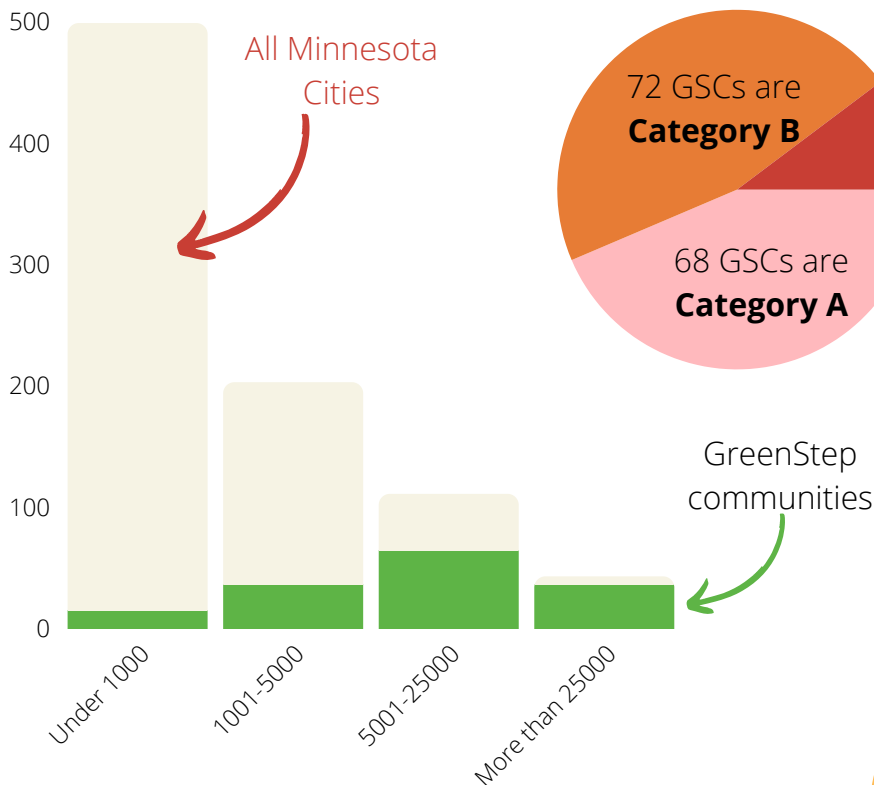


156 Cities and Tribal Nations participate in the program

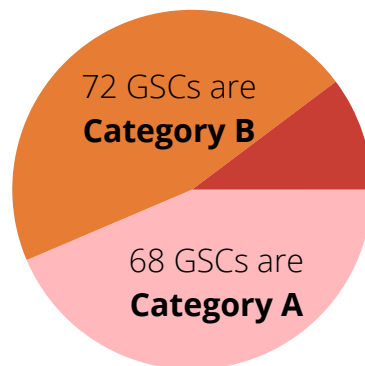
18% of Minnesota's 856 cities are a GreenStep City

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

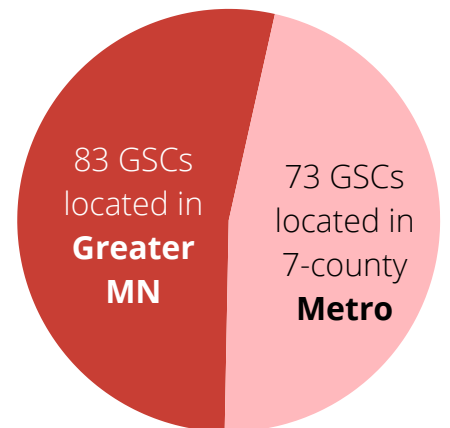
28% of GreenStep Cities are at the highest Step - Step 5



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.



