Sign-up to Join the Cohort Here!

GreenStep Fast Track Cohort for Small/Medium Cities

Join peer communities in the GreenStep program through this free, 6-month long, monthly GreenStep Fast Track cohort. You will get information and support to complete GreenStep Steps 1, 2, and 3!

Each session will help you reach a new GreenStep action and also provide you with a stretch action if you want to continue the work in the future.

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Who is this Cohort for?

This cohort's goal is to further support small and medium sized cities across Minnesota. Participants can be new to the GreenStep Cities program or already participants at Step 1 or Step 2.

The cohort is for any community interested in learning about additional actions that can save money through efficiency and no-cost actions.

As a small city, we know your to-do list is long, capacity and funding are tight, and you are challenged with balancing many priorities. That's why we identified the following 7-8 actions to

Cities and Tribal nations with greater capacity for making civic improvements are able and challenged to implement more best practices and actions. Answer 5 simple questions to determine whether your community is in category A (largest), B, or C (smallest).

help you reach up to GreenStep Step 3 (out of 5!) with no-costs and tailored to meet small- and medium-sized city needs. In addition, this 6-month-long program is structured as a cohort with other small/medium cities new to the GreenStep program.

The MN GreenStep program uses a Community Category Calculator to determine participant capacity for the program's challenge tiers of A, B, or C. This Cohort will best support those at Category C, but it is open to any interested city.

About the Cohort

There are 5 sessions. Each session is 1.5 hours: 1 hour for content and 30 min. (optional) for connecting with staff to reach your personalized actions and goals. Sustainability staff from communities across Minnesota will be ready to share their experiences, templates, and knowledge. If interested in staying connected after the cohort, GreenStep staff can assign you to a Peer Exchange Pod.

Cohort Schedule

July, 2026 - January, 2027
Cohort meetings monthly, 2:30-3:30pm
Open office hours following cohort meetings from 3:30-4:00

- July 29: Energy (Focus on actions 1.2, 26.2, 23.3, 26.5, 26.7)
- August 20: Water (Focus on action 17.6)
- September 24: Transportation (Focus on actions 13.1, 13.3, 13.4)
- October 15: Planning and Purchasing (Focus on actions 6.1, 15.1)
- November 19: Resilience and Engagement (Focus on actions 24.1, 29.1)
- January TBD: Closing

About the GreenStep Program

The GreenSteps Cities program is a five-step program for cities and Tribal nations to work towards sustainability. There are 29 best practices which each provide required and recommended actions. Recommended actions are placed into the following categories: buildings and lighting, land use, transportation, environmental management, and resilient economic and community development. Each action submitted by a city receives a ranking based on a three-star system.



Step 2 Guidelines*

As a Category C city, to be recognized as a Step 2 GreenStep City, **ANY 4 Best Practices** must be reported.

Learn more about Step 2

☐ **Any 4 Best Practices**

Step 3 Guidelines*

As a Category C city, to be recognized as a Step 3 GreenStep City, the following must be reported, at minimum:

Learn more about Step 3

☐ **Any 8 Best Practices**

☐ **Buildings & Lighting:** ☐ any one Buildings & Lighting BP (1-5)

☐ **Comprehensive, Climate & Energy Plans:** ☐ 6.1

☐ **Transportation:** ☐ any one Transportation BP (11-14)

☐ **Sustainable Purchasing:** ☐ 15.1

☐ **Coordination, Engagement, & Outcomes:** ☐ 24.1

☐ **Climate Adaptation & Community Resilience:** ☐ 29.1

*These checklists are for Category C participants only. For Category B and Category A checklists, please visit the Step 2 and Step 3 webpages. If participating in this Cohort, GreenStep staff can support you through the additional action reports.

Category C City Action Plan to Reach Steps 2 and 3:

Here are the specific no-cost actions you will be guided and guaranteed to reach as part of the cohort (though you are welcome to log other actions!). Some of the Best Practices have options you can select from, while others identify 1 specific action to report.

