



76th Annual All-America City Award

Denver, Colorado

June 27-29, 2025





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COLORADO

Governor Jared Polis

June 27, 2025

Dear All-America City Award Finalists,

Greetings, On behalf of the State of Colorado, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to our beautiful state for the National Civic League's 2025 All-America City Award event.

We commend your commitment to collaborative, community-driven problem-solving and thank you for your dedication to strengthening communities across the country. Your efforts to advance environmental sustainability while meaningfully involving residents in shaping local solutions are more important than ever. Here in the Centennial State, we know the power of partnership. Public, private, and nonprofit sectors have come together to protect Colorado's natural resources, support our communities, grow our economy, and improve public health. We remain committed to promoting forward-thinking environmental and energy policies—accelerating the adoption of clean, renewable energy, expanding energy efficiency, electrifying our transportation systems, and ensuring the long-term conservation of our public lands and wildlife.

Colorado is honored to host civic leaders from cities, towns, and counties across the nation. We are confident the 2025 All-America City Award event will be an inspiring and impactful experience—one that sends you home with renewed energy and new ideas. You have my best wishes for a successful and memorable weekend.

Sincerely,

Jared Polis
Governor
State of Colorado

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2025 All-America City Finalists

in alphabetical order by city/county/region

Akron, Ohio
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Austin, Texas
Carrboro, North Carolina
Chelsea, Massachusetts
Delray Beach, Florida
Denver, Colorado
Englewood, Colorado
Hampton, Virginia
Jacksonville, North Carolina
Kinston, North Carolina
Leominster, Massachusetts
Memphis, Tennessee
Petaluma, California
Port St. Lucie, Florida
Seattle, Washington
Snyder, Texas
Statesboro, Georgia
Tallahassee, Florida
Western Riverside Region, California



Event Agenda

76th All-America City Award Event
Strengthening Environmental Sustainability through Inclusive Community Engagement

Grand Hyatt
1750 Welton St, Denver, CO 80202
June 27-29, 2025

Thursday, June 26, 2025

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Registration

Come pick up your welcome bag, program, and name badge.

2nd Floor Lobby

Friday, June 27, 2025

7:15 AM – 7:45 AM

Finalist Delegation “Captain” Briefing

Daily in-person briefings are an opportunity to go over the day’s agenda and for delegation captains to learn about collaboration opportunities with the League’s partners.

Mt. Yale

7:30 AM – 4:00 PM

Registration and Help Desk

Come pick up your welcome bag, program, and name badge. League staff will be around to answer any questions you might have.

2nd Floor Lobby

8:00 AM – 4:15 PM

Finalist Presentation Rehearsals

Colorado Ballroom

9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Democracy Innovations Workshop

The League’s Center for Democracy Innovation is offering a free supplemental workshop for All-America City Award attendees, exploring new techniques and tools to enhance community engagement in participatory and deliberative governance.

Capitol Peak Ballroom

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Lunch on your own

2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Fueling Civic Action: Mapping and Funding Your Community’s Democracy Ecosystem

As an All-America City finalist, your community is leading the way in civic innovation and collaboration. This workshop introduces two powerful tools—the National Civic League’s Healthy Democracy Ecosystem Map and the U.S. Democracy Hub—designed to help you grow your impact. You’ll learn how to use the Map to strengthen civic infrastructure, build strategic partnerships, and activate local residents. At the

Mt. Columbia



same time, the Democracy Hub offers valuable insights into funding opportunities by mapping foundation and nonprofit investment across the country. Together, these resources can help your community secure support, enhance engagement, and build a more sustainable future.

3:15 PM – 4:45 PM

Finalist Roundtable: Matching Solutions to Shared Challenges

Mt. Columbia

Communities nationwide face diverse challenges but also possess a wealth of community-based resources to address them. In this interactive workshop, attendees will engage in facilitated conversations and brainstorm solutions to shared concerns. Rotating between tables participants will explore topics such as environmental sustainability, resilience and disaster preparedness, creating belonging amidst political divisions, homelessness, economic vitality, youth engagement, among others.

4:45 PM – 5:25 PM

Civic Action Fair Setup

Aspen Ballroom

Communities are invited to bring their booth materials from storage and set up in the Aspen Ballroom for the Civic Action Fair. Each community will be assigned a designated table positioned along the perimeter of the room.

5:30 PM – 6:30 PM

Opening Ceremony: Celebrating Community Innovation and Civic Leadership

Colorado Ballroom

Kick off the 2025 All-America City Award with an evening of inspiration, recognition, and conversation. We'll honor this year's finalist communities—leaders in environmental sustainability and civic engagement—and set the stage for a powerful few days ahead. The evening will feature keynote remarks from former Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, and a fireside chat with Mary Thomas (CFLeads) and Frederick Riley (Aspen Institute), moderated by Kyle Hybl (El Pomar Foundation).

6:30 PM – 7:30 PM

AAC Civic Action Fair and Welcome Reception

Aspen Ballroom

Tour exhibits showcasing this year's finalist communities, highlighting their history, culture, and innovative local initiatives. Bring items from your hometown for a fun swap!

Saturday, June 28, 2025

8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Registration and Help Desk

2nd Floor Lobby

Come pick up your welcome bag, program, and name badge. League staff will be around to answer any questions you might have.

8:00 AM – 8:30 AM

Finalist Delegation "Captain" Briefing

Mt. Yale

Daily in-person briefings are an opportunity to go over the day's agenda and for delegation captains to learn about collaboration opportunities with the League's partners.



9:00 AM – 10:25 AM

Jury Introductions and Block 1 Presentations

Block 1: Akron, OH; Albuquerque, NM; Austin, TX.
Cheer on your fellow finalists and invite friends, family, and colleagues to watch the live stream on our Facebook page!

Colorado Ballroom

10:45 AM – 11:55 AM

Block 2 Jury Presentations

Block 2: Carrboro, NC; Chelsea, MA; Delray Beach, FL.
Cheer on your fellow finalists and invite friends, family, and colleagues to watch the live stream on our Facebook page!

Colorado Ballroom

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Lunch on Your Own

1:00 PM – 2:35 PM

Block 3 Jury Presentations

Block 3: Denver, CO; Englewood, CO; Hampton, VA; Jacksonville, NC.
Cheer on your fellow finalists and invite friends, family, and colleagues to watch the live stream on our Facebook page!

Colorado Ballroom

2:50 PM – 4:00 PM

Block 4 Jury Presentations

Block 4: Kinston, NC; Leominster, MA; Memphis, TN.
Cheer on your fellow finalists and invite friends, family, and colleagues to watch the live stream on our Facebook page!

Colorado Ballroom

4:30 PM – 6:00 PM

An All-America Night of Entertainment and Celebration

Hear from Michael Smith, Former CEO of AmeriCorps and help us celebrate the recipients of the prestigious Hall of Fame & All-America Leader Awards. Following these highlights, immerse yourself in the Cultural Entertainment Showcase, where talented individuals and groups from finalist communities will dazzle the audience.

Colorado Ballroom

Sunday, June 29, 2025

8:00 AM – 8:30 AM

Finalist Delegation “Captain” Briefing

Daily in-person briefings are an opportunity to go over the day’s agenda and for delegation captains to learn about collaboration opportunities with the League’s partners.

Mt. Yale

8:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Help Desk

League staff will be around to answer any questions you might have.

2nd Floor Lobby

9:00 AM – 10:10 AM

Block 5 Jury Presentations

Block 5: Petaluma, CA; Port St. Lucie, FL; Seattle, WA.
Cheer on your fellow finalists and invite friends, family, and colleagues to watch the live stream on our Facebook page!

Colorado Ballroom

10:25 AM – 12:00 PM

Block 6 Jury Presentations

Block 6: Snyder, TX; Statesboro, GA; Tallahassee, FL; Western Riverside Region, CA. Cheer on your fellow finalists and invite friends, family, and colleagues to watch the live stream on our Facebook page!

Colorado Ballroom



12:00 PM – 1:30 PM

Lunch on Your Own

1:30 PM – 3:30 PM

AAC Festival of Ideas

During the jury's deliberation period, finalists will engage in an informative exchange with their peers. Each community will showcase one of their projects, offering an invaluable opportunity to explore other finalist initiatives and gain insights on implementing these innovative ideas in your own community.

Group 1 (Mt. Sopris A)

Austin, TX
Seattle, WA
Denver, CO
Memphis, TN

Group 3 (Mt. Columbia)

Akron, OH
Delray Beach, FL
Hampton, VA
Jacksonville, NC

Group 5 (Mt. Princeton)

Carrboro, NC
Englewood, CO
Kinston, NC
Snyder, TX

Group 2 (Mt. Sopris B)

Albuquerque, NM
Western Riverside Region, CA
Port St. Lucie, FL
Tallahassee, FL

Group 4 (Mt. Oxford)

Chelsea, MA
Leominster, MA
Petaluma, CA
Statesboro, GA

3:45 PM – 5:15 PM

Governing in Challenging Times: Elected and Appointed Officials Dialogue

Calling all elected and appointed municipal officials! Join us for an engaging, solutions-focused session hosted by the Colorado Municipal League and sponsored by Amazon, designed to spark idea exchange and collective problem-solving around the pressing challenges facing our communities—and our democracy.

Mt. Sopris B

5:30 PM – 6:30 PM

Pre-Awards Reception

Unwind before the big night and connect with your fellow finalists at a pre-award reception featuring light hors d'oeuvres. Held in the stunning Capitol Peak Ballroom on the 38th floor, this space offers breathtaking panoramic views of the Colorado Rocky Mountains—an unforgettable setting to kick off the celebration.

Capitol Peak Ballroom

6:30 PM – 8:00 PM

Awards Ceremony

Don't miss the big reveal! Celebrate the announcement of the ten 2025 All-America Cities, along with the winners of the Youth Award and Social Media Award. This exciting event will feature keynote remarks from Derek Kilmer, Senior Vice President for U.S. Program and Policy at The Rockefeller Foundation and former U.S. Representative.

Colorado Ballroom

8:00 PM – 9:30 PM

Awards Celebration and Music

Join us back on the 38th floor for the closing reception featuring a lively DJ, dancing, and late-night snacks! Let loose and make the most of your final evening at AAC—everyone's invited!

Capitol Peak Ballroom



Thank You!

Jury Members

- Wendy Willis (Jury Foreperson), Founder & Director, Oregon's Kitchen Table
- Gabriela Alcalde, Chief Executive Officer, Sewall Foundation
- Leon Andrews, President and CEO, Equal Measure
- Debi Ghate, Partner, Steadfast
- Shannon Hartman, President, Interactivity Foundation
- Don Mares, President and CEO, The Colorado Trust
- Tony Peyton, Executive Vice President, National Center for Families Learning
- Muqadas (Das) Sharifi, Committee Member, Colorado Youth Advisory Council
- Michael Smith, Former CEO, AmeriCorps
- Suyash Shrestha, Committee Member, Colorado Youth Advisory Council
- Nik Walker, Director of Constitutionally Limited Government, Stand Together

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- Illinois Municipal League
- Morrisville, NC*
- Mount Pleasant, SC*
- Rancho Cordova, CA
- Roanoke, VA
- Rochester, NY
- San Antonio, TX
- Tallahassee, FL*
- Tulsa, OK
- Tupelo, MS
- Wichita, KS*

AAC Event Support

A special thank you to the 2025 planning taskforce, application review committee, youth award interviewers, workshop presenters and facilitators, keynote speakers, and our spirited volunteers!

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- Joshua Franzel, PhD, Senior Executive & Director of Research & Data Analysis, National League of Cities

continued on next page



Thank You!

- Hon. Patti Garrett, Mayor, City of Decatur, GA
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- Monte Roulrier, President, Community Initiatives Inc.
- Hon. Vince Williams, Mayor, City of Union City, GA
- Wendy Willis, Founder & Director, Oregon's Kitchen Table

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- Marcia Conner, Executive Director, National Forum for Black Public Administrators
- Zach Dyer, Deputy Director, Worcester Public Health Department
- Charles Ellington, student, Sacramento; past winner, All-America Cities Youth Award
- Lee Feldman, Zencity
- Chris Gates, Senior Advisor, Bridge Alliance; Elected Fellow, NAPA
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- Curtis Johnson, former Executive Director, Citiscope, and former League board member
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- Charles Ozaki, former City and County Manager, City and County of Broomfield, Colorado
- Joni Pattillo, Retired City Manager, City of Dublin, CA
- Donovan Pinner, Graduate Student, Princeton University; residence: Hopkinsville, KY; past winner, All-America Cities Youth Award
- Angela Romans, Executive Director, Innovation for Equity
- Sarah Rubin, Outreach and Engagement Coordinator, California Department of Conservation
- Hon. David M. Sander, Ph.D., City Council Member and Former Mayor, City of Rancho Cordova
- Daniel Schugurensky, Professor, School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University and Director, Participatory Governance Initiative
- Sean Smoot, Principal Consultant, 21st Century Policing LLC

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Rehearsal Schedule

All rehearsals will take place in the Colorado Ballroom

Friday, June 27, 2025

8:00am-8:20am	Akron, OH
8:25am-8:45am	Albuquerque, NM
8:50am-9:10am	Austin, TX
9:15am-9:35am	Carrboro, NC
9:40am-10:00am	Chelsea, MA
10:05am-10:25am	Delray Beach, FL
10:30am-10:50am	Denver, CO
10:55am-11:15am	Englewood, CO
11:20am-11:40am	Hampton, VA
11:45am-12:05pm	Jacksonville, NC
12:10pm-12:30pm	Kinston, NC
12:35pm-12:55pm	Leominster, MA
1:00pm-1:20pm	Memphis, TN
1:25pm-1:45pm	Petaluma, CA
1:50pm-2:10pm	Port St. Lucie, FL
2:15pm-2:35pm	Seattle, WA
2:40pm-3:00pm	Snyder, TX
3:05pm-3:25pm	Statesboro, GA
3:30pm-3:50pm	Tallahassee, FL
3:55pm-4:15pm	Western Riverside Region, CA

Presentation Schedule

All presentations will take place in the Colorado Ballroom

Saturday, June 28, 2025

Block 1

9:00am – 9:10am	Jury Introductions
9:15am – 9:35am	Akron, Ohio
9:40am – 10:00am	Albuquerque, New Mexico
10:05am – 10:25am	Austin, Texas

Break

Block 2

10:45am – 11:05am	Carrboro, North Carolina
11:10am – 11:30am	Chelsea, Massachusetts
11:35am – 11:55pm	Delray Beach, Florida

Lunch

Block 3

1:00pm – 1:20pm	Denver, Colorado
1:25pm – 1:45pm	Englewood, Colorado
1:50pm – 2:10pm	Hampton, Virginia
2:15pm – 2:35pm	Jacksonville, North Carolina

Break

Block 4

2:50pm – 3:10pm	Kinston, North Carolina
3:15pm – 3:35pm	Leominster, Massachusetts
3:40pm – 4:00pm	Memphis, Tennessee

Sunday, June 29, 2025

Block 5

9:00am – 9:20am	Petaluma, California
9:25am – 9:45am	Port St. Lucie, Florida
9:50am – 10:10am	Seattle, Washington

Break

Block 6

10:25am – 10:45am	Snyder, Texas
10:50am – 11:10am	Statesboro, Georgia
11:15am – 11:35am	Tallahassee, Florida
11:40am – 12:00pm	Western Riverside Region, California



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2025 All-America City Finalist Program Summaries

Akron, Ohio

As Akron celebrates its 200th anniversary, the city reflects on a rich legacy of innovation and reinvention. Once a global leader in rubber and tire production, Akron has evolved into a modern center for advanced manufacturing and sustainability, with recent investments positioning it as a national hub for polymer technology. This spirit of progress is matched by a deep commitment to equity, community voice, and inclusive growth.