16 GSCs are **Category C**



Program Participants:

- Large (Saint Paul, pop. 311,527)
- Small (Hewitt, pop. 251)
- Located in 60 of the state's 87 counties (69%)



Notable Actions reported this year:

- **Alexandria was the FIRST in Minnesota to pioneer temporary traffic calming islands** during the summer months that can be removed for plowing in the winter. Islands use bio-logs, woodchips, and planters and residents can request them annually
- **Apple Valley's** Liquor Store #3, Hayes Community and Senior Center, and Police Operations Building are GreenGlobes certified
- **Champlin** offers curbside pick up of both organics and recycling to all single family properties as of July 2025
- **Chanhassen's** mobile bike clinic helps residents repair bikes
- **Columbia Heights** provides emergency communications to residents with options for a language translation line and the multi-cultural liaison
- **Eagan adopted a Climate Action Plan** in April 2025 that sets out to reduce communitywide emissions by 55% by 2035 and achieve net zero emissions by 2050
- **Granite Falls'** solar powered speed monitoring sign led to a policy to purchase any new signs with solar
- **Robbinsdale** installed an 80kW solar PV rooftop array on the water treatment plant in 2024 and a 40kW system on City Hall in 2025
- **St. Anthony Village's "Bike Bus"**, run by volunteers, takes up to 50 students weekly to the elementary schools with a pre-planned route throughout the city
- **St. Peter's Sustainability Task Force** started in 2025 to guide and support local sustainable action
- **Vergas conducted a community energy & resilience survey** in 2025 to gain community insight and input regarding climate impacts, energy use, and support for city energy and resiliency related actions

5851

Total cumulative
actions for all
cities

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

1081

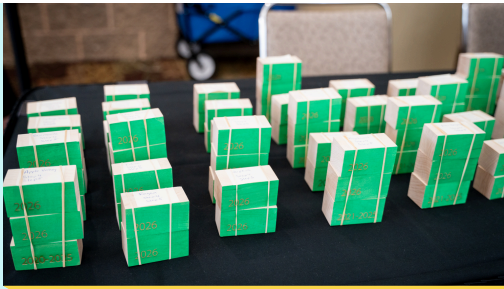
Total actions
reported at
the 3-star level

201

New actions
reported this year

NEW

STEP 4 & 5 REPORTING OPTIONS



As part of GreenStep's efforts to streamline participation and reduce barriers, the GreenStep Cities Steering Committee has adopted new reporting options and requirements for reaching Step 4 & 5 of the program in 2026 and beyond.

One of the roles of the GreenStep program is to challenge communities to achieve their sustainability and quality-of-life goals. GreenCorps member, Nicole Smiley ('24-'25), conducted a series of interviews with current Step 4 & 5 participants to learn more about program participation, barriers, and recommendations.

A key recommendation was for the GreenStep program to reimagine the requirements for Step 4 & 5 to link back to action reporting and foster engagement. Additional working groups, feedback opportunities, and recommendations followed.

AS OF NOVEMBER, 2025, THE FOLLOWING CHANGES ARE IN PLACE:

- Reporting Options for Step 4:
 - **4A** – Meet with GreenStep staff to select your sustainability targets
 - **4B** – Select & report your sustainability targets
 - **4C** – Report GreenStep-identified metrics
- Reporting Options for Step 5:
 - **5A** – Improve your sustainability targets
 - **5B** – Report GreenStep-identified metrics
 - **5C** – Report new/improved Best Practice Actions
 - **5D** – Give a presentation
 - **5E** – Publish a story
 - **5F** – Survey residents about your targets
 - **5G** – Participate in a Minnesota action program

4

5

In 2026, **38 communities completed Step 4** and **33 completed Step 5** reporting.

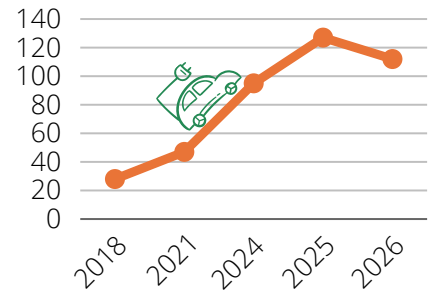
STEP 4 & 5 METRICS

In 2026, **27 participants reported using option 4C** and **24 reported using option 5B**. This was the first year that the new Step 4 & 5 reporting options was available but 4C and 5B continue to focus on GreenStep metrics. Fewer participants reported metrics this year, which may lead to misleading data when compared with previous years.