GreenStep staff can help you report the actions using your GreenStep account. All necessary actions to reach Steps 2 and 3 will need to be reported by April 1, 2027.

1. Efficient Existing Public Buildings

☐ any one Buildings & Lighting BP (1-5)

Actions we will focus on for this cohort:

☐ **1.2** Make no or low-cost indoor lighting and operational changes in city-owned buildings to reduce energy costs

Example Action Report Implementation Details:

- Municipal building has all LED lighting.
- Installed motion activated lighting at City Hall.
- Public Works shop HVAC is set on a timer to adjust temperature settings based on season and building use.

Stretch Actions:

- Complete improvements for two buildings. (1.2)
- Enter in the last 12 months of utility bills into B3 Benchmarking. (1.1)

Specific Resources:

- CERTs provides free technical assistance and advice and tools like the Pay for Your Projects Tool, Right Light Guide, Seed Grants, stories, and more.
- See the ENERGY STAR Building Upgrade Manual for additional no/low-cost ideas.
- Utilities offer rebates and support for building energy and water efficiency – find energy programs at DSIRE.
- ENERGY STAR tools for small offices.

6. Comprehensive Plan

☐ **6.1** Adopt a comprehensive plan or a future land use plan adopted by the county or a regional entity

Example Action Report Implementation Details:

- Adopted/amended a Comp Plan within last 10 years.
- Our County has a Land Use Plan (less than 15 years old) that includes our city.
- Adopted a City Vision that looks at least 20 years into the future.
- Hosted a city visioning workshop that engaged residents in the future of our city.

Stretch Actions:

- Include a sustainability and/or climate section or chapter into your plan.

- Incorporate a section into your plan about active living, placemaking, and/or bicycles and pedestrians.
- Integrate sustainability goals and strategies into all chapters of your plan.
- Provide translators and interpreters, childcare, stipends, and/or meals for residents during community engagement meetings related to your planning and visioning.

Specific Resources:

- Check with your Regional Development Commission or metropolitan district early. They provide assistance, tools, and resources for community planning.
- The Metropolitan Council's Local Planning Handbook provides ample guidance, including sustainability topics.
- See the League of MN Cities Handbook – *Chapter 13: Comprehensive Planning, Land Use, and City-Owned Land.*
- *Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities* (EPA and ICMA, 2010)

11-14. Transportation

☐ any one Transportation BP (11-14)

Actions we will focus on for this cohort:

☐ **13.1** Efficiently use your existing fleet of city vehicles. **OR**	☐ **13.3** Phase in operational changes for city or local transit fleets. **OR**	☐ **13.4** Phase in bike, foot, or horseback modes for police, inspectors, and other city staff.

Example Action Report Implementation Details:

- Provide training for employees about trip bundling, carpooling, vehicle sharing, video conferencing, etc. to reduce single passenger vehicle trips. (13.1)
- Monitor fuel usage and costs and maintenance schedules to assess and ensure vehicle efficiency. (13.3)
- Adopt a "no-idling policy/practice" for city or transit fleets. (13.3)
- Police patrol on bike, foot, or horseback (13.4)

Stretch Actions:

- Adopt a Complete/Living Streets Policy that incorporates landscaping and stormwater (11.1)
- Test out a temporary traffic calming measure using paint, bollards/delineators, roundabouts, etc. (11.6)
- Be recognized as a Walk Friendly, Bicycle Friendly, or Age Friendly Community (12.1)
- Conduct an Active Living Campaign such as Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program (12.2)
- Promote mobility options including public transit, carpooling, bikesharing, etc. (12.3, 12.4)

- Coordinate a school or work "bike bus" to encourage bicycling (12.4)
- Reduce or eliminate parking minimums; add parking maximums; develop district parking (14.1)
- Install, assist with, and promote publicly available EV charging stations or public fueling stations for alternative fuel vehicles (23.5)

Specific Resources:

- Clean Fleet Toolkit includes information on journey management, eco driving, vehicle maintenance, fuels, and more
- IdleBox: a toolkit for idle reduction education and outreach
- AFLEET Tool for calculating petroleum use, costs of ownership, and emissions for a vehicle fleet
- Fleet and Equipment Management resources from the Minnesota Local Technical Assistance Program (UofMN)
- Find your Transit Provider (MnDOT)

15. Sustainable Purchasing

☐ **15.1** Adopt a sustainable purchasing policy or administrative guidelines

Example Action Report Implementation Details:

- Written guidelines specifying city purchase of recycled-content printing paper and Energy Star electronic equipment and appliances
- Sustainable Purchasing Policy adopted by City Council

Stretch Actions:

- Require 100% recycled content paper
- Include the purchase of remanufactured toner cartridges or high yield OEM cartridges for monochrome printing
- Include eco-friendly janitorial supplies, furniture, and/or building materials (BPA 15.8)
- Join with other cities in joint purchasing of environmentally preferable products

Specific Resources:

- Six steps to developing a sustainable purchasing policy (MPCA)
- Minnesota state law (Minn. Stat. 16C.073) requires all public entities to follow environmentally preferable printing practices, including use of chlorine-free, uncoated paper with a minimum of 30% post-consumer recycled content, among other requirements.
- Find Energy Star-certified office equipment, electronics, appliances, and more.

- Join the Cooperative Purchasing Venture (CPV) to purchase goods from contracts established by the State of Minnesota. State contracts often identify sustainable solutions for procurements.
    - See this quick slidedeck to learn more about sustainable procurement using State contracts.
- See the State of Minnesota Sustainable Procurement Program for examples, statewide goals and progress, and more.
- Looking to buy more sustainable products and services? Explore EPA's search tool to discover recommended standards and ecolabels by purchase category and start browsing for products.

17. Stormwater Management

☐ Any 1 additional Best Practice

Actions we will focus on for this cohort:

☐ **17.6** Improve Smart Salting

Example Action Report Implementation Details:

- Any city staff applying winter maintenance (streets, sidewalks, parking lots, etc.) have taken MPCA Smart Salting Level 1 training.
- Require any winter maintenance contractor hired by the city must have taken MPCA Smart Salting Level 1 training.
- Host free training for private property managers and contractors who do winter maintenance in the city.

Stretch Actions:

- Develop/adopt a chloride/salt management plan
- Adopt a Chloride Reduction ordinance
- Certify the city at Smart Salting Level 2 which uses the MPCA's Smart Salting Assessment Tool to complete a best management practices assessment
- Track salt usage and report salt reductions of 30% over the last year

Specific Resources:

- Smart Salting is a suite of techniques that minimize the environmental and economic impacts of chloride while still meeting public needs. The MPCA offers trainings, refreshers, and a workshop for certification.
    - Roads; Rural Roads; Parking Lots & Sidewalks; Property Management; Water Softening; Community Leaders workshop

- The MPCA partnered with several organizations to develop a suite of model ordinances, contracts, and policies that communities can choose to implement.
- Smart Salting Tool: Evaluate sources of chloride impacting local water resources and find support and guidance on how to address those sources. Create a free "Chloride Reduction Action Plan" following the questionnaire-based template.
- The Low Salt. No Salt. Minnesota program was developed by the Hennepin County Chloride Initiative in 2022 to develop a toolbox for LGUs to use in conversations with local residents, businesses, and property managers about best practices related to winter maintenance.
- Statewide chloride resources, plans, and reports (MPCA).

24. Coordination, Engagement, & Outcomes

☐ **24.1** Inclusive and Coordinated Decision-Making

Example Action Report Implementation Details:

- A staff green team or small working group exists to support GreenStep involvement.
- City staff/officials participate in a multi-government regional gathering about sustainability action.
- City promotes GreenStep involvement to the community annually through a detailed news article/media.