Facing challenges familiar to many industrial cities—such as population loss, economic shifts, and the lingering impacts of past planning decisions—Akron has embraced a collaborative, people-first approach to shaping its future. With new leadership, engaged residents, and strong cross-sector partnerships, the city is prioritizing accessible development, diverse representation, and bold civic vision. The following initiatives highlight how Akron is translating these values into action through innovative, community-centered projects.

Recycle Right Campaign

In 2019, Akron was grappling with a major environmental and financial issue: nearly 40% of the materials residents placed in recycling bins were non-recyclable. This widespread contamination not only threatened the viability of the city's curbside recycling program but also led to substantial financial penalties and hindered the city's progress toward sustainability goals.

To address the problem, local nonprofit Keep Akron Beautiful partnered with the City of Akron to launch the Recycle Right Campaign. Using funding from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the

team developed an educational initiative focused on direct, personalized engagement. Throughout the summer, trained staff visited neighborhoods to inspect recycling carts and leave customized tags with clear, actionable feedback. The goal was to build awareness, correct misconceptions, and help residents understand how to sort their waste properly—all through a hands-on, supportive approach.

The campaign's early rollout faced hurdles, but through perseverance, strategic communication, and community outreach, the program gained traction. By 2024, contamination had fallen to just 12%, and Akron's recycling program had shifted from a financial drain to a source of revenue and environmental leadership—offering a model for cities nationwide.

Reimagining Akron's Civic Commons

Akron needed a way to meaningfully connect neighborhoods with vastly different economic and demographic profiles. A three-mile stretch of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail highlighted this divide, linking the city's affluent downtown core with Summit Lake—one of its most underserved and diverse communities.

To address this disparity, the Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition brought together over a dozen partners—including neighborhood groups, cultural organizations, and city departments—to form a Core Team focused on a community-first approach to reimagining public spaces. The team launched an extensive engagement process, hosting hundreds of conversations, workshops, and surveys to gather input directly from residents. Temporary pop-ups like concerts and art installations were venues for seeing



what resonated with residents, and trust was steadily built through repeated, responsive interactions.

This collaborative process led to transformational investments across three neighborhoods. In Ohio & Erie Canal Park, a resident-led steering committee helped shape improvements like new playgrounds, murals, and fitness trails. Downtown saw a more inclusive redesign of major gathering spots, including the \$17M renovation of Lock 3 Park. In Summit Lake, community-driven planning resulted in new governance structures, a nature center, a multi-use trail, and the upcoming \$6.7M NorthShore Park. With over \$30M invested and trust in local institutions nearly doubling in some neighborhoods, Akron's Civic Commons initiative continues to show how public spaces can become platforms for equity, inclusion, and long-term neighborhood connection.

Akron Waterways Renewed!

Aging sewer infrastructure threatened the historic Cuyahoga River—a vital local resource that provides drinking water and serves as a recreation destination—by allowing millions of gallons of combined sewer overflow to discharge into it annually, creating persistent pollution that endangered public health and the environment.

Akron Waterways Renewed! was created to invest in the city's environmental future by building wastewater and stormwater infrastructure that will protect public health and maintain water of the highest quality.

The effort includes 26 major infrastructure projects, including: constructing storage basins, separating portions of the combined sewer system, installing storage tunnels, and upgrading the wastewater treatment plant to increase capacity. Additionally, Akron has integrated green infrastructure projects to increase the effectiveness of the gray infrastructure and provide additional co-benefits for the community and environment.

Such projects include implementation of rain gardens, rainwater harvesting systems, permeable pavements, complete green streets, and more.

The jargon-filled nature of the topic and the significant financial burden on residents necessitated robust community engagement. The city developed an award-winning public outreach program to educate and involve residents—clarifying the environmental benefits and the reasons behind the necessary utility rate increases.

That engagement work has included a formal stakeholder group consisting of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Summit Metro Parks, Ohio EPA, watershed groups, industry representatives, residents, and neighboring communities. It also includes city staff bringing information and updates to council meetings and ward meetings as well as facilitating open houses and public tours of infrastructure projects and relevant city facilities.

The results have been transformative! The Cuyahoga River now meets or exceeds water quality standards, supports a thriving ecosystem with the return of key species, and is poised to offer expanded recreational access along its banks.

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Albuquerque, the Land of Enchantment, is a city where rich cultural traditions meet forward-thinking innovation. Shaped by its Indigenous roots and historic role as a vital trade hub, it has long been a crossroads of diverse cultures and ideas. In recent years, Albuquerque has focused on expanding economic opportunity, advancing sustainability, and ensuring progress reaches all corners of the community. It's a city that honors its heritage while embracing a future grounded in equity and inclusive growth.

Facing the challenges of the 21st century, Albuquerque is taking bold, community-



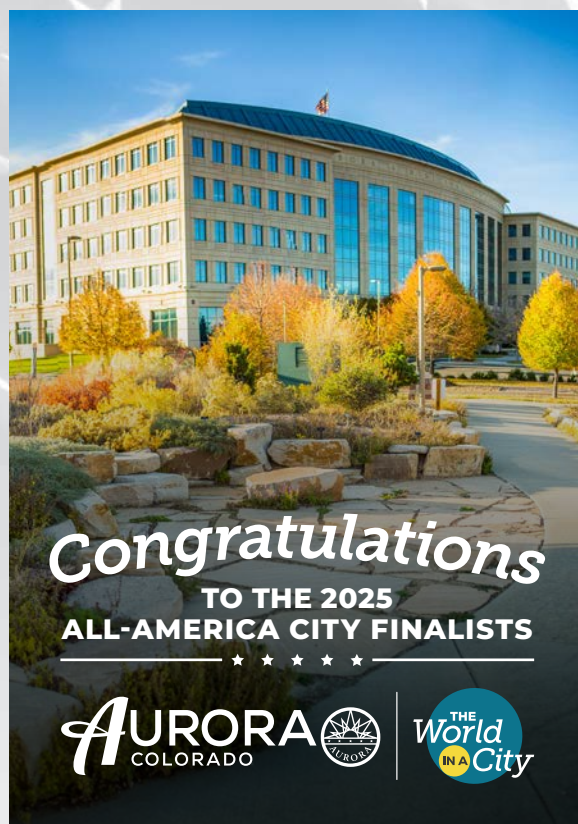
centered action on issues such as economic development, transit access, and environmental resilience. At the heart of these efforts is a deep commitment to public engagement—residents play an active role in shaping the policies that affect their daily lives. Through initiatives focused on climate justice, housing affordability, and community empowerment, Albuquerque is paving the way for a sustainable, inclusive future.

J40 in Action: Advancing Environmental Justice Through Community-Driven Action

In Albuquerque, a critical challenge emerged: ensuring that environmental and climate investments benefit every resident, especially those historically marginalized by underrepresentation and environmental hazards. To address this, the city established the J40 Oversight Committee, charged with advancing the city's commitment to environmental justice in line with the federal Justice40 Initiative. This effort stems from a historic policy commitment under the Biden administration, directing that 40 percent of climate-related investments reach disadvantaged communities. Local leaders in Albuquerque recognized the need for continued action at the municipal level to ensure this goal was met even after federal priorities shifted.

The committee's first steps involved deep community engagement. They prioritized gathering input from residents to ensure that the City's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) Taskforce, a key component of Albuquerque's Climate Action Plan, would reflect the concerns and needs of those most impacted by climate challenges. Additionally, the committee provided technical assistance to local organizations and city departments, helping them navigate federal grant processes to increase their ability to secure funding for environmental initiatives.

The committee's efforts have already made a significant impact. Increased public participation has strengthened local organizations, and the city's budget audit has



highlighted opportunities for a more equitable allocation of resources. Moving forward, the J40 Oversight Committee remains focused on refining its strategies, ensuring that Albuquerque's path toward environmental justice continues with community-driven action at its core.

Resilient Communities Initiative

The Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program is a strong example of community-centered climate action, with equity embedded throughout every phase. A central challenge was avoiding the repetition of past harms—particularly the unintended consequences of previous engagement efforts that negatively impacted marginalized communities. Addressing this required a thoughtful approach to gathering and applying community feedback, as well as a recognition of the time and care needed to authentically understand diverse perspectives.



CONGRATULATIONS 2025 ALL-AMERICA CITY AWARD FINALISTS!



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In Phase 1, funding supported language access and participant support costs, the hiring of an Equitable Development Fellow, and the completion of an external equity audit. The project team also researched best practices for equitable climate engagement.

Phase 2 expanded on this foundation through stakeholder interviews with members of the 2021 Climate Action Task Force, regular consultations with the Justice40 Oversight Coordinating Committee, and targeted meetings with the Office of Equity and Inclusion. Their input helped shape the Public Engagement Plan and launch the Resilient Futures Initiative.

Now in Phase 3, the project is focused on establishing a stipend-supported Community Task Force composed of frontline community representatives. This group will play a central

role in co-developing the city's climate action plan. The engagement strategy continues to address power imbalances and the legacy of harm caused by government policies.

Black and Native American Homeownership Initiative

In October 2022, a transformative vision emerged in Albuquerque to empower Black and Native American residents by addressing systemic barriers to homeownership while promoting sustainability and inclusive community engagement.

The Black Chamber of Commerce New Mexico and the City of Albuquerque's Office of Equity partnered with community organizations to design the Down Payment Assistance Program. This dual-approach initiative prioritizes both financial education and direct support for Black and Native American first-time homebuyers.

Participants receive immediate assistance through grants or low-interest loans to cover down payments and closing costs. The program also emphasizes education, offering workshops on credit repair, financial literacy, and mortgage readiness.

Complementing this effort is the newly launched Go Green program, which plans to develop energy-efficient housing complexes—tackling both economic and environmental challenges with community-led solutions.

Stakeholder engagement has been central to the program's design. Strategies include culturally relevant education, targeted digital outreach, and grassroots workshops. By collaborating with Black and Native American organizations, tribal housing entities, and community advocates, the program ensures that those most affected help shape its direction. Ongoing community feedback sessions will further refine the initiative.

This is more than a housing program—it's a holistic effort to build equity, reduce wealth disparities, and create a sustainable future for all.



Austin, Texas

Over the past decade, Austin has emerged as a vibrant, rapidly evolving city—meeting the demands of significant population growth while staying committed to sustainability, equity, and resilience. The adoption of a comprehensive Climate Plan in 2015, followed by a strengthened equity framework in 2021, laid a strong foundation for tackling climate change with a focus on the city's most vulnerable communities. Austin's climate action efforts emphasize not only environmental sustainability but also equitable opportunities for all residents to thrive.

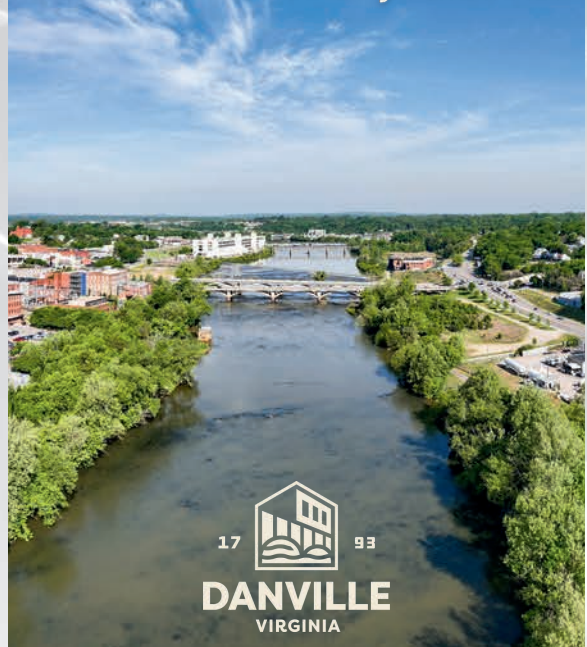
The city's initiatives are designed to address both environmental and economic needs, creating a more inclusive and resilient future for the entire community.

Austin Climate Equity Plan

The City of Austin recognizes that low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately affected by climate change, compounding existing disparities in housing, transportation, and environmental health. Historically, these communities have faced greater exposure to environmental hazards, poor air quality, and climate-related risks. To address these injustices, Austin prioritized equity throughout the development of its Climate Equity Plan.

Underrepresented groups played a central role in shaping the plan through innovative strategies like the Community Climate Ambassador Program. These ambassadors, deeply rooted in their communities, led discussions on key issues such as energy, transportation, and access to green space—ensuring that those most impacted had a direct voice in the process. The planning effort also included five community-led advisory groups, a 19-member Steering Committee, public workshops, open houses, and digital engagement platforms.

CONGRATULATIONS to the 2025 All-America City Finalists!



The final plan outlines 17 goals and 75 strategies across five key areas: Sustainable Buildings, Transportation Electrification, Transportation and Land Use, Food and Product Consumption, and Natural Systems. A public dashboard tracks progress and highlights remaining gaps, promoting transparency and accountability.

Since 2023, the city has secured \$242 million in federal grants to support climate initiatives. The development of a Comprehensive Climate Implementation Program will further align efforts to meet Austin's ambitious goals by 2030.

The Austin Resilience Network

Austin's ability to withstand and recover from disasters, such as extreme heat, flooding, and wildfires, depends on the resilience of its communities. The Austin Resilience Network



(ARN) builds on the City’s Resilience Hub pilot program, evolving it into a community-driven, city-wide network designed to enhance disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Noting that marginalized communities have historically been underserved regarding resources and emergency response, the ARN addresses these disparities by creating a flexible and inclusive network that enhances resilience through strong community relationships, partnerships, and accessible resources that serve those most in need.

The ARN’s development began with the Resilience Hub pilot program, which established six locations offering critical disaster-related resources. After gathering feedback from residents and community organizations, city staff recognized the limitations of static locations. In response, they expanded the program into the Austin Resilience Network, which now includes over 50 partners from city departments, NGOs, and community-based organizations. This collaboration ensures that resilience efforts are not just centralized in a few locations but are woven into the fabric of the entire community, with a strong emphasis on equitable access to resources.

Since its launch, the ARN has made significant strides in strengthening disaster response capabilities. The network integrates community-driven resources and partnerships that ensure underserved communities receive timely support during emergencies. Through continued collaboration and funding, the ARN is building a more resilient, equitable city capable of responding effectively to future crises.