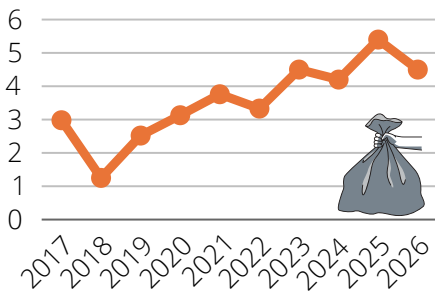
(Metric numbers are shown in parentheses.)

WHAT DO THE METRICS TELL US?

Cities report owning or leasing 112 **electric vehicles in the city fleet**; up from just 28 in 2018. (3.5)



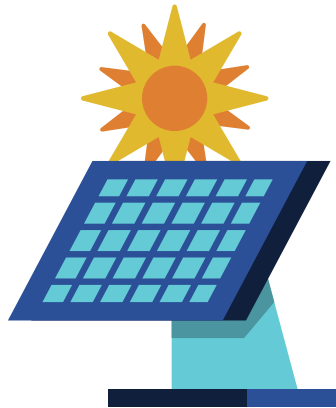
20 communities report 100% of their **traffic signals have been converted to LED**. (1.5)



Cities reported an average of 4.5 pounds of **solid waste generated** per city resident/per day, a slight decrease over 2024 metrics (13.1)

Communities reported adding an average of 13.3% **affordable housing units** (of total housing added), down from 33% in 2022 (7.6)

A collective total of 3,567 **municipal and private renewable energy generation sites** reported - 178.9 MWh generated (14.1, 14.2)



34.8 miles of **new or reconstructed**

sidewalks or trails were completed in

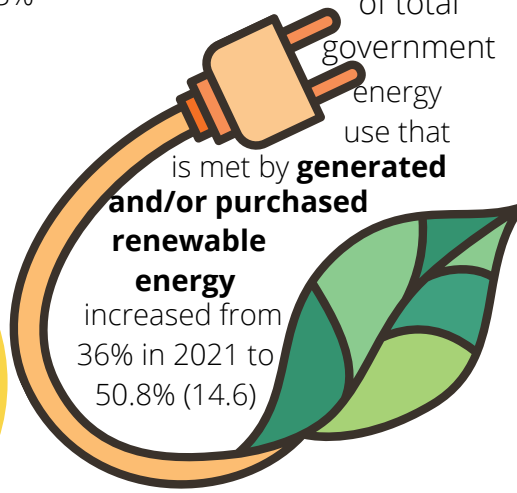
2025 (4.1)

19 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 50.8% (14.6)