Stretch Actions:

- A community group, city task force/committee/commission exists to lead and coordinate sustainability/GreenStep implementation
- A joint committee of city staff/officials and community members (business, education, religious, etc.) exists and meets regularly
- Community members on the committee represent the community's racial, economic, abilities, and other diverse representation

Specific Resources:

- The GreenStep BPA 24.1 Resource Guide provides information on committee structures & membership, roles & tasks, and tips for creating & maintaining successful committees.
- The *Sustainability Planning Toolkit* (ICLEI, 2009) provides information on "Forming a Team" (starting on pg. 17) for developing a Sustainability Plan but it is also useful for a GreenStep Green Team.
- Check out the MN Gold Leaf Challenge for the local climate action that sets up a Combined Green Team for more resources examples.

26. Renewable Energy

☒ Any 1 additional Best Practice

Actions we will focus on for this cohort:

☐ **26.2** Promote green power purchasing programs to residents /businesses. **OR**	☐ **26.3** Promote local utility incentives to residents/ businesses. **OR**
☐ **26.5** Install a municipally owned renewable energy technology, such as solar electric (PV). **OR**	☐ **26.7** Improve solar permitting processes for residents and businesses.

Example Action Report Implementation Details:

- Sharing the Solar Suitability App and Clean Energy Project Builder on your website (26.2)
- Promoting a local utility's green power purchasing program in a city newsletter (26.2)
- Connecting businesses to tools like PACE for clean energy project financing (26.3)
- Describe any public sector renewable energy installation and report installed capacity in kW (26.5)
- Ensure via ordinance that solar energy installations are allowed land uses (26.7)

Stretch Actions:

- Host a community-wide solar bulk-buy program or campaign (26.2)
- Install at least two different renewable energy technologies (26.5)
- Become a SolSmart-designated community (26.7)
- Streamline solar permitted through SolarAPP+ (26.7)

Specific Resources:

- CERTs provides tools like the Solar Directory, Solar Suitability App, PACE information, Pay for Your Projects Tool, and more.
- Case Study: *Energy Ready City: La Crescent, Minnesota Earns Solar and EV Designations*
- Join the over 50 Minnesota communities that have a SolSmart designation.
- SolarApp+ Permitting Incentives from the MN Dept. of Commerce are currently available to help local governments use the FREE online permitting platform. First come, first serve until June 30, 2028. Cities under 50,000 in population can receive a base of $5,000 with the potential for bonuses up to $20,000 total.

29. Climate Adaptation & Community Resilience

☐ **29.1** Prepare to maintain public health and safety during extreme weather

Example Action Report Implementation Details:

- Reviewed the county's Hazard Mitigation Plan within the last 2 years and identified the city staff responsible.
- Document how all diverse populations in the city are served emergency communication, evacuation, sheltering, etc.
- In consultation with the County, designate a community safe shelter that is accessible to the public and provides provisions and back-up power to support residents and/or visitors in a time of need.

Stretch Actions:

- Address how diverse populations in the city are served by emergency communication, evacuation and sheltering, mitigation and prevention, planning and preparedness
- Develop targeted emergency communications in appropriate languages for each population of non-English speakers in your community for each hazard
- Arrange for adequate provisions (including food and potable water) and backup power sufficient to meet minimum daily run-time requirements as a shelter for one week or longer during utility grid failure.
- Develop coordinate strategies with private sector emergency facilities and essential services that require backup power during widespread outages and disasters. Bonus points for clean energy sources!

Specific Resources:

- Take a peak at the MN Gold Leaf Challenge program that includes specific actions and resources for taking local climate action, including CP1: Safe Shelter and CP2: Community Resilience Hub.
- Chapter 12 Public Safety and Emergency Management of the LMC Handbook for Minnesota Cities provides guidance about statutory requirements for cities.
- See guidance on hazard mitigation planning from MN's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division of the MN Department of Public Safety.
- Minnesota Department of Health Climate and Health webpages contain information on extreme heat, water quality and quantity, air quality, planning tools, and emergency management regional profiles (2018).
- Communicating vulnerabilities to climate change provides PDF brochures to communicate climate vulnerabilities for eight populations of concern: children, EJ communities, indigenous peoples, occupational groups, older adults, people with disabilities, people with existing health conditions, and pregnant women.