Austin Civilian Conservation Corps (ACCC)

The Austin Civilian Conservation Corps (ACCC) was launched in May 2020 to address rising unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic and create pathways into green jobs for underserved communities. Rooted in equity and systemic change, the ACCC prioritizes expanding opportunities for those most

impacted by climate change—particularly low-income communities, BIPOC communities, and people experiencing homelessness. By collaborating across city departments and with external partners, the program supports employment and training across sectors such as natural systems, environmental education, zero waste, digital media, and more.

Austin, like many cities, faces challenges in building an inclusive green workforce. Historically marginalized communities continue to experience the brunt of climate change and economic exclusion. To address these disparities, the ACCC provides equitable job pathways and opportunities for leadership within the City of Austin.

Community involvement has been central to the program’s design, with local organizations and leaders helping to shape accessible career pathways. Since its inception, the ACCC has employed or compensated 773 individuals, including 387 in FY23 alone. Of these, 112 were offered positions after their term, and 14 have transitioned into full-time city roles. The ACCC exemplifies how investing in people, partnerships, and green job pathways can foster lasting change and economic resilience.

Carrboro, North Carolina

Carrboro has long taken intentional steps to build a welcoming, sustainable, and diverse community. Once a small mill town across the tracks from Chapel Hill, its identity began to shift with an influx of UNC students and growing Black, Latino, and refugee populations. Today, Carrboro is known as one of the South’s most inclusive communities.

That reputation is backed by bold action: Carrboro was the first North Carolina town to elect an openly gay mayor (1995) and to offer domestic-partner benefits to same-sex couples. In 2019, it began installing “truth plaques” to confront and share the town’s complex racial history.





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Standing on this legacy, Carrboro remains focused on the strategic directions set by its foundational pillars of racial equity and climate action to build a thriving and inclusive community.

Carrboro in Motion Fest/Festival de la Comunidad en Movimiento (CIM)

In many towns, renters often remain underrepresented in traditional civic engagement forums, such as public hearings, surveys, and planning discussions. These residents often face barriers to participation, limiting their ability to voice their needs and concerns.

In Carrboro, renters—who make up about 58% of the population—are often underrepresented in traditional civic engagement forums, such as public hearings, surveys, and planning

discussions. To address this, the Town launched Carrboro in Motion Fest/Festival de la Comunidad en Movimiento (CIM), a series of neighborhood block parties designed to meet residents where they are and foster meaningful community connections.

Held in apartment complexes and other areas with high emergency housing assistance applications, CIM events bring together renters, neighbors, town staff, elected officials, and local organizations in a relaxed, welcoming setting. Activities range from Zumba and bike repair to mobile health clinics, story time, and performances by Takiri Folclor Latino. Services are provided by partners like Chapel Hill Transit, El Centro Hispano, and the Orange County Health Department.

CIM promotes awareness of town services, civic participation, wellness, and sustainable



nationalcivicleague.org

practices. Events include bilingual materials, free food, and giveaways. The program has inspired new initiatives like a bilingual community calendar and an emerging neighborhood liaison program.

Beyond numbers, CIM prioritizes relationships—building trust, amplifying marginalized voices, and making civic life more inclusive. Carrboro in Motion is helping shape a more connected, participatory future for all residents.

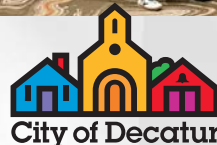
Green Neighborhoods Grant Program

To meet its ambitious goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% from 2010 levels by 2030, the Town of Carrboro recognizes the need for widespread community participation. However, residents, particularly in low-income and historically marginalized communities, often lack the resources or support to engage in climate action at the neighborhood level.

In response, the Town launched the Green Neighborhoods Grant Program as part of its Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP). The program offers up to \$2,500 for resident-led projects that reduce emissions, enhance ecosystem resilience, or raise climate awareness.

Prioritizing equity and environmental justice, the program empowers neighbors to take the lead on solutions that benefit their communities while fostering local connection. Projects must be initiated and implemented by residents and are evaluated based on equity, impact, and engagement. Since its launch, Carrboro has funded 16 projects, including pollinator gardens honoring Black history, neighborhood composting stations, tree planting, and vermicomposting workshops.

The program's reach extends beyond climate metrics. For example, new compost bins in one neighborhood sparked social connections and inspired other communities to apply. Today, four neighborhoods host similar projects.



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In 2025, the Town plans to fund up to 10 additional initiatives. The Green Neighborhoods Grant Program is helping Carrboro residents lead grassroots climate action while building lasting community bonds.

Bolin Creek Watershed Restoration Program

Persistent erosion in Carrboro's Bolin Forest and Forest Court neighborhoods was damaging land, threatening Bolin Creek's water quality, and creating safety hazards across both private and HOA-owned properties. Since stormwater runoff ignores property lines, residents recognized the need for coordinated, cross-property action—but lacked the technical expertise and resources to address the issue alone.

In response, the Town of Carrboro's Stormwater Division launched the Bolin Creek Stormwater Collaborative, uniting HOAs, private



homeowners, environmental groups, and state agencies to develop a sustainable, community-based solution. After years of organizing and planning, a grant-funded construction project launched in 2021, resulting in two Regenerative Stormwater Conveyances (RSCs) across three HOA properties. These natural infrastructure systems slow runoff, reduce erosion, and filter pollutants using native vegetation.

Fifteen partners contributed funding, expertise, and in-kind support. The project featured seven community events—including educational workshops, planting days, and a public celebration—which drew over 150 volunteers. HOA boards coordinated maintenance plans, created reserve funds, and installed signage to raise awareness.

This award-winning effort transformed a long-standing problem into a model for local watershed restoration. It strengthened community relationships, increased understanding of stormwater issues, and demonstrated that stormwater management is not just an individual responsibility—it's a shared, community-wide commitment.

Chelsea, MA

Chelsea, Massachusetts exemplifies resilience—a city that has continually risen from adversity through unity, determination, and innovation. From major fires and a city in Receivership due to corruption and bankruptcy, to school closures and a global pandemic, Chelsea has not only endured but reimagined itself time and again. These challenges have catalyzed collaboration between residents, local government, and community-based organizations to build a more inclusive, engaged, and transparent city.

Today, Chelsea continues to lead with a strong culture of civic engagement, equity, and representation. The city is home to a diverse, multilingual population and a local government

that reflects the racial, cultural, and generational makeup of its community. Through initiatives and over two dozen resident-led boards and commissions, Chelsea ensures that its residents are not only heard but directly shape the city's future. This ongoing spirit of collaboration is reflected in several impactful programs that empower residents and promote equity, resilience, and sustainability.

Cool Down Chelsea

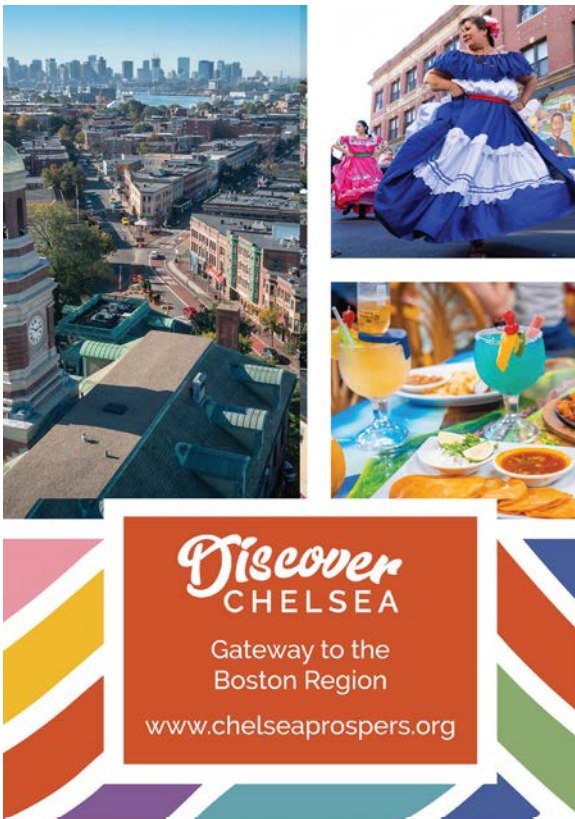
Chelsea, Massachusetts is a frontline environmental justice community facing long-standing public health and climate challenges. With only 3% of land dedicated to parks, 80% impervious surfaces, and just 2% tree canopy, the city suffers from extreme heat, flooding, and poor air quality—conditions that disproportionately affect its largely immigrant, working-class population.

In response, Chelsea residents and organizations launched the Cool Block Initiative—a pilot project to transform one of the city's hottest blocks into a greener, healthier, and more resilient space. In collaboration with Boston University's School of Public Health and the Boston Society of Landscape Architects, residents identified heat hotspots, collected data, and co-designed cooling strategies.

Over 60 trees were planted with care led by the resident-run Tree Keeper Program, boosting tree survivability from 30% to 87%. A white roof was installed at the Boys and Girls Club, and residents designed and advocated for a new green space—ultimately securing unanimous city council approval to create it.

Looking ahead, 150 more trees will be planted, and the Tree Keeper Program will expand. The Cool Block has become a model for grassroots climate resilience—cooling the city, empowering residents, and demonstrating that those most impacted by injustice can lead the way toward lasting change.





Community Microgrid

In the wake of Hurricane Maria's devastation in 2017, which left Puerto Rico without power for months, many displaced residents relocated to Chelsea, Massachusetts. The disaster highlighted the life-threatening impacts of grid failure and inspired Chelsea residents to prioritize local energy resilience.

At a 2018 community meeting, residents—many with direct ties to Puerto Rico—identified a microgrid as a top priority. Though technically complex, the concept resonated with a community that had seen the human costs of unreliable energy. This shared urgency sparked a collaborative, community-led effort, spearheaded by the Resilient Urban Neighborhoods - Green Justice Coalition (RUN-GJC), to design a virtual microgrid tailored to local needs.

The microgrid will power critical infrastructure, including city hall, the 911 center, the police station, senior housing, and other public buildings. Featuring solar panels, battery storage, EV chargers, energy-efficient upgrades, and backup broadband, it will deliver clean, reliable energy while reducing emissions and utility costs.

The initiative also includes resident training, educational installations, and plans to expand to private buildings. With strong support from the city manager and city council, Chelsea's microgrid is a pioneering model for community-driven energy governance—shifting power from extractive utilities to local hands in the face of escalating climate threats.

GreenRoots vs. The League of Air Pollutants: Chelsea's Quest for Clean Air

Air quality is a critical social determinant of health—and in Chelsea, residents are leading the fight for cleaner air. In May 2020, during the height of the pandemic, a major air emissions violation occurred when contractors renovating the Tobin Bridge Viaduct released thick dust into nearby neighborhoods. Already burdened by high rates of respiratory illness and COVID-19 infections, the community mobilized quickly. Public outcry led to the installation of a stationary air quality monitor by state and federal agencies.

Building on that momentum, Chelsea partnered with Northeastern University to significantly expand local air monitoring. Today, more than 80 QuantAQ air quality monitors are installed across the city's 1.8 square miles, capturing neighborhood-level pollution data. A multilingual, community-informed dashboard is in development to make this real-time data accessible to residents and researchers alike.

Chelsea is also engaging the community through creative approaches to address indoor air quality and urban heat. At public events, residents built their own air-filtering box

fans, while comic strips featuring GreenRoots battling the League of Air Pollutants taught families about pollution's health effects.

When a dangerous pile of asbestos was found illegally dumped near public housing, the community responded immediately—demanding its removal and comprehensive environmental testing.

This proactive response is part of Chelsea's ongoing fight for cleaner, safer air for all.

Delray Beach, Florida

Founded in 1895, Delray Beach, Florida, evolved from an agricultural settlement into a thriving coastal city shaped by White farmers, Black Bahamians, African Americans, and Indigenous Seminoles. Despite racial and economic challenges, the city embraced collaboration and civic engagement to promote equity and resilience. Through Vision Assemblies, Delray invested in education, infrastructure, and inclusive growth. Today, it leads with environmental justice, adopting the 2022 Green Building Ordinance, the 2024 Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, and a 10,000-tree initiative. Restoring coastal ecosystems earned Delray the 2023 Blue Flag Award, affirming its commitment to sustainability and a forward-looking vision for 2025 and beyond.

Branching Out: Delray's Path to Environmental Justice

Delray Beach's Environmental Equity Campaign is a collaborative initiative aimed at reducing environmental disparities in low-to-moderate income neighborhoods. In partnership with Community Greening—a nonprofit founded by Delray Beach residents—the city works to mitigate pollution, improve air quality, and address food insecurity through equitable access to environmental resources and education. Ongoing civic engagement—through canvassing, collaboration with community leadership groups, youth teams, and monthly



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Delray Beach wishes you the best of luck in the competition.



planning meetings—shaped the development of responsive, community-centered programs.

Guided by resident feedback, Community Greening implemented a multi-pronged strategy: large-scale tree plantings in parks and public spaces; tree giveaways that included planting education; and a drop-off program delivering larger trees directly to homes, particularly supporting residents with mobility challenges. These efforts increase urban canopy coverage and promote long-term environmental sustainability in underserved areas. In addition, Urban Orchards were established in food deserts, transforming vacant lots into vibrant green spaces where residents can harvest free, fresh fruit. A Youth Tree Team internship program offers paid, hands-on experience in environmental work, building career pathways for high school students from historically underrepresented communities.



This community-driven model has led to over 22,000 trees planted across South Florida. Honored with the “Outstanding Urban Forestry Program” award, the campaign demonstrates how inclusive environmental action fosters sustainability, resilience, and equity.

Youth Eco-Consciousness: Educating the Next Generation

Children in Delray Beach, like many across the country, are spending less time outdoors and have limited access to hands-on science education. This disconnect from nature contributes to gaps in environmental awareness, threatening the development of future environmental stewards.

To address this, Delray Beach has partnered with local organizations to create educational programs centered on youth-led environmental learning. Residents, educators, and children themselves co-designed the Delray Beach Children’s Garden—a community-built space that fosters connection to nature through gardening, creative reuse, and outdoor exploration. The Sandoway Discovery Center’s Junior Naturalist Program, developed in collaboration with public schools, parents, and students, provides equitable, standards-aligned science education. In 2024, the city also joined the Delray Beach Historical Society’s “Community Experiences” pilot program to offer field trips that explore the connection between history and nature.

These programs are making a measurable impact. The Children’s Garden welcomed over 18,000 visitors in 2024 and continues to serve as a hub for nature-based education. Sandoway’s programming reached more than 5,400 students in Delray Beach, most from low-income communities, while expanding outreach to aftercare centers and launching the Science Leadership Academy. The Historical Society introduced hundreds of high school students to heritage-based environmental learning.

These efforts reflect Delray Beach’s long-

term commitment to environmental equity and youth empowerment—core values that drive the city’s broader initiatives on eco-consciousness and climate justice.