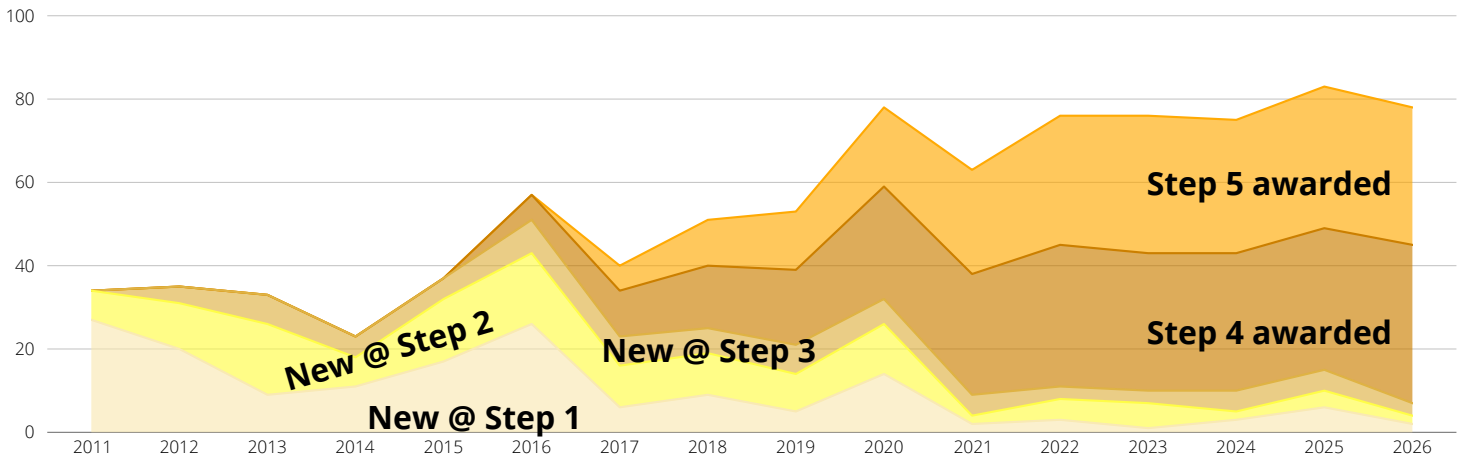


An average of 97.4% of residents in reporting communities **live within one mile of a bike route** (4.2); 74% live within **¾ mile of transit route** (5.8); 90% live within **½ mile or 10 minute walk of parkland** (8.3)

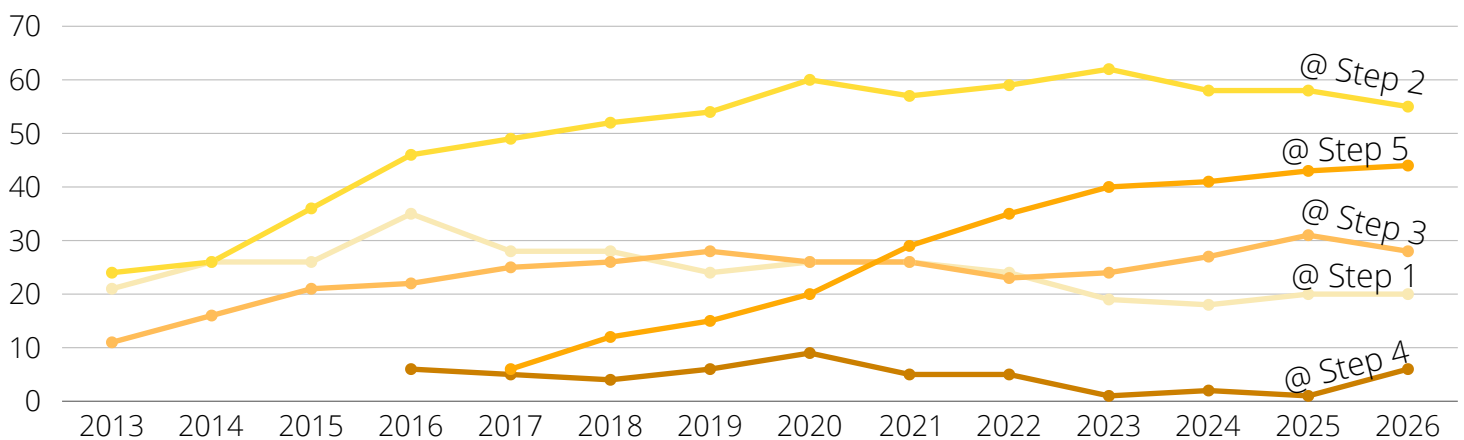
See metric summaries & individual city accomplishments on our [Recognition](#) page.