Looking Towards the Future: Climate Action Planning

As climate change intensifies, Delray Beach is experiencing rising temperatures, increased flooding, and more severe storms—threats that disproportionately impact historically underserved communities. To better understand these challenges and shape locally informed solutions, the city launched an inclusive community engagement effort in April 2024. Kicking off during Earth Month, staff introduced the Climate Action Survey through public presentations designed to raise awareness and gather input on climate priorities. Outreach efforts focused on lower-income neighborhoods, with staff attending gatherings like the Elders Table and partnering with trusted community groups to ensure that those most affected by climate change had a voice in the process.

To reach a wide and diverse audience, the city distributed the survey both digitally and in person. QR codes were posted in more than 20 locations, shared through local email lists, and featured in social media posts and transportation ads. The Office of Sustainability and Resilience also promoted the survey at events like the Delray Beach Green Market. These efforts resulted in more than 350 responses—more than any other local municipality had received for a similar initiative. Insights from the survey were further refined through interactive “Climate and Conversations” events and five stakeholder brainstorming sessions held in January 2025.

Next, the city is compiling all feedback into a draft Climate Action Plan aligned with the Always Delray Comprehensive Plan. Set for City Commission review in April 2025, the CAP will mark a key milestone in building a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient future.

Denver, CO

When it comes to protecting the city and the planet for future generations, every second counts, and every choice matters. Denverites understand this well. In 2020, a groundbreaking step was taken when Denver voters approved a dedicated sales tax to fund climate action and resilience efforts. This funding supports a wide range of projects aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality, and ensuring environmental justice for historically underserved neighborhoods.

The city's approach is rooted in collaboration, with the Climate Action Task Force playing a key role in shaping strategies. Through partnerships with community organizations, businesses, and local leaders, Denver has been able to implement projects such as solar installations, equitable transportation options like e-bikes, and neighborhood resilience programs. These efforts are designed to directly benefit residents, particularly those most affected by environmental challenges, and help Denver become a model for a sustainable and resilient future. By combining data-driven strategies with inclusive engagement, Denver is fostering a greener future that values both people and the planet.

Denver's Nation-Leading E-Bike Rebate Program

In 2022, the City and County of Denver's Office of Climate Action, Sustainability and Resiliency (CASR) launched a groundbreaking e-bike rebate program to tackle transportation's role in greenhouse gas emissions—then 34% of the city's total. With most car trips under 10 miles, the program aimed to make e-bikes a practical alternative. The launch saw overwhelming demand: more than 3,000 applications flooded in, with 40% from income-qualified residents.

To prioritize equity, the city engaged community stakeholders and, in 2023, rolled

out \$300 standard rebates, \$1,200 income-qualified rebates, and special incentives for adaptive bikes. In 2024, the program expanded to include middle-income rebates, safety trainings, battery recycling, and distribution through 64 community-based organizations.

The impact has been significant. As of March 2025, over 9,400 vouchers have been redeemed—more than 45% for e-cargo bikes—displacing 4.1 million vehicle miles and avoiding 1,447 tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually. Residents have saved more than \$1 million in fuel and maintenance costs.

Denver's innovative approach has inspired dozens of cities and states, including Colorado's own statewide e-bike incentive. By centering equity and data, Denver has created a national model for sustainable, community-driven climate action.

Denver's Climate Champions Program

The City and County of Denver and Denver



WELCOME TO THE MILE HIGH CITY



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RETIREMENT

Public Schools (DPS) have partnered to meet community expectations for sustainable schools and prepare students for careers in clean energy and resource management. Driven by student advocacy—particularly from DPS Students for Climate Action—the district adopted a Climate Policy and Action Plan aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 90% by 2050. Community assessments identified youth, especially students of color, as underserved in climate education and resilience efforts.

In response, DPS and Denver’s Office of Climate Action, Sustainability and Resiliency (CASR) launched the Climate Champions Grant Program, funded by the city’s Climate Protection Fund. With \$225,000 in its first year (2023–24), the program supported student-led, teacher-supported projects focused on real-world climate solutions. CASR and DPS offered workshops and one-on-one support to guide students through the proposal process.

Fifteen projects were funded across the city, involving an estimated 2,000 students. Projects ranged from solar-powered picnic tables and reusable dishware kits to tree planting, bike infrastructure, and waste diversion campaigns. The program received more submissions than it could fund, underscoring strong interest and potential for growth.

Now entering its second year, the program continues to empower Denver youth as the next generation of climate leaders.

Promotoras Climáticas Program

The City of Denver’s Office of Climate Action, Sustainability and Resiliency (CASR) recognized that financial incentives alone wouldn’t drive broad climate action without the development of strong social norms, especially in under-resourced neighborhoods. Through community rapid assessments, it was revealed that many Denverites felt unheard and underserved by the city, particularly those in vulnerable

areas. In response, CASR launched a request for proposals from community-based organizations to create culturally competent climate literacy and engagement campaigns that were neighborhood-focused.

In 2022, CASR selected five community organizations to serve as Promotoras Climáticas, with the goal of raising awareness about climate resiliency, particularly regarding extreme heat and drought. Over two years, CASR engaged with the Promotoras quarterly, offering support, connecting them to city and state agencies, and fostering collaboration among the groups. These Promotoras served as neighborhood navigators, reaching more than 100,000 Denverites with initiatives like composting education and energy efficiency improvements.

The Promotoras’ climate engagement campaigns led to measurable success, with survey data showing increases in climate literacy, personal action commitment, and engagement in sustainability practices. The program’s effectiveness was also reflected in the influence the Promotoras had on residents’ actions, with many citing the program’s impact on their decision to take climate action. As a result, the city is using this data to inform and improve the program for the next cycle in 2025.

Englewood, Colorado

Englewood, Colorado, a vibrant and diverse city of 35,000 on Denver’s southern border, is known for its youthful population, eclectic mix of businesses along Broadway, and strong healthcare sector, anchored by Swedish Medical Center and Craig Hospital. The city offers over 217 acres of parks and open space, including a water park, golf course, and two recreation centers. Despite its many strengths, Englewood faces significant environmental challenges common to the region, including extreme weather, air quality issues, and disproportionately high environmental health

risks in certain census blocks, as identified by Colorado's EnviroScreen. Recognizing these challenges, Englewood has made sustainability a central focus. Since 2020, the city has prioritized sustainability in its strategic plan, launched a dedicated sustainability program and commission, and hired a coordinator to lead initiatives. These efforts target climate impacts, energy efficiency, and waste diversion, especially to benefit the city's most vulnerable populations. Englewood's work demonstrates a commitment to inclusive progress, regional resilience, and environmental sustainability.

Removing Barriers, Sustainability for All

Engaging historically underserved and low-income residents in sustainability efforts is often limited by financial and accessibility barriers. Englewood recognized these challenges and committed to making sustainability initiatives more inclusive and equitable.

The city worked closely with residents and community stakeholders to understand these barriers and design solutions. For example, in developing the Electric Vehicle (EV) Action Plan, city staff partnered with local nonprofits and hosted focus groups and tabling events to ensure diverse input shaped the plan's priorities. Similarly, during Climate Resiliency Workshops, the city conducted targeted outreach using environmental health data and made participation accessible by providing childcare, translation, food, and a third-party facilitator to foster open dialogue.

To reduce financial barriers, Englewood launched the Sustainability Grant and Energy Efficient Englewood (E3) programs, providing direct funding for grassroots projects and energy-efficient home upgrades. Other programs such as turf replacement rebates, composting initiatives, and the At Your Door hazardous waste pickup service removed cost and transportation burdens.

These efforts not only empowered residents



but also created systemic change. Insights from engagement activities informed a blueprint for low-income energy outreach and will guide future planning, including the 2026–2030 strategic plan. Englewood's work demonstrates how inclusive design and sustained investment can create lasting environmental and community impact.

Rooted in Partnership: Englewood's Collaborative Climate Action

Addressing environmental sustainability requires collaboration that extends beyond local government action alone. Englewood recognized that lasting progress depends on empowering residents, businesses, and partner organizations to lead and co-create solutions.

To define shared sustainability goals, Englewood actively partnered with community members and regional stakeholders. Residents proposed and implemented projects through the city's Sustainability Grant Program,



including “Little Green Libraries” with educational materials and a puzzle swap in partnership with a homelessness nonprofit. The transformation of Depot Prairie Park from turf to native habitat stemmed from a resident-led initiative, supported by city departments and community advocacy.

Englewood’s actions included hosting Earth Month programs featuring educational events with nonprofits, universities, and local experts. Regional partnerships strengthened efforts, such as an intergovernmental agreement with the City of Sheridan to share a sustainability manager, and the Tri-Cities Sustainable Business Partnership, which supports businesses in adopting green practices. The city also collaborated with South Platte Renew on cleanup efforts and energy efficiency campaigns.

These collaborations are expanding sustainability’s reach, from engaging woman-owned businesses to improving infrastructure through an energy performance contract. Regional studies, like a joint waste analysis, position Englewood and its neighbors to make data-informed decisions that benefit 194,000 residents. This interconnected, community-driven approach ensures long-term environmental impact across the region.

Clean and Connected Transportation

Like many communities, Englewood faces the challenge of limited clean and connected transportation options. Reliance on single-occupancy vehicles remains high, while public transportation—though available—is infrequent, expensive, and fragmented. To improve mobility and reduce environmental impact, Englewood is transforming its transportation landscape through community-driven planning and innovation.

The city prioritized public engagement in reimagining local transportation. Through a citywide survey and a full rebrand of the free Englewood Trolley service, residents



shaped updates designed to boost ridership. The resident-led Englewood Transportation Advisory Committee regularly collaborates with city departments to resolve traffic and safety issues. Similarly, community input helped shape the updated Walk and Wheel Plan, which has already added 4.6 miles of new bike lanes. A major infrastructure project—redeveloping Old Hampden Avenue—is also community-informed, with a stakeholder group representing diverse voices including residents with disabilities.

Beyond planning, Englewood uplifts multi-modal transportation through events and partnerships. Annual Bike to Work and School Days engage residents of all ages, while the Sustainable Business Partnership’s “Watts @ Work” event educates local businesses on EV options. Internally, the city launched the EngleRIDE program, providing incentives for



employees to commute sustainably.

Englewood’s approach blends infrastructure investments with community ownership. As new projects like the Old Hampden complete streets initiative advance, the city continues to prioritize equity, access, and environmental sustainability through inclusive transportation solutions.

Hampton, VA

Over 60% of Hampton, Virginia is water—and with sea levels rising and storms intensifying, recurrent flooding has become the city’s defining resilience challenge. Surrounded on three sides by water and threaded with creeks and rivers, Hampton developed a bold, community-centered response: the “Living with Water” strategy. Guided by values of safety, equity, heritage, and innovation, this comprehensive plan integrates flood protection, environmental restoration, economic opportunity, and recreation. Signature projects include the WaterWalk trail, Big Bethel Blueway, and neighborhood resilience efforts.

But Hampton’s resilience goes beyond infrastructure—its civic capital is just as strong. “The Hampton Way” is a nationally recognized model of inclusive, sustained civic engagement. From budgeting and land use to climate and cultural planning, thousands of residents—from teens to older adults—are regularly engaged in shaping city priorities. Whether through neighborhood commissions, multilingual town halls, or digital outreach, Hampton’s co-creation ethos ensures that residents not only have a voice, but a real say.

Hampton Clean City Commission

In coastal cities like Hampton, Virginia, litter and pollution threaten not only land but also waterways, wildlife, and public health. The Hampton Clean City Commission is tackling

this challenge with a blend of grassroots action and environmental education. Building on decades of impact, the commission partners with schools, civic groups, and environmental organizations to promote sustainability and resilience.

Through programs like School Pride in Action, teachers lead school-based recycling drives, oyster restoration projects, and hands-on science activities. Students build sculptures from plastic waste and raise oysters to help clean local waters—turning education into action. Community cleanups, pollinator gardens, rain barrel workshops, and the Adopt-a-Spot program engage thousands of residents in caring for their environment.

Clean City also combats food insecurity through three community gardens in walkable, lower-income neighborhoods. These gardens offer residents fresh produce, education, and a chance to connect. With a 78% gardener retention rate and growing waitlist, new sites are under consideration.

In 2023, over 8,800 volunteer hours resulted in 574 cleanups, 20 miles of restored shoreline, and widespread beautification. From creek cleanups by kayak to classroom oyster tanks, Hampton proves that real environmental change starts at the community level.

Phoebus Living Shoreline

The historic neighborhood of Phoebus in Hampton undertook an ambitious effort to restore a damaged waterfront park and address chronic flooding—centered entirely on community voice and leadership. The Phoebus Partnership, a joint business and civic association, collaborated with the American Flood Coalition to pilot a yearlong, equity-driven process. Their goal: to reimagine the park not just as a green space, but as a shared neighborhood asset shaped by the people who use it.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the



Partnership found creative and accessible ways to engage residents—pop-up events, surveys, yard signs, Facebook updates, even front-yard potluck cookouts that sparked casual but meaningful conversations. Residents shared what the park meant to them, how they wanted to use it, and what changes would make it more welcoming and resilient.

Their input guided a vision for restoring the park's living shoreline and creating a more usable, inviting space. Volunteers, neighbors, and partner groups came together during two full-day work sessions to remove invasive plants and install native vegetation. The city supported the effort by adapting its Adopt-A-Spot program to allow long-term stewardship. The project not only enhanced the shoreline and expanded access to green space, but it also strengthened local partnerships and built momentum for future projects. The Phoebus Partnership is now applying lessons learned

to secure new funding, host events, and boost local pride.

Aberdeen Gardens Flooding Resilience

Aberdeen Gardens, a historic Black neighborhood in Hampton, Virginia, faces worsening flooding due to climate change, aging infrastructure, and its original low-lying location. Established in 1934 under the New Deal, it was the first resettlement community built by and for African Americans. Many of the original 158 brick homes remain—some still owned by descendants—but rising waters now threaten property, historical landmarks, and quality of life.

To address this, Wetlands Watch partnered with three civic associations, the city, and students from local universities to co-create the Aberdeen Gardens Community Resilience Action Plan. Developed through door-to-door outreach, neighborhood events, and community meetings, the plan reflects the voices of residents and outlines both infrastructure upgrades and grassroots solutions: stormwater improvements, creek restoration, tree planting, school programs, and a revived community garden.

In 2023, the city received a \$20 million EPA grant to implement the plan. While the city leads, Wetlands Watch and a community steering committee remain at the center. For residents like 85-year-old Margaret Wilson, who runs the neighborhood museum, the project is more than flood mitigation—it's about protecting heritage, preserving home, and ensuring a resilient future for generations to come.

Jacksonville, North Carolina

Situated along the banks of the New River, Jacksonville, North Carolina, is a dynamic coastal city shaped by its deep military roots, rich environmental legacy, and resilient community spirit. Home to Marine Corps



Base Camp Lejeune and New River Air Station, Jacksonville has grown alongside its military neighbors, forging strong civic ties and a shared commitment to service. The city's history is deeply intertwined with its waterway, most notably the New River, which has witnessed the city's most significant challenges and triumphs.