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

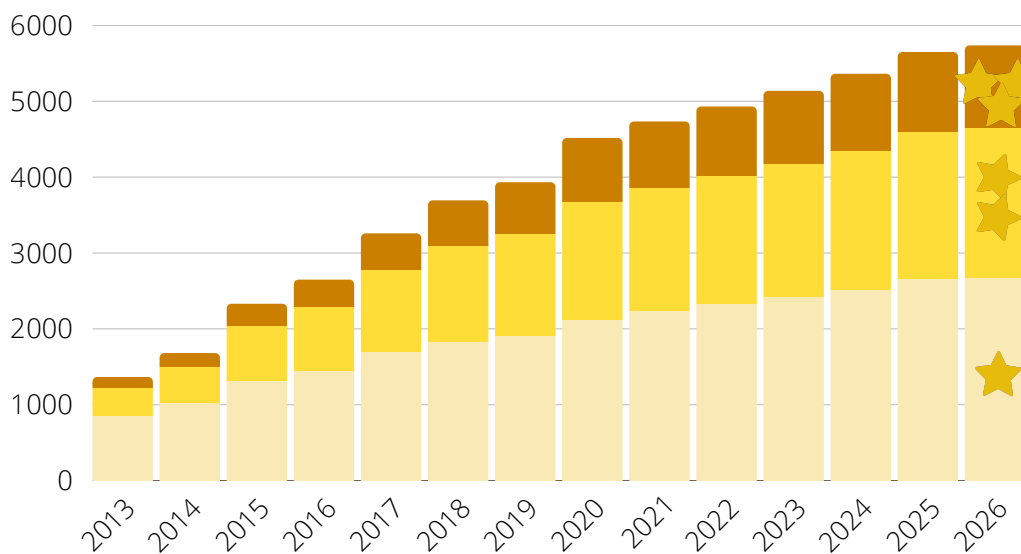
Trend-Setting



Annual GreenStep Community Recognitions



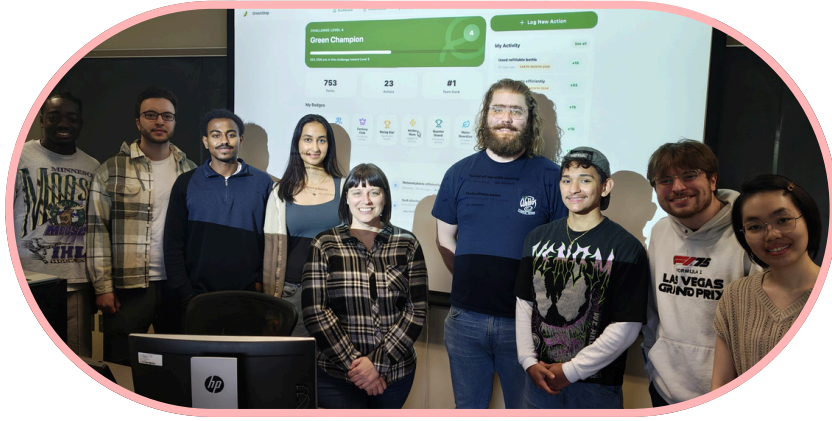
Total GreenStep Communities by Step



Total Best Practice Actions Reported

That's
5737
total
actions!

STUDENTS & STORIES



The GreenStep Cities program partners with the University of St. Thomas Sustainable Communities Partnership each semester. The Spring '26 computer science senior capstone course helped further design an “eco-challenge” web app that can be used to encourage sustainable action among peers and colleagues.

Ongoing outreach and education throughout the year included:

- 7 e-newsletter mailings sent to an audience of 1,347 contacts
- 101 messages sent through LMC's MemberLink email listserve for GreenStep Coordinators (317 contacts)
- 116 members are connected through the private LinkedIn group
- 42 posts led to 160 content interactions on Facebook
- 1 road sign delivered to 1 city
- 6 people used Virtual Open Office Hours



Spring 2026 intern Fowzia Warsame researched and wrote stories highlighting GreenStep Cities: Hutchinson, La Crescent, and New Hope.



University of St. Thomas Sustainable Communities Partnership student researcher Eric Ganske, continued a Fall '25 class project to develop a web app that highlights Gold Leaf Challenge participants and the actions they have reported.

We hosted 6 virtual workshops that included 239 attendees:

- January 7, 2026: MnTAP Wastewater Optimization Opportunities
- January 21, 2026: Step 4 & Step 5 Reporting Overview
- February 26, 2026: Data Centers and Local Considerations
- March 12, 2026: City to City Conversation on Pollinators
- March 26, 2026: Opportunities to Reuse Waste and Protect Water
- May 21, 2026: Sourcewell building energy/water savings

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

Stephanie

SCHUEBEL

2025-2026 GREENCORPS MEMBER

Stephanie joined the GreenStep team in September of 2025 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.

She served in GreenCorps' Community Outreach and Education topic area, where her work focused on identifying and developing educational materials, trainings, and resources to help GreenStep communities build capacity and put their quality of life goals into practice. Throughout her service, she supported a wide range of GreenStep programming and helped turn GreenStep coordinators' needs into learning opportunities and practical tools.

Stephanie created an interactive [GreenStep MemberLink 101 training](#), developed a composting guide for rural communities with limited capacity, and designed a Community Energy Ambassador cohort in partnership with CERTs tailored to GreenStep coordinators. She also compiled resources on communicating sustainability, volunteer engagement, LinkedIn learnings, Minnesota sustainability podcasts, and how to share GreenStep community success stories. She supported GreenStep's new annual [Impact Challenge](#) and other GreenStep programming through social media, flyers, and other communications materials. Her work identifying and analyzing GreenStep coordinator training needs will help shape the future of GreenStep programming for years to come.

She studied liberal arts at the University of Wisconsin -Baraboo/Sauk County and sustainability, public health, and writing at the University of Minnesota -Twin Cities. Her experience spans reuse and waste diversion, volunteer coordination, membership development at a thinktank and trade organization, environmental education at a greenhouse, and even managing a toy store –where being silly and wearing costumes were encouraged! Despite a pandemic career detour, she was persistent in finding her way back to sustainability. GreenCorps gave her the unique opportunity to bring those experiences together and clarify the kind of work she wants to pursue: public service, building partnerships, and providing the resources and support communities need to institutionalize sustainability. She describes the past year as the most rewarding of her career so far and feels honored to continue serving through GreenCorps in 2026 with the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

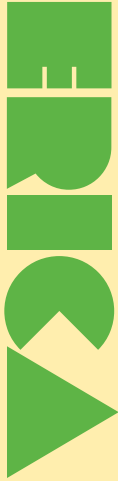


15+ MN GreenCorps members served in GreenStep-participating communities and organizations during the 2025/2026 service year, supporting multiple sustainability efforts.

Minnesota
GreenCorps



Program **2026** Accomplishments



Erica Bjelland was the GreenStep Program Associate from July 2024-June 2026. Over the past two years, Erica helped strengthen the program and expand support for communities across Minnesota. She provided hands-on assistance to small and rural communities, helped onboard new communities, supported communities advancing through Steps 4 & 5, and visited communities across the state.

Erica also strengthened program quality by reviewing 50+ community action assessments, helping revamp Steps 4 & 5, and developing an annual Impact Challenge program.

Through presentations, regional partnerships, and connections with others, Erica expanded GreenStep's reach and strengthened its role in Minnesota's climate and sustainability work. She also provided critical program continuity by stepping in to host meetings, office hours, and presentations whenever needed.

Thank you, Erica! Our program is so grateful for the one-time legislative appropriation that brought you onboard!



Celebrating **GreenStep School's** transition to the non-profit, Bold Futures Now, and Jonee Brigham's retirement in 2026!



18 Best Practice Advisors attended a half-day workshop in November 2025 to get program updates, connect with each other, and prepare for the Impact26 water challenge 2026.