Faced with environmental degradation from past practices, Jacksonville turned crisis into opportunity, launching a decades-long effort to restore the New River and embed sustainability into its civic DNA. Guided by public will and cross-sector collaboration, the city has become a model for environmental stewardship, inclusive engagement, and regional cooperation. Today, Jacksonville continues to build on this legacy with bold, community-driven initiatives that reflect a commitment to equity, resilience, and innovation. The following projects illustrate how Jacksonville is putting these values into action, creating a healthier, more connected future for all who call it home.

Prioritizing Environmental Stewardship

In Jacksonville, North Carolina, decades of untreated wastewater devastated the New River, eradicating marine life and sparking urgent community action. As the only county where the river begins and ends, residents recognized their responsibility to restore what had been lost. In 1995, the city council issued a moral call to action and engaged the public through community summits. From those discussions emerged the Wilson Bay Initiative—an innovative plan to use oysters, nature's water filters, to help revive the river. Volunteers of all ages joined efforts to "chub" oysters and place them in Wilson Bay, kickstarting a grassroots movement. The city shut down its aging wastewater plant and landfill, transforming them into public green space and the Sturgeon City

Environmental Education Center. A \$50 million land-application wastewater treatment facility was built on 6,300 acres, where treated water irrigates pine forests, replenishes groundwater, and generates \$300,000 annually through timber sales.

The impact has been remarkable: fecal coliform levels dropped over 600%, marine life returned, and wetlands were restored. Building on this success, Jacksonville launched the Oyster Highway in 2017, placing over 10 million oysters across 12 living reefs along the New River to further filter water, restore habitat, and boost recreational fishing. Once declared beyond saving, the New River now stands as a national model of environmental recovery and civic leadership.

Caring Community Programs & Initiatives

Jacksonville's leaders recognized the need to unite a diverse community through environmental stewardship, youth engagement, and civic education to build a stronger, more compassionate society. They achieved this through three primary efforts:

Sturgeon City, founded in 2000, fosters environmental education and stewardship. In 2019, a \$4 million investment opened the Sturgeon City Environmental Education Center, offering year-round STEAM programs for youth and adults. With 136,000 participants to date, the center promotes "Green Time Not Screen Time" and plans new exhibits, a pollination garden, and a living lab to highlight ecosystem health and the Wilson Bay Initiative's impact.

The New River Roundtable began as a data-sharing effort and has evolved into a collaborative forum addressing the river system's health. It unites researchers, agencies, nonprofits, and educators to restore shorelines, prevent pollution, and deploy trash-trapping devices. Its goals include data exchange,

stakeholder coordination, and public education.

The New River Institutes at Sturgeon City offer free, two-week summer programs for high school students, engaging them in science, leadership, and environmental stewardship. Over 10,000 teens have participated since 1999, many of whom later pursue related careers. Through the Jacksonville Youth Council, students engage in civic service, volunteerism, and leadership, contributing to community projects and supporting vulnerable residents.

Building Resiliency for the Future

Jacksonville faced longstanding environmental challenges—stormwater runoff, flooding, and water pollution—that demanded sustainable, community-driven solutions. In response, the city launched Clean & Green Jacksonville in 2011 to unite city leaders, residents, and regional partners around environmental stewardship. Building on stormwater practices first adopted in 1999, the initiative now encompasses watershed restoration, staff training, illicit discharge mitigation, and community volunteer programs like Adopt-a-Park and Stream/Street.

The city restored habitats, cleared 32 abandoned vessels from the New River, and created the Jacksonville Blueway for recreation. Events such as Earth Day, New River Splash, Winterfest, and National Night Out celebrate these efforts, drawing thousands annually to clean, accessible waterfronts.

Jacksonville also prioritized sustainable transportation. Federal funding in 2008 launched the trails and greenways system and Jacksonville Transit. Today, over 23 miles of greenways connect to five bus routes and 187 stops, with Jacksonville Station—a 2022 transportation hub built without local tax dollars—linking transit and recreation. The city's Stormwater Division trains staff in best practices, and pet waste stations

reduce pollution in parks. Jacksonville has been a Tree City USA for 45 years, with 41% tree canopy coverage as of 2020. A citizen-led Environmental & Appearance Advisory Committee supports tree planting, canopy preservation, and environmental education citywide.

Together, these efforts reflect Jacksonville's commitment to environmental sustainability, civic engagement, and quality of life through long-term, collaborative action.



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We Have to Stop Meeting Like This: Rethinking Public Meetings

In many communities, traditional public meetings are failing to meet the needs of residents and local governments. City council meetings and similar interactions often deepen distrust and division—not because of bad intentions, but because of outdated formats that discourage genuine engagement.

To address this, the League's Center for Democracy Innovation has partnered with several pilot communities to develop a transformative new approach. By redesigning city council study sessions, we've replaced frustrating public comment periods with dynamic, inclusive conversations. This innovative format fosters meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding, while fully complying with official meeting regulations.



Features of the Redesigned Format

Inclusive Participation: Proactive outreach strategies to ensure diverse community representation.

Collective Learning: Engaging presentations for shared reflection between officials and residents.

Facilitated Discussions: Trained facilitation to encourage active listening, highlight lived experiences, and spark forward-thinking ideas tailored to the session's theme.

Post-Event Evaluation: Attendees provide feedback to refine future sessions.

Benefits

Foster Involvement: Amplify diverse perspectives and ensure every voice is heard and respected.

Deeper Community Connections: Facilitate authentic engagement that nurtures mutual trust between officials and residents.

Make Informed Decisions: Blend expert insights with community experiences for smarter, more responsive policymaking.

Strengthen Civic Relationships: Build a sense of collaboration and shared purpose to unify your community.

No Dais, No Mic!

Email democracyinnovation@ncl.org to reimagine public participation.

Kinston, North Carolina

Kinston, North Carolina is a community defined by resilience, creativity, and collaboration. After decades of economic decline, environmental disasters, and systemic disinvestment, residents have rallied around a shared vision for inclusive revitalization. From repurposing downtown buildings into hubs of cultural and economic activity to fostering youth-led civic leadership in East Kinston, the city embraces innovation grounded in local history, culture, and community strength. Local government, grassroots organizations, and residents work together to address persistent challenges such as climate impacts, housing instability, and public safety through initiatives that center equity and long-term sustainability.

This spirit of collaboration and civic engagement is reflected in the city's evolving infrastructure—both physical and social. Efforts include building accessible leadership pipelines, preserving historic landmarks, planning inclusive economic strategies, and revitalizing neighborhoods. Kinston continues to show what's possible when all voices are heard. The following three projects highlight how a shared commitment to inclusiveness, youth leadership, and civic pride is shaping a more resilient and thriving Kinston.

Emma Webb Park Master Plan: A Community-Driven Approach to Revitalization and Resilience

Emma Webb Park, a 7-acre historic park in the heart of Kinston, had long been underutilized and in disrepair, with outdated amenities and a degraded natural stream system that contributed to neighborhood flooding. Located in a flood-prone area, the park's deteriorating infrastructure made it unsafe and inaccessible, particularly for children and families in a community with limited recreational options.

To guide a transformation rooted in community needs, the City of Kinston partnered with the American Flood Coalition, Design Workshop,



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and Kinston Teens to launch an inclusive engagement process. Over 350 residents shared input through surveys, listening sessions, and pop-up park events. Youth from Kinston Teens conducted door-to-door outreach, ensuring flood-impacted households helped shape the project.

This collaborative effort resulted in the Emma Webb Park Master Plan—a community-driven roadmap prioritizing flood mitigation, accessibility, and expanded recreation. Planned improvements include stream restoration, walking trails, basketball courts, a splash pad, and an ADA-accessible playground.

With \$1 million in local and state funding secured, construction is underway on Phase 1. Future phases will feature cultural programming, climate education, and public art. The project is a model for integrating resilience, equity, and community-led design to create safe, inclusive public spaces.



East Kinston Neighborhood Hub and Community Visioning for Equitable Development

East Kinston is one of the city's most historically and culturally rich neighborhoods—but decades of disinvestment, population decline, and flooding have taken a toll. Residents have long lacked access to essentials like grocery stores, quality housing, and economic opportunity. Despite a strong sense of community, East Kinston has often been left out of key planning decisions, deepening social and environmental inequities.

In response, Kinston Teens and its partners launched a community-led equitable development initiative to ensure East Kinston residents are centered in shaping the future of their neighborhood. Through neighborhood meetings, visioning sessions, and more than 500 in-person conversations, residents identified priorities including affordable housing, food access, small business support, and climate resilience. Culturally grounded strategies—like storytelling, oral histories, and neighborhood block parties—helped root the process in East Kinston's legacy.

A key outcome has been the creation of the East Kinston Neighborhood Hub, a resident-led space offering fresh food, hygiene supplies, digital literacy training, leadership workshops, and a safe place to gather. The accompanying Equitable Development Plan formalized community priorities and is now guiding citywide strategies.

The East Kinston Neighborhood Hub and Equitable Development Plan effort was the basis for a \$20 million EPA Community Change Grant application, though the funding has not yet been secured due to the change in administration.

Downtown Kinston Mural Program: Strengthening Civic Engagement Through Public Art

Once known as the “Magic Mile,” downtown Kinston had lost its vibrancy. Vacant

buildings and underused spaces left the area disconnected, while many residents—especially young people and historically marginalized groups—felt excluded from shaping the city's future.

To reignite civic pride and economic activity, the City of Kinston launched the Downtown Kinston Mural Program in 2019 with support from a \$100,000 NEA Our Town grant. Led by the Planning Department in partnership with the Kinston Community Council for the Arts and a citizen-led Mural Selection Committee, the initiative commissioned seven murals along Queen Street, turning blank walls into powerful public storytelling spaces.

Community engagement was at the heart of the project. A 14-member selection committee guided the process, and artists were required to hold public forums and incorporate resident feedback. Two murals honored





Kinston's Civil Rights legacy, including tributes to Alice Hannibal, the city's first Black woman councilmember, and the 1951 Adkin High School Walkout.

The murals brought new energy to downtown, attracting foot traffic, sparking intergenerational conversations about justice and identity, and encouraging local property investment. Businesses reported increased engagement, and youth participated through leadership by Kinston Teens.

Now a model for community-centered placemaking, the program is expanding into other neighborhoods. The city has committed to preserving the murals and exploring digital tools like augmented reality experiences and QR codes to enhance education.

Leominster, Massachusetts

Leominster, Massachusetts, is a city where civic pride runs deep and community connection drives progress. Known as the birthplace of Johnny Appleseed and the iconic pink flamingo lawn ornament, Leominster blends quirky history with bold action—like preserving the legacy of Chief Sholan through the expansion of the state's only city-owned apple orchard, Sholan Farms.

With 43,000 residents and over 40 free, city-sponsored events each year, Leominster lives its motto: "If it's free for me, it's 01453." Decades of community-driven planning have shaped a city where access, equity, and the environment take center stage. Since adopting one of Massachusetts' earliest Open Space and Recreation Plans in the 1990s, Leominster has preserved over 2,000 acres of open space, built a 32-mile trail network, and planted nearly 3,500 trees since 2016.

Leominster's culture of responsiveness is unmatched. From Facebook livestreams to multilingual outreach, residents are heard and helped. That connection was lifesaving during the 2023 1,000-year flood, when strong infrastructure and communication systems protected lives and property.

Leominster is a proud, resilient city shaped by the voices and values of its people—and always ready to grow stronger, together.

Sholan Farms

In 1999, Leominster faced a defining moment when the Pollack family announced plans to sell 169 acres of prime farmland—the city's last working apple orchard. With a \$4 million price tag, the future of this iconic land in the birthplace of Johnny Appleseed seemed uncertain. But a grassroots movement quickly formed: students wrote letters, residents packed city meetings, and "Save the Orchard" signs filled front yards. Through a combination

of state funding, local fundraising, and a city council vote to fund a third of the cost, the land was preserved—marking the birth of Sholan Farms.

The real challenge began immediately: harvesting and managing the orchard. That first year, the mayor and city staff picked apples and sold them from city hall. Today, Sholan Farms is managed by the nonprofit Friends of Sholan Farms, with over 300 volunteers, 250 members, and 15 seasonal staff. The farm is self-sustaining through produce sales, grants, and partnerships.

Now spanning 167 acres—80 of them active orchards—Sholan grows 34 apple varieties and hosts school tours, festivals, research projects, community gardens, and environmental competitions. It's one of only two city-owned, pick-your-own orchards in Massachusetts and a model of sustainable agriculture, volunteerism, and civic pride.

From Christmas tree sales to hiking trails, Sholan Farms has become a year-round hub for health, learning, and community in Central Massachusetts.

Twin Cities Rail Trail

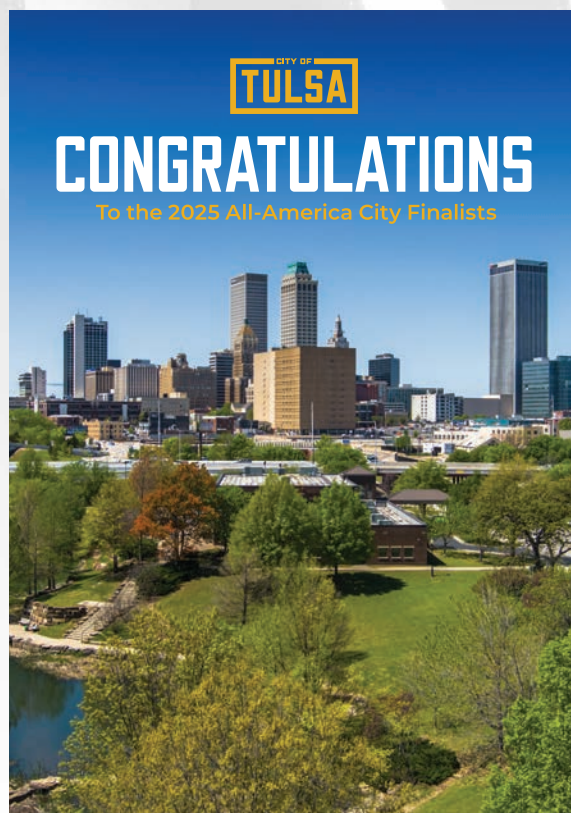
At one of North Worcester County's busiest corridors—where 31,000 cars pass daily between Leominster and Fitchburg—residents saw an opportunity in an abandoned railway running parallel to Route 12. What began as a vision to transform that corridor into a safe, vibrant rail trail became a true community effort spanning decades.

In 2004, residents formed the Twin Cities Rail Trail Association, a volunteer nonprofit dedicated to building a trail for bikers, walkers, runners, and commuters. Public support surged. Hundreds packed design meetings, thousands followed progress online, and local leaders at every level backed the project. Open space plans dating back to 1997 had consistently ranked walking and biking trails among the

region's top priorities—this was the community putting that vision into action.

With years of advocacy, persistence, and collaboration, the cities of Leominster and Fitchburg secured federal, state, and local funding to purchase the land and bring the project to life. Phase I of the 4.5-mile trail was completed in 2023, with the final segment—linking both downtowns—expected to open this year. The trail now connects residents to commuter rail stations, hospitals, recreation areas, and commercial centers.

Community pride fuels the trail year-round. Local businesses and civic groups sponsor benches and maintenance, while residents clear paths, raise funds, and adapt with snowshoes and cleats in the winter. This is more than a path—it's a shared investment in health, mobility, and connection.





Guiding Communities Through Effective and Inclusive Charter Reviews

The Center for Democracy Innovation at the National Civic League helps communities navigate the charter review process with expert guidance and resources. Communities can start by accessing the League's Model City Charter, a public resource first created in 1900 and updated in 2021 to uphold engagement and equity as core priorities of local governance. This free resource is available to any community seeking guidance on the content and design of a city charter.

Traditionally, a charter review process begins when the elected body determines a review is needed—sometimes triggered by a revision clause in the existing charter. The next step is selecting a charter review commission, which then conducts an extensive review of the charter, examines relevant examples from other jurisdictions, holds public meetings, drafts proposed amendments, submits them for community review, and ultimately presents them for a referendum.

Charter review commissions, composed of volunteers, often face challenges such as time constraints, role confusion, and the learning curve associated with drafting a charter. A key challenge is effectively engaging the public to ensure meaningful input and community buy-in. A successful process must build trust through substantive, multi-channel public participation. The League can support these commissions by providing best practices in public participation, ensuring the review process is inclusive, transparent, and trusted by the community.

The Center for Democracy Innovation draws on deep expertise in charters, local government structures, and innovative public participation methods. Through our Democracy Innovations for Better Public Meetings initiative, we've helped local governments foster more civil, inclusive, and participatory meetings. We apply these insights to charter review efforts, equipping commissions with the tools needed to establish the trusted community relationships essential for an effective charter revision process.

Every community's needs differ, so our support is flexible—ranging from remote consultation to in-person presentations and facilitation. Whether providing strategic advice or hands-on assistance, the League helps communities create charters that reflect their values and priorities.



Email democracyinnovation@ncl.org to explore how we can support your community in building a more effective and inclusive charter review process.

Leominster Climate Action Plan

In 2019, the City of Leominster launched its Climate Action Plan, fully aware that climate change—and local politics—could spark division. With a history of strong opinions and long-standing rivalries, city leaders were unsure how the community would respond. But they moved forward, grounded in a belief that collaboration could chart a shared path ahead.

The first public workshop in September 2019 exceeded expectations. Engineers, small business owners, city councilors, nonprofit staff, trail stewards, and residents from diverse backgrounds spent the day identifying climate hazards, assessing community vulnerabilities, and prioritizing actions to build resilience. With shared memories of the 2008 ice storm, the record-breaking snow of 2015, and the rising Nashua River, there was clear consensus: the climate is changing, and the city must adapt.

The draft plan was circulated citywide for feedback and refined through public input before city council approval. One top priority—repairing the Monoosnoc Brook culvert—demonstrated the city’s inclusive approach. After ten public meetings and online surveys, Leominster secured \$6.8 million from FEMA to complete the project, preserving downtown parking while creating new green space in an environmental justice neighborhood.

Since adoption, Leominster has made steady progress: upgrading sewer and water systems, stabilizing streambanks, enhancing emergency communications, and installing generators at critical sites. These citizen-driven priorities helped the city respond effectively to major flooding in 2023.

Leominster’s success underscores the power of transparency, public input, and collective action. When everyone moves forward together, success follows.

Memphis, Tennessee

Memphis is a city of contrasts—rich in culture, civic pride, and grassroots energy, yet still wrestling with the enduring legacy of racial and economic inequity. A majority-Black city that helped shape the civil rights movement, Memphis continues the “phase two” struggle Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. described: achieving genuine economic equality. Generations of disinvestment and white flight hollowed out once-thriving neighborhoods, leaving deep disparities in wealth, health, education, and opportunity.

These inequities now intersect with climate vulnerability. Although Memphis is not especially prone to natural disasters, Shelby County ranks in the 97th percentile for climate vulnerability due to systemic challenges. Black households disproportionately bear the burden of high energy costs, poor air quality, and limited access to climate-resilient infrastructure.

Yet Memphis remains resilient. Programs like Memphis 3.0, the Memphis Academy for Civic Engagement, and the fight against a harmful oil pipeline reflect a city grounded in resident-led change. From grassroots coalitions to city hall, Memphis is building a more equitable and sustainable future through civic innovation and authentic collaboration.

Memphis 3.0

From the 1970s through the early 2000s, Memphis responded to population stagnation by annexing more than 100 square miles of suburban land—doubling the city’s footprint without increasing density. This expansion, paired with decades without a comprehensive plan, led to fragmented development and chronic disinvestment in core neighborhoods.

In the mid-2010s, Memphis shifted course. Recognizing the long-term costs of unplanned growth, city leaders launched Memphis 3.0—the first comprehensive plan in nearly 40 years. Built on deep community engagement, the plan emerged through collaboration with nearly 50 local organizations, hundreds of public meetings, neighborhood walking tours, university partnerships, and creative outreach. More than 15,000 residents shaped the vision, prioritizing walkability, neighborhood identity, and equitable economic growth.

The plan centers future development around “anchors”—walkable, transit-connected hubs tailored to each neighborhood’s character and needs. It aligns with broader sustainability goals through denser, mixed-use development that reduces emissions and enhances quality of life.

Unanimously adopted in 2019, Memphis 3.0 has since engaged over 73,000 residents and spurred more than \$900 million in public and private investment. Now in its fifth year, the plan continues to evolve through new rounds of district meetings and zoning updates—laying the foundation for a resilient, resident-driven future.

Sustainable Workforce Initiatives

Black families in Memphis face deep wealth and income disparities. The median Black household holds just \$24,000 in assets, compared to \$189,000 for White households. White-owned businesses outnumber Black-owned firms 11 to 1, and the racial wealth gap represents an estimated \$25 billion in lost regional revenue. Addressing this inequity is critical to Memphis’ long-term economic and climate resilience.

Energy efficiency has become a local priority. While weatherization and home repair programs exist, demand far exceeds the number of certified contractors. To close this gap, the City of Memphis, MLGW, and partners established a new training facility at Moore

Tech in 2024. Equipped with a model house for hands-on instruction, the program offers scholarships and aims to train 30 technicians annually, creating access to well-paying green jobs.

In Binghampton, a majority-Black Memphis neighborhood, the BDC Business Hub repurposed a warehouse into a job training center focused on recycling. When MLGW converted 77,000 streetlights to LED, BDC secured a contract to recycle them—creating 58 jobs. The program has expanded to serve other cities, hiring over 90 people since 2021 and offering training in financial literacy and career development.

Healthy Homes Partnership / Lead-Safe Memphis

Memphis ranks last in the nation for housing health, with pests, mold, water infiltration, and lead paint among the most common hazards. Lead poisoning is one of the most urgent crises—often undetected, it can result in lifelong consequences, including developmental delays, mental illness, and cardiovascular disease.

In response, local advocates and institutions formed the Memphis Lead Coalition (MLC), a collaboration of nonprofits, city and county agencies, hospitals, and utilities built on years of environmental justice organizing. One key member, Young, Gifted & Green (YGG), expanded neighborhood canvassing after joining the Green and Healthy Homes Initiative in 2018. Volunteers provide direct referrals to lead testing and abatement services and connect households to blood lead level testing.

In 2023, Memphis-Shelby County Schools proactively tested all water sources; affected fountains were removed from use. Parents formed Memphis ALARM, a peer support and advocacy group featured in MLK50’s investigative series and the documentary Lead Watch 901. They continue to play a vital role in monthly canvassing and community education.

The City of Memphis' Lead-Safe program has reduced lead exposure in over 2,000 homes. In 2019, the city received a \$5.6 million federal grant to expand lead hazard inspections, education, and remediation efforts.

YGG has held over 25 events with 190 volunteers, reaching more than 650 residents. In 2024 alone, 85 high-risk homes were referred for lead services. The EPA adopted 80% of the recommendations made during its 2023 Memphis listening session as part of its national Lead and Copper Rule revisions. Together, these initiatives are increasing awareness, reducing exposure, and building momentum toward healthier homes in Memphis.

Petaluma, California

Over the past decade, Petaluma, California, has shown how bold, community-driven climate action can catalyze lasting civic transformation. Spurred by devastating wildfires, droughts, and floods, residents, students, nonprofits, and business leaders united to demand meaningful change. Their advocacy led to the 2019 Climate Emergency Resolution and the formation of a Climate Action Commission, resulting in a 2030 carbon neutrality goal and pioneering initiatives like ReLeaf Petaluma and Cool Petaluma. In 2021, Petaluma became the first U.S. city to ban new gas stations, sparking national dialogue.

At the heart of Petaluma's success is its inclusive governance. Public forums, neighborhood block programs, youth representation, and advisory groups ensure historically underrepresented voices shape local policy. Efforts like the Fairgrounds Advisory Panel and the City's Blueprint for Climate Action reflect how robust community input drives equitable outcomes. Through transparency, collaboration, and shared leadership, Petaluma has built lasting trust and a model of civic participation that extends far

beyond climate action—offering a powerful example of community-led governance.

Equitable Climate Action Coalition

Guided by civic engagement and a co-creative approach, Petaluma's goal of carbon neutrality by 2030 led to the creation of the Petaluma Equitable Climate Action Coalition (PECAC). Launched by Daily Acts and Equity First Consulting, PECAC aimed to elevate the voices of those most affected by climate change—communities historically excluded from decision-making.

The six-month pilot program, PECAC 1.0, selected six diverse residents to analyze the city's Climate Emergency Framework and co-create solutions. Participants received \$1,800 stipends, co-designed a bottom-up curriculum, and built trust through shared lived experiences. The cohort presented its findings

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to more than 30 leaders across city, county, and community agencies, earning praise as a new standard in civic engagement.

Due to its success, the City funded PECAC 2.0 to develop transportation policy recommendations. The second cohort dedicated over 60 hours to learning, conducting focus groups, and presenting proposals to advisory committees and city departments.

The model's impact extended countywide: the Sonoma County Office of Equity adopted it to strengthen outreach, and PECAC-informed efforts helped secure \$6.1M in state funding for climate resilience projects. To date, 28 of 64 planned landscape projects have been completed, saving over two million gallons of water and creating nearly an acre of habitat.

PECAC proves that centering underrepresented communities isn't just equitable—it's transformative.

Petaluma's Journey Toward an Equitable, Sustainable Future

Petaluma's commitment to climate resilience took a major step forward when a 14-member team—including residents, businesses, grassroots organizations, and city leaders—successfully secured a Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT) grant from the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

Their goal: partner with multidisciplinary experts to envision Petaluma as an equitable, regenerative, and carbon-neutral city. The SDAT process focused on two priorities—creating “15-minute neighborhoods” where daily needs are accessible by walking or biking, and reducing carbon emissions in an equitable, economically responsible way.

Building on Petaluma's 2019 Climate Emergency Resolution, the project was deeply grounded in community engagement. A 40-person stakeholder bus tour, a town hall attended by more than 350 residents, pop-up events, and targeted Spanish-language outreach ensured inclusive input. These efforts informed recommendations that were incorporated into the Climate Blueprint, General Plan Update, and Active Transportation Plan.

The outcomes are already visible: fare-free public transit launched in July 2024, Safe Streets programs are improving pedestrian infrastructure, and urban greening projects—supported by EPA and regional partnerships—are expanding access to parks and tree cover. Mixed-use development efforts, such as River Park, reinforce local living and sustainable mobility.

The SDAT process set a new standard for inclusive, participatory urban planning. Petaluma now aims to institutionalize these recommendations through zoning reforms, expanded bike networks, and sustained community input.

By aligning systemic planning with local voices, Petaluma is proving that small cities can lead the way in equitable climate action.

Re-envisioning the Petaluma Fairgrounds

Faced with the expiration of the lease between the City of Petaluma and the 4th District Agricultural Association in 2023, the future of the 55-acre Petaluma Fairgrounds became a flashpoint of community debate. Long-standing frustrations over limited public input, demographic shifts, and evolving community needs led the city to take bold action: convening a resident-led, demographically representative Fairgrounds Advisory Panel in partnership with Healthy Democracy.

The 36-member panel, selected by lottery and supported with stipends, childcare, transportation, and tech access, reflected the full diversity of Petaluma. Over 90 hours of structured deliberation, panelists engaged experts and one another to answer the core question: How might we use the City's fairgrounds property to meet the evolving needs of our community?

The process—marked by transparency, accessibility, and inclusion—resulted in a three-part series of reports featuring guiding principles and specific recommendations, including:

- Preserving agricultural uses and the annual fair
- Creating a year-round farmers market
- Establishing an emergency evacuation center
- Implementing sustainable noise mitigation strategies

The city adopted eight guiding principles based on the panel's work and committed to using them in future redevelopment.

By centering community voices and removing participation barriers, Petaluma not only navigated a contentious issue but also set a precedent for collaborative decision-making

grounded in equity, transparency, and shared values.

Port St. Lucie, Florida

Port St. Lucie defies the traditional South Florida origin story. Founded in 1961 as a retirement community without job centers, parks, or core infrastructure, it has evolved into one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation through innovation, collaboration, and resident-driven leadership. Now the third-largest city in Florida, PSL is reshaping its future with a focus on sustainability and quality of life.

Major efforts include one of the largest septic-to-sewer conversion programs in the country and the creation of Naturally PSL: Green Spaces and Places, a resident-led initiative to protect 744 acres of conservation and recreation land. Stormwater improvements, water quality protections, and trail expansions reflect PSL's deep commitment to environmental resilience.

At the heart of this transformation is a culture of civic engagement. Annual Citizen Summits, City University, Youth Council, and neighborhood-based initiatives ensure all voices help shape the city's future. With inclusive leadership, transparent governance, and a community-first approach, PSL is setting a new standard for how diverse, fast-growing cities can thrive—resilient, connected, and forward-thinking.

Naturally PSL: Green Spaces and Place

Port St. Lucie's non-traditional beginnings have left lasting impacts on its growth and natural environment. Incorporated in 1961 and systematically divided into 80,000 quarter-acre lots, the city's early development as a retirement haven led to rapid residential growth and fragmented open space.

As the city grew, leaders worked to retrofit

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infrastructure for parks, jobs, and conservation. Yet with over 250,000 residents today—and nearly 50,000 added since 2020—land scarcity and concerns about disappearing green space intensified. At the 2023 Citizen Summit, residents ranked Neighborhood Parks and Natural Preserves as their top priority.

In response, the city launched Naturally PSL: Green Spaces and Places, guided by the concept of High-Performance Public Spaces (HPPS), which combine stormwater management, recreation, conservation, and economic development in multi-functional spaces.