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

- Kristin Mroz was on the planning, communications and equity committees
- Kristin attended the network's annual gathering in Ann Arbor, MI with 50 attendees from across the U.S.
- The network hosts regular learning opportunities and cohorts for member programs

Peer Learning Networks

Many GreenStep participants are members of statewide peer learning groups that help communities take action on clean energy: the Community Energy Network (facilitated by GreenStep core partners – the Great Plains Institute and CERTs) and the Minnesota Cities Climate Coalition (facilitated by GPI). This year, CEN launched a geothermal work group in partnership with Hennepin County and continued our elective pay cohort, which is focused on helping communities leverage clean energy tax credits.



Minnesota Gold Leaf

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 & their 2025 Gold Leaf actions

Climate Smart St. James - CC1, CC3, CC11

Columbia Heights

Eagan - CC1, CC3, CC4, CP6, CP7, CP9, CP10

East Central Regional Development Commission

Falcon Heights - CC1

The Grove United Methodist Church

Hackensack - CA5, CC1

Hutchinson

La Crescent - CP10, CC4, CC6

Lake Elmo - CC1, CC8

Mahtomedi

Maplewood - CC1

Metropolitan Mosquito Control District

New Brighton - CA2, CC1

Ramsey County - CM3, CM5, CM8, CP10, CC1, CC4, CC9

Robbinsdale - CM12, CP6, CP10, CA5, CC1, CC5, CC7

Roseville

St. Anthony Village - CC1, CM7



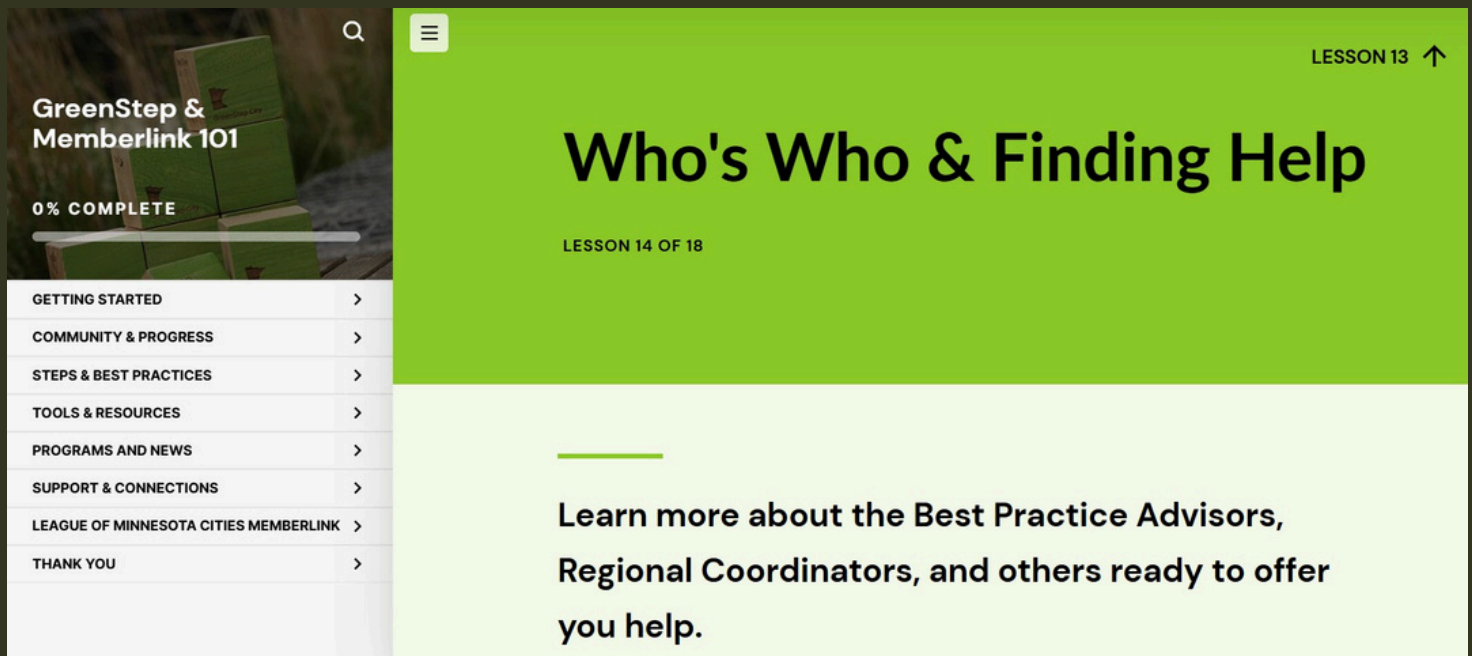
Gold Leaf Award presented to St. Anthony Village in 2025