Through a partnership with the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, the city engaged over 900 residents in interviews, walking tours, and design sessions, resulting in resident-driven projects like Buzz Stops, Explore PSL, and a Green Land Bank.

Formally launched at the 2025 Citizen Summit, Naturally PSL includes trail maps, a Conservation Corps, and a Stewardship Award program. More than a program, it represents a resident-led movement to create a resilient, sustainable, and vibrant future—rooted in deep connection to place and community.

Improving Water Quality and Supply

Ensuring clean, reliable water for residents and ecosystems is a core priority for Port St. Lucie's future. The city faces mounting pressures from stormwater runoff, nutrient pollution, and aging septic systems. In response, Port St. Lucie has adopted a comprehensive approach that integrates infrastructure upgrades with robust community engagement.

A flagship effort is the St. Lucie River/C-23 Water Quality Project at McCarty Ranch, which transforms 1,871 acres into a natural filtration and water storage facility. This project captures and filters six billion gallons



of water annually, preventing 55,000 pounds of nitrogen and 14,000 pounds of phosphorus from entering the river—while also serving as a future alternative water source. Rarely attempted at the municipal level, it reflects Port St. Lucie’s leadership and innovation.

The city’s Septic-to-Sewer Conversion Program, with over 10,700 conversions since 1999, has diverted more than 20 billion gallons of wastewater and removed over two million pounds of nitrogen from entering surface waters.

Public engagement is central to these efforts. Initiatives like Lunch & Learn events, Water Woman outreach, the “Drop Savers” Poster Contest, and the St. Lucie Water Champions program connect residents to their local ecosystems through hands-on learning and environmental stewardship.

At the annual Citizen Summit, residents interact directly with project leaders, helping shape the city’s future. Together, through forward-thinking infrastructure and deep public participation, Port St. Lucie is building a cleaner, more resilient water future.

Addressing Environmental Challenges through Outreach and Partnerships

As environmental pressures grow, Port St. Lucie is responding with strategic partnerships and strong community engagement. Keep Port St. Lucie Beautiful (KPSLB) is a flagship initiative that mobilizes hundreds of volunteers each year through citywide cleanups, Adopt-a-Street programs, and anti-litter campaigns. The Tree Giveaway Program, held twice annually, expands the urban canopy while fostering civic pride.

The Annual Hurricane Expo equips residents with disaster preparedness knowledge through expert-led presentations, an Exhibitor Hall of readiness solutions, and interactive community forums. Developed

in response to community-identified needs, the Expo promotes household resilience and strengthens sector-wide emergency response.

Through the Resilient St. Lucie initiative, the city partners regionally to address shared climate risks. A 2021 Resilience Steering Committee now leads multi-agency efforts to develop a countywide Resilience Plan by 2026—supported by citizen science contributions that track local flooding in real time.

In 2021, Port St. Lucie hosted the Smithsonian Water/Ways exhibition, partnering with the Oxbow Eco-Center to offer educational programming and eco-tours on water conservation and environmental stewardship.

Programs like Naturally PSL and the Conservation Corps engage residents in restoring green spaces, while Stewardship Awards honor sustainability leaders. Outcomes include 75,000+ trees planted, thousands of volunteers activated, expanded environmental education, and increased federal/state funding.

Port St. Lucie’s proactive, partnership-based approach continues to build a cleaner, more resilient, and sustainable future.

Seattle, WA

Seattle’s story is one of transformation, complexity, and the enduring strength of community. Rooted in a layered past—home to the Coast Salish peoples, built by immigrant labor, and defined by waves of cultural and technological change—the city continues to evolve. With a projected population of one million by mid-century, Seattle faces both great opportunity and serious challenges. Through intentional planning and collective action, it aims to build a future grounded in equity, sustainability, livability, and resilience.



At the heart of this vision is the Department of Neighborhoods, which has spent decades building civic capital by centering relationships and supporting long-term, community-driven solutions. In Seattle, civic engagement isn't a side effort—it's embedded in how the city works. Across neighborhoods, residents are actively shaping policies, leading local projects, and building the civic infrastructure that helps communities thrive. The following three initiatives illustrate how this culture of engagement comes to life and strengthens the city from the ground up.

Food Action Plan

Seattle's Food Action Plan recognizes that food is never just food—it is culture, history, health, economic opportunity, and a reflection of past and present injustices. In 2008, the Seattle City Council passed the Local Food Action Initiative, which led to the city's first Food Action Plan in 2012. That plan expanded food access and informed new environmental policies, but systemic inequities—especially along racial and economic lines—remained. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and deepened those vulnerabilities, disrupting supply chains and intensifying food insecurity.

To address these challenges, Seattle updated the plan in 2024 with a renewed focus on equity, sustainability, and resilience. More than 250 stakeholders shaped the new plan through deep listening and dialogue. The city partnered with trusted consultants to engage BIPOC farmers, mutual aid leaders, and Native and Indigenous food experts. Guided by principles from the Environmental Justice Committee, the city collected over 100 hours of feedback through 21 interviews, 14 focus groups, and five surveys.

The final plan outlines four goals, eight strategic priorities, and 50 actions—including reducing food-related emissions, supporting local supply chains, and promoting regenerative agriculture—to build a food

system that supports all Seattle communities, in good times and bad.

Transportation Electrification Infrastructure Plan

Transportation is the largest source of climate pollution in Seattle, responsible for nearly two-thirds of the region's greenhouse gas emissions. In response, Seattle City Light (SCL) launched its first Transportation Electrification Strategic Investment Plan (TEISP) in 2020. Over four years, the utility installed more than 905 EV chargers, supported fleet transitions, and helped electrify public transit. As of 2024, one in four new vehicle sales in King County was electric.

Despite this progress, affordability and access remain major barriers—especially for low-income and BIPOC communities disproportionately harmed by transportation-related pollution. In 2024, SCL began updating the TEISP by partnering with the Department of Neighborhoods, Community Liaisons, and nonprofits to ensure the plan reflected community priorities. Outreach efforts reached 500+ residents across 10 neighborhoods and 24 cultural communities through events, interviews, surveys, and hands-on activities.

Community feedback emphasized equitable access, ongoing in-person engagement, and investments in local organizations and youth workforce development. Conversations led to actionable opportunities—like exploring EV charger installations at neighborhood centers.

Adopted in January 2025, the updated 2025–2030 TEISP prioritizes grid readiness, public and workplace charging, green workforce pathways, and sustained partnerships with community-based organizations to ensure inclusive and resilient transportation electrification.

Cedar River Watershed Tours

Clean, safe drinking water flows effortlessly from Seattle's taps—but it begins 30 miles away in the Cascade Mountains. Seattle is the only U.S. city to own and manage more than 90,000 acres of watershed, producing some of the highest-quality water in the country. Yet back-to-back droughts have underscored how climate change is putting this precious resource at risk. In response, Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) launched the "Seattle Water Needs You" campaign.

To move from messaging to meaningful connection, SPU and the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) piloted a 2024 program inviting BIPOC, immigrant, refugee, elder, youth, and mobility-challenged residents on guided Cedar River Watershed tours. Co-designed with seven community organizations, the nine tours featured multilingual programming, culturally relevant meals, and accessible transportation.

A total of 290 residents participated, many visiting the watershed for the first time. Tours were conducted in English, Spanish, Tagalog, and Traditional Chinese. DON streamlined reimbursements so small nonprofits could purchase food in advance.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive: 86% rated the experience as "Excellent" and 98% would recommend it. For many, it rekindled cultural and environmental connections. In 2025, SPU and DON are expanding the program—offering youth career pathways, family programming, and deeper partnerships across city agencies.

Snyder, TX

Snyder is a close-knit West Texas community with approximately 11,200 residents. Often described as "90 miles from anything," the city lies between Lubbock, Abilene, and Midland, serving as a hub for surrounding farming and ranching areas. Its history is rooted in trading

and ranching, later shaped by an oil boom. Today, Snyder balances tradition and progress with a strong emphasis on sustainability, community partnerships, and civic pride. Programs like Take Back Sparkle City, its largest annual cleanup, continue the legacy of its 1968 All-America City win.

Local leaders engage residents through public meetings, stakeholder interviews, surveys, and creative outreach such as mural unveilings and youth-led recycling initiatives. Tools like SeeClickFix, Connect Snyder, and STEAM Team initiatives promote two-way communication and help ensure the inclusion of underserved communities. Snyder's civic capital thrives through collaboration among local government, schools, businesses, and volunteers. Grounded in data, creativity, and strong relationships, Snyder continues to build a clean, connected, and welcoming "Sparkle City."

Keep Snyder Beautiful

In 2023, Keep Snyder Beautiful was established to unite city, chamber, school, and economic development leaders under a shared mission of litter prevention, beautification, and recycling. But the heart of the effort is community-driven—powered by volunteers, youth, nonprofits, and local businesses working side by side. Programs are supported by city staff and funded through local budgets, grants, and in-kind contributions, but the true engine is people power.

When residents voiced concerns about litter, illegal dumping, and neglected properties, the city listened—and Take Back Sparkle City was born. This community-wide cleanup, launched in 2023, empowers neighbors to help neighbors before code enforcement steps in. Volunteers collect items like tires and appliances, and others trim overgrown weeds. The results are stunning: over 317 tons of trash removed, tall weed violations down 66%, and 35 dilapidated structures cleared—restoring



860.18 tons of debris and a renewed sense of pride.

Community engagement continues to grow with projects like the Fall Sweep, which drew 60 volunteers to clean, plant flowers, and beautify downtown. Local artists painted dumpster murals, with four more large-scale pieces underway. A new landscaping ordinance encourages tree preservation, and a facade grant program, boosted by community support, awarded \$389,000 to 23 businesses.

Together, these efforts are transforming Snyder—not just physically, but socially—into a more united, welcoming, and vibrant place to live.

The Snyder Bottle Recycling Challenge

As Snyder deepened its commitment to environmental stewardship, it recognized a need to improve recycling habits and engage youth in sustainability. In response, the City of Snyder partnered with the school district and the Keep Snyder Beautiful committee to launch the Annual Bottle Recycling Challenge—a hands-on, educational program that promotes recycling through friendly competition and community spirit.

Held each fall in celebration of Snyder Recycles Day and America Recycles Day, the challenge encourages students to collect plastic bottles and drop them off during a three-day event. What began in 2012 with 300 participants and 3,000 bottles has grown into a citywide tradition. In the past five years alone, residents have recycled more than 665,000 bottles, including 137,640 during the most recent challenge.

Students trade bottles for raffle tickets and prizes, while the Snyder Intermediate STEAM team leads outreach efforts—creating artwork, PSAs, and educational lessons for younger students. Tours of the city’s recycling center and landfill further deepen public understanding.

SNYDER, TEXAS

✦ SPARKLE CITY ✦

*Congratulations to our fellow
All-America City finalists!*



Learn more about the City of Snyder at snydertx.gov



Supported by schools, city departments, local businesses, and volunteers, the program has expanded to include year-round drop-off bins and inspired additional environmental projects. More than a recycling event, the Snyder Bottle Challenge is a community-powered movement fostering civic pride and lifelong environmental responsibility.

Prepared and Proactive: Snyder Builds a Stronger Emergency Management System

Previously, Snyder’s emergency management was housed within the fire department, limiting the ability to take a proactive approach. In response to growing public concerns and increased natural threats—including hotter, drier conditions, wildfires, severe storms, and 441 earthquakes in the past year alone—the City of Snyder and Scurry County partnered to create a full-time Emergency Management Coordinator position in early 2024.



This role oversees disaster preparedness, response planning, and public outreach. Within the first year, Snyder has become a model for other communities. Key accomplishments include restoring NIMS compliance among city staff, updating the Emergency Operations Plan, and becoming the first jurisdiction in the region to transition to the state's new THAPs/ESF emergency management framework.

Public engagement has grown through readiness guides, workshops, and booths at community events. Monthly meetings bring together over 50 leaders for feedback and tabletop exercises. Mutual aid agreements and MOUs with businesses have strengthened supply access during crises.

The coordinator has participated in two major disaster deployments, bringing back real-world insights. With over 100 staff training hours and 320+ hours of coordinator education, Snyder is enhancing community readiness, forging strong partnerships, and setting a regional standard for emergency preparedness.

Statesboro, GA

Statesboro, Georgia, a city of about 32,000 residents in Bulloch County, blends rural heritage with emerging urban vitality. Home to Georgia Southern University, the city enjoys a lively academic influence while retaining the traditional charm of its surrounding farmland and dirt roads. Over the past decade, Statesboro has evolved significantly—fueled in part by the arrival of a \$7.6 billion electric vehicle plant bringing over 16,000 jobs—reshaping its economy and diversifying its community. Amid this growth, the city has intentionally cultivated a civic identity centered on inclusivity, equity, and shared progress.

Community engagement has flourished through both grassroots efforts and city-

led commissions that encourage resident participation in addressing local issues. Programs like the Beloved Community and initiatives focused on sustainability, including GreenFest and the Statesboro Community Garden, highlight the city's dedication to dialogue, environmental stewardship, and resilience. Facing challenges like frequent hurricanes, Statesboro continues to invest in preparedness and sustainability, all while advancing a vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and forward-looking community.

Community-Led Disaster Preparedness

Statesboro's commitment to community-driven disaster resilience is exemplified by the work of Bulloch VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), a coordinated emergency response network formed in response to the growing frequency of severe storms. Once rare, hurricanes now strike the area two to three times per year, disproportionately affecting low-income and rural residents. Previously, the city lacked an organized system to respond effectively. Bulloch VOAD filled this gap by uniting nonprofits, churches, government agencies, and community groups to deliver immediate relief, coordinate long-term recovery, and ensure information sharing—even when communication systems fail.

A key feature is volunteer training through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). To date, 46 residents have been trained in debris removal, roof tarping, and other essential tasks. During Tropical Storm Debby, Bulloch VOAD launched a community mapping tool using a Google Form to track road conditions, viewed over 180,000 times in just three days. The mapping initiative has since been adopted by the Bulloch Emergency Management Agency.

To further expand its reach, VOAD has acquired a fully stocked disaster trailer and established Pittman Park Church as an emergency shelter. The Bulloch Strong Fund has raised more than \$60,000 for affected families. Looking ahead,

the organization plans to increase volunteer training, invest in equipment, and enhance mapping technology to bolster its response capacity.

Cultivating a Greener Future

In response to rapid development and environmental concerns, Statesboro launched Keep Statesboro-Bulloch Beautiful (KSBB) and the Greener Boro initiative to promote sustainability through inclusive, community-led engagement. These efforts emerged from environmental impact assessments and community feedback that underscored the need for greater green spaces, energy efficiency, and conservation.

At the heart of the initiative is the Statesboro Community Garden, located in an underserved neighborhood with limited greenspace. With accessible raised beds and ground plots, it supports low-income families, schools, and community groups. The garden also hosts workshops on composting, urban farming, and organic gardening, strengthening both environmental literacy and community bonds.

Greener Boro helps residents in low-income areas reduce energy costs by promoting efficiency upgrades and access to state and federal programs. The program also advises the city council on sustainability policies.

Annual events like GreenFest and RecycleFest foster broader community participation, while partnerships with Ogeechee Riverkeeper support waterway cleanups and pollution prevention. Tree planting efforts have added hundreds of trees to reduce heat and improve air quality, and the Garden-to-Go initiative has distributed over 500 pounds of homegrown produce to food-insecure households.

Future plans include expanding sustainability education in schools, launching a citywide composting program, and encouraging active transportation. Together, KSBB and

Greener Boro are shaping a more sustainable Statesboro.

Empowering Youth, Strengthening Community

In response to limited access for youth to education, employment, and civic opportunities, the city launched the Statesboro Youth Commission and Village Builders Initiative to engage youth and underserved families in leadership, service access, and local governance.

The Statesboro Youth Commission creates structured opportunities for youth leadership, mentorship, and policy advocacy. Participants engage in mock city council sessions, lead community conversations, and co-design life skills workshops—particularly for those aging out of foster care. Two youth-led forums have directly influenced city policies and budget priorities.

The Village Builders Initiative, developed through community input, brings essential services directly to neighborhoods with limited access. Mobile resource days offer healthcare screenings, literacy programs, job training, and school supplies, along with free meals and activities. More than 500 families have connected with up to 50 service providers at each event.

Complementing these efforts is Career Connect, a paid summer internship program for high school students that pairs work experience with mentoring and financial literacy. The Youth Council, open to students in grades 8–12, builds civic skills and gives young people a direct voice in local governance.

By prioritizing youth leadership and equitable access to resources, Statesboro is laying the foundation for a more engaged and empowered next generation.

Tallahassee, FL

In 2024, Tallahassee, Florida, celebrated its bicentennial, marking 200 years of growth from Native American and Spanish roots to becoming Florida's capital and a thriving center of culture, education, and innovation. At the heart of its evolution is a strong, collaborative community spirit committed to progress.

Over the past decade, sustainable development has taken center stage. The city has prioritized green infrastructure, clean energy, and environmental stewardship to ensure resilience for the next 200 years. Initiatives like the Urban Forest Master Plan and Clean Energy Plan aim to preserve natural ecosystems, boost solar energy use, and strengthen infrastructure against increasing climate threats, including floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes.

Tallahassee's strength lies in its partnerships. Nonprofits, universities, and businesses work alongside the city to expand affordable housing, improve public spaces, support the arts, and foster inclusive economic growth.

While challenges remain, Tallahassee remains focused forward, guided by inclusive planning and the dedication of its people.

Tallahassee's Clean Energy Plan

The City of Tallahassee's Clean Energy Plan (CEP), adopted in 2019, aims for 100% net clean renewable energy by 2050. Developed through extensive community input, the plan emphasizes sustainability, affordability, and grid resilience, especially for underserved communities. Key actions include expanding solar energy, implementing energy efficiency programs, and enhancing grid resilience with smart technologies and battery storage. Since its launch, solar capacity has tripled, and energy burdens for thousands of households have decreased. The city has also improved

energy reliability, particularly during severe weather events.

Community engagement has been central to the CEP's success. The city hosted forums, conducted surveys, and formed stakeholder advisory groups involving local universities, businesses, and advocacy organizations. Over 2,400 residents participated in surveys, and more than 300 attended public sessions. Outreach to underserved communities included translated materials and tailored workshops to ensure equitable participation.

Tallahassee's energy transition is supported by strong partnerships, including collaborations with Florida A&M University and Florida State University. The city's efforts have earned a LEED Gold certification and strengthened public-private partnerships. With continued focus on renewable energy expansion and equitable access, Tallahassee is on track to achieve its 2050 goal, fostering a sustainable, inclusive future for all residents.

The Southside Action Plan

The Southside Action Plan (SAP), launched in 2021, addresses longstanding challenges in Tallahassee's Southern Strategy Area, where decades-old policies failed to deliver results. To understand why, the city prioritized direct engagement with residents—attending community events, hosting drive-thru and pop-up engagements, and collecting feedback through surveys. This approach helped uncover current needs, build trust, and involve those often left out of planning processes.

Community leaders played a key role in encouraging participation, reinforcing the city's commitment to inclusivity. Comparing past and present input revealed persistent concerns about housing, mobility, and infrastructure—raising important questions about implementation gaps. As a result, the SAP emphasizes community-led solutions and project accountability.

TALLAHASSEE ★ AMERICA CITY ★



CITY OF
TALLAHASSEE

Since its adoption in 2023, the SAP has driven over \$200 million in public investment toward infrastructure, housing, and neighborhood revitalization. Projects include the Southside Transit Center, safety improvements, and developments like Magnolia Oaks and Ridge Road Flats, which expand affordable housing options. From 2018–2023, more than 2,100 affordable units were added, along with new investments in rental rehabilitation, homebuyer assistance, and neighborhood services.

The SAP's inclusive, data-informed approach earned the city a 2024 Award of Excellence from the Florida Chapter of the American Planning Association. Looking ahead, the plan will continue addressing resident priorities, from housing protections and job access to green infrastructure and safety enhancements.

100Parks

Access to quality parks and green spaces is crucial for community well-being, physical activity, and environmental sustainability. Tallahassee has prioritized equitable park distribution to ensure all neighborhoods, especially underserved ones, have safe and convenient access to public green spaces. Strategic investments in these areas have expanded recreational opportunities and fostered community connectivity.

The city's success has been driven by robust engagement, including public workshops, surveys, and partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and neighborhood associations. Volunteer programs, alongside youth and senior-specific initiatives, have promoted inclusion and local ownership. Neighborhood Park Advisory Committees offer ongoing feedback and advocacy.

Through collaboration and strategic planning, the city reached its 2020–2024 Strategic Plan milestone of 100 parks, adding 12 new ones during that time. Geographic data helped prioritize development in underserved

areas, such as the FAMU Way Dog Park on the Southside. Parks have been enhanced with upgraded facilities and amenities based on resident feedback, like converting tennis courts for pickleball use.

Sustainability and safety were also prioritized, with features like native landscaping, stormwater systems, and ADA-compliant walkways at parks like Bond Linear Park and Debbie Lightsey Nature Preserve. By 2023, 92% of residents lived within a 10-minute walk of a park, up from 80% in 2019. With ongoing projects, Tallahassee is committed to achieving 100% access, ensuring all residents benefit from these green spaces.

Western Riverside Region, California

The Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG) strength lies in its ability to unite cities, counties, and public agencies around a shared vision of sustainability, equity, and long-term regional resilience. Through inclusive strategic planning, robust public engagement, and collaborative initiatives like the Food Rescue Program and Love Your Neighborhood, WRCOG creates clear, actionable paths forward that reflect community priorities. Its Executive Committee—this year led by an all-female, multi-jurisdictional team—embodies the organization's commitment to diverse, inclusive leadership.

WRCOG fosters civic capital through structured community engagement, grassroots partnerships, and targeted equity strategies. Programs like the Fellowship and Clean Cities initiatives build leadership pipelines and amplify historically underrepresented voices. WRCOG's digital-first communication approach, which includes high-performing newsletters, multilingual materials, and social media collaboration, ensures transparency and accessibility. By serving as a trusted convener and equipping partners with ready-to-use resources, WRCOG

bridges sectors to address regional challenges, build trust, and create meaningful, lasting impact.

Stephen's Kangaroo Rat Habitat Conservation Plan

The challenge of balancing development with environmental protection became clear in 1988 when the Stephen's Kangaroo Rat (SKR) was listed as a federally endangered species. Development in Riverside County slowed significantly, as each project required costly and time-consuming consultations. This created major barriers, especially for underserved communities where housing and infrastructure were urgently needed.

To address the issue, the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency (RCHCA) was formed in 1991. RCHCA convened local governments, environmental agencies, academic experts, the Building Industry Association, and community members to craft a regional solution. Early on, a short-term Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) allowed limited development while a long-term strategy was created. In 1996, RCHCA adopted the full SKR HCP, aiming to permanently protect 15,000 acres as reserves while allowing development on another 15,000 acres with mitigation fees.

RCHCA engaged the public through over 40 scoping sessions and forums, addressing concerns about property rights and emphasizing the dual benefits of conservation and development. Developers supported the one-time mitigation fee model, which replaced complex federal negotiations and accelerated project timelines.

Ultimately, the plan protected 46,000 acres of habitat, led to the downlisting of the SKR to "threatened" in 2022, and helped build affordable housing and infrastructure. Unlike many conservation efforts, much of the protected land remains open for recreation,

boosting local economies. The SKR HCP stands as a national model of collaborative conservation, inspiring other regional plans in Riverside County and beyond.

Fellowships Fostering Future Public Service Leaders

Public sector agencies in Riverside and San Bernardino counties face two key challenges: limited staffing to advance critical projects and a lack of structured opportunities to prepare future leaders—particularly in energy efficiency, sustainability, and public administration. Simultaneously, local students, especially in underserved communities, struggle to find meaningful career-aligned experiences.

WRCOG's I-REN Energy Fellowship addresses these gaps by recruiting and training local university and community college students to support energy initiatives at public agencies. Fellows have contributed to municipal energy audits, climate resilience planning, and energy-saving measures. In its first year, 11 fellows supported 28 projects; in year two, 14 fellows engaged in additional initiatives. Educational partnerships, outreach in disadvantaged areas, and stakeholder roundtables ensure diverse recruitment and alignment with community needs.

Fellows describe their experiences as transformative. One shared that conducting outreach, presenting to city councils, and discussing imposter syndrome with local youth helped build confidence and critical skills. Another, now pursuing environmental law, contributed to a city's California Native Job Tolerant Policy—cementing their interest in public service.

The WRCOG Public Service Fellowship builds local capacity by placing students in city and county agencies. The program manages logistics and funds up to 100% of salaries, eliminating barriers for both fellows and hosts. Since launch, over 110 fellows have contributed

85,000+ service hours, many transitioning into full-time roles. Both fellowships exemplify WRCOG's commitment to workforce development and regional resilience.

Love Your Neighborhood (LYN) and Regional Food Rescue Program (RFRP)

Riverside County faces significant challenges related to food waste, food insecurity, and environmental sustainability. Over 6 million tons of food are discarded annually due to overproduction, supply chain inefficiencies, and unclear labeling, while illegal dumping disproportionately affects underserved communities. In response, WRCOG launched two community-focused programs: Love Your Neighborhood (LYN) and the Regional Food Rescue Program (RFRP).

LYN, developed with the Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, promotes environmental stewardship through neighborhood cleanups, educational workshops, and multilingual outreach. The program has mobilized over 5,000 volunteers, removed more than 250,000 pounds of waste, and improved stormwater pollution prevention in vulnerable communities.

RFRP bridges the gap between food generators and food-insecure populations while supporting local environmental regulations aimed at reducing food waste. Using the Careit app, the program enables real-time food donations from businesses to local food banks and nonprofits. Since launch, RFRP has rescued 6.2 million pounds of food, helped 75% of food-generating businesses meet regulatory requirements, and partnered with over 50 food recovery organizations.

Both programs prioritize equity by addressing barriers such as language, transportation, and awareness, ensuring underserved communities can participate. Through strategic partnerships, inclusive outreach, and technology-driven solutions, WRCOG is building a cleaner, healthier, and more connected region.



It's Your America

It's Your America is a deliberative democracy workshop that brings people – from across the political spectrum – together to learn about policy issues; build problem-solving skills; practice finding common ground; and make an action plan for staying engaged.



This interactive workshop:

- Helps residents connect constructively across political and social differences.
- Provides a framework for elected officials to deepen constituent engagement.
- Cultivates a sense of belonging and shared identity.
- Motivates sustained, authentic civic engagement.

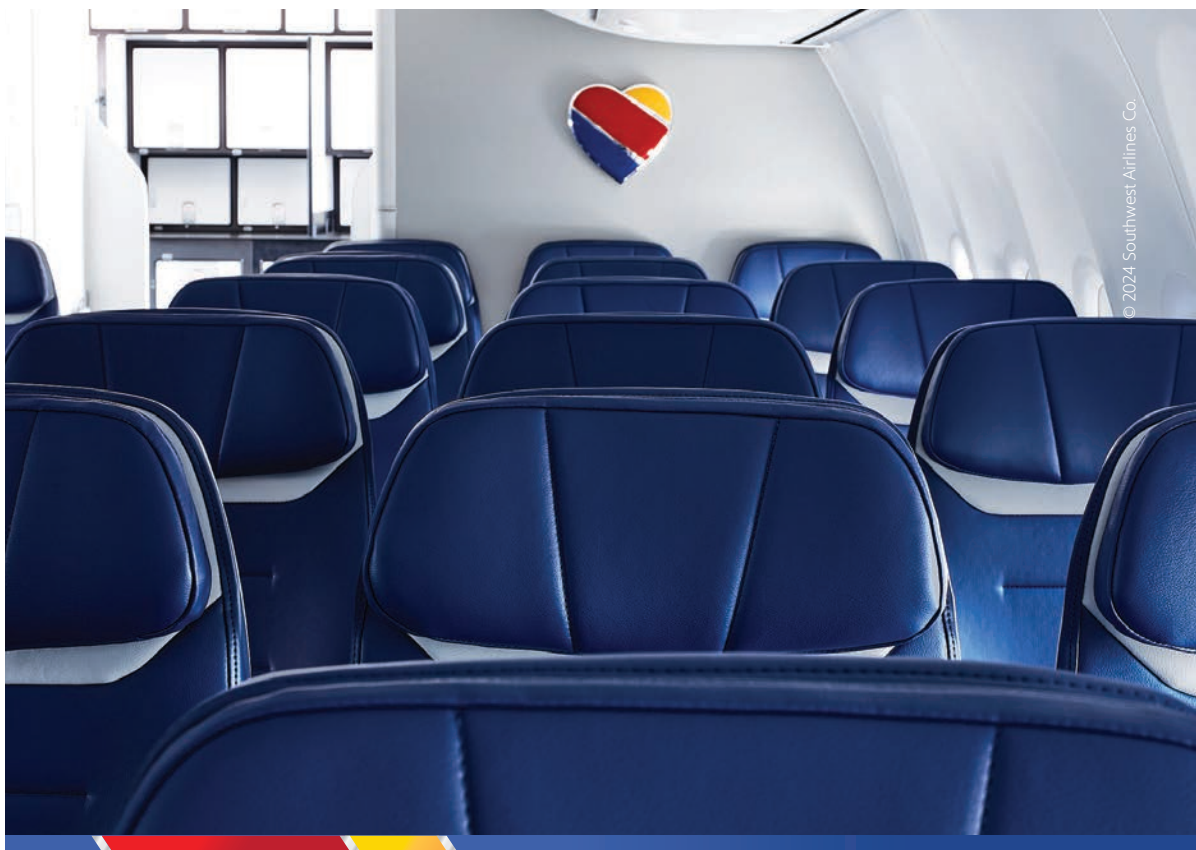
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