Starting in 2026, GreenStep invited cities and Tribal Nations to participate in an additional topic-based challenge each year. The challenge highlights relevant GreenStep actions, events, workshops and funding opportunities, connect these actions to statewide goals, and to encourage collective action.

For 2026, GreenStep chose to focus on water for several reasons. In the last few years, several state action reports related to water protection have been updated, and a collective effort to highlight Mississippi River protections will take place in 2026.

GREENSTEP & MEMBERLINK 101



Course lessons include:

- Getting Started: About this Course
- Community & Progress
- Steps & Best Practices
- Tools & Resources
- Programs & News
- Support & Connections
- League of Minnesota Cities MemberLink

Learn more about the GreenStep Cities & Tribal Nations program in the [GreenStep & MemberLink 101](#) e-learning modules!

This 101 course is a self-paced tutorial designed to prepare GreenStep Coordinators and their communities for success in the GreenStep program.

No account is required and anyone may review the course in order. The Course should take you 10-20 minutes to go through but you can also click on the lessons directly and skip around.

Program Partners

GreenStep Cities 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](#)



CERTs
CLEAN ENERGY
RESOURCE TEAMS



**Urban Land
Institute**
Minnesota

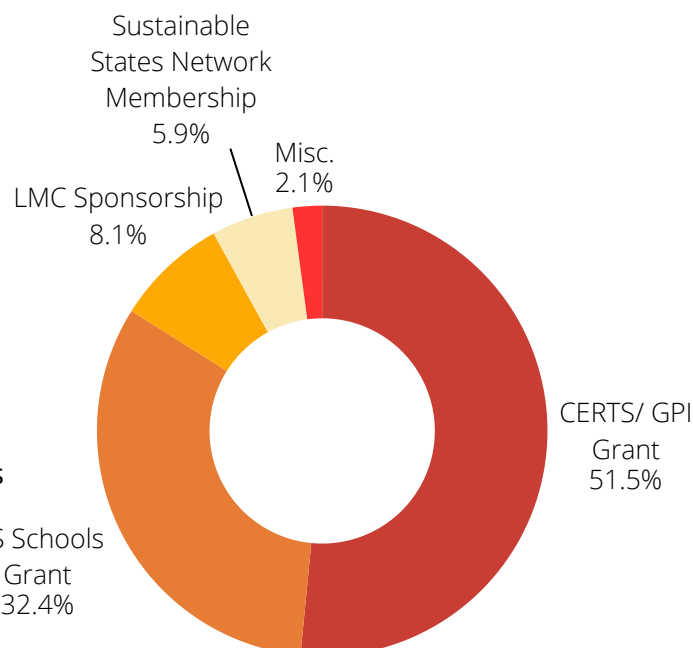


Program \$\$\$\$

The GreenStep Cities program had a budget of \$68,000 in Fiscal Year 2026 (June 2025 to June 2026) 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 2026 award blocks
- Sustainable States Network membership for 2026

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



ABOUT US



GreenStep
Cities



GreenStep
Tribal Nations



2026 Annual Award Ceremony

In the fall of 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).

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.

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.

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
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