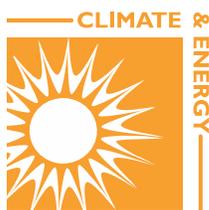




SUSTAINABILITY  
TOOLS FOR  
ASSESSING &  
RATING COMMUNITIES



# Using the STAR Community Rating System to Integrate Sustainability into Community Planning Efforts





# STAR COMMUNITIES

SUSTAINABILITY TOOLS FOR ASSESSING & RATING COMMUNITIES

**STAR Communities** is a nonprofit organization that works to evaluate, improve, and certify sustainable communities. We administer the STAR Community Rating System™ (STAR), the nation’s leading framework and certification program for local sustainability. Cities and counties use STAR to measure their progress across social, economic, and environmental performance areas. Built by and for local governments, STAR is a catalyst for local action and is transforming the way that communities address sustainability progress.

One of the top reasons that U.S. cities and counties come to STAR Communities is because they are looking for ways to strengthen and support local planning efforts. This document is designed for local government staff and planners and provides guidance on how to use the STAR Community Rating System to integrate sustainability into comprehensive, strategic, and sustainability plans.

This report was published in May 2016 and was written by Lacey Shaver and David Abell.

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**Goal Area**  
CLICK HERE TO see what we have already accomplished!

**Goal Area Acronym**  
Goal Area  
Goal Icon  
Prioritized Objective (objectives we plan to tackle in this plan)  
Goal Objective (not a current plan priority)  
Objective Number

**Prioritized Objective**  
CLICK HERE TO review how



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY INTO PLANNING</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE STAR COMMUNITY RATING SYSTEM</b>	<b>5</b>
The STAR Framework	6
STAR Tools & Resources	8
<b>WAYS TO USE STAR IN PLANNING</b>	<b>9</b>
1. Align with the STAR Framework	9
Case Study: Phoenix, AZ	10
2. Set Benchmarks & Targets	12
Case Study: Los Angeles, CA	13
3. Discover Best Practices	15
Case Study: Plano, TX	16
4. Communicate Sustainability & Engage the Public	18
Case Study: Lee County, FL	19
5. Conduct a Baseline Assessment & Identify Gaps	21
Case Study: Dubuque, IA	22
6. Integrate Multiple Topic Areas	23
Case Study: Northampton, MA	24
7. Track Implementation & Progress	26
Case Study: Washington, DC	27
<b>GET STARTED WITH STAR</b>	<b>29</b>

# Integrating Sustainability into Community Planning

Sustainability is commonly defined as the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As local governments strive to create healthy, prosperous communities with a high quality of life for their current residents, they must also prepare for the needs of the future. Addressing modern day challenges, such as climate change, an increasingly globalized economy, aging infrastructure, and income inequality requires innovation, collaboration, and lots of planning.

One of the primary ways that communities prepare for the future is through local community plans, and so it is important that communities begin to integrate the principles of sustainability into their planning efforts. In fact, the American Planning Association identifies comprehensive plans as the prime way to address sustainability in their “Sustaining Places” initiative:

Planning for sustainability is the defining challenge of the 21st century. Overcoming deeply ingrained economic and cultural patterns that result in resource depletion, climate instability, and economic and social stress requires holistic problem solving that blends the best scientific understanding of existing conditions and available technologies with the public resolve to act. Planning processes allow communities to look past immediate concerns, evaluate options for how best to proceed, and to move towards a better future. The Comprehensive Plan has the legal authority to act as the vehicle for guiding community development, the scope to cover the necessary functions and facilities, and the history of practice to inspire public acceptance of its policies. Planning can provide the necessary analysis, the requisite communitywide reflection and education, and the momentum required to respond to these monumental challenges

- David Godschalk and William Anderson, *Sustaining Places: The Role of the Comprehensive Plan*, APA Planning Advisory Services, 2012

By integrating sustainability into a comprehensive plan, a community can transition from talking about sustainability in the abstract to identifying concrete practices, implementing solutions, and measuring impact. The STAR Community Rating System™ (STAR) is a valuable tool that helps cities and counties to become healthier, stronger, and more resilient.

STAR allows cities and counties to set a clear path for sustainability and track progress towards meaningful results that save money and improve communities. The rating system provides a robust, data-driven framework that allows communities to define sustainability for themselves and then evaluate and improve economic, environmental, and social performance.

While comprehensive plans provide long-term guidance for the future development of a community, other supporting plans aid in the day-to-day implementation and management of the local government: short-term strategic plans and plans that address specific issues, such as a hazard mitigation plan, climate action plan, or sustainability plan. The measures and guidance in the STAR Community Rating System can be adapted to support all types of plans. This document will show those involved in developing or updating planning documents of all types how to use and adapt the STAR Community Rating System to meet their needs.

# The STAR Community Rating System

The STAR Community Rating System™ (STAR) is the nation's leading community-wide sustainability framework and certification program. STAR was built by and for local governments, out of an identified demand for a systematic way to define, measure, and track progress towards local sustainability.

In 2007, ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, the U.S. Green Building Council, and the Center for American Progress made a Clinton Global Initiative Commitment to Action to create a Green City Index. That same year, they launched the concept for the STAR Community Index at GREENBUILD in Chicago, IL. By 2008, they had established a formal partnership that included the National League of Cities to develop STAR.

Between 2008 and 2012, nearly two hundred volunteers representing fifty cities and counties, state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, national associations, universities, utilities, and private corporations contributed thousands of hours and diverse expertise to the development of what became the STAR Community Rating System. Serving on steering, technical, and ad hoc committees, these volunteer experts led the development of the framework, credits, methodologies for measurement, and requirements for achieving and maintaining a STAR Community Rating®.



The STAR Community Rating System was officially released in Fall 2012, and a pilot program commenced to test associated products and services, including the certification process. In Spring 2014, the Leadership Program and membership were launched. Since 2012, over fifty communities have achieved certification under the STAR Community Rating System, and hundreds of communities have used the rating system to support local sustainability.

The path to sustainability is different for every community, but communities generally take one of two approaches to using STAR. The first approach is to use the rating system as a standalone framework for local sustainability and a resource for sustainability work. The second approach is to use the STAR certification program to report progress on the evaluation measures in the rating system and then use the certification results as a management and decision-support tool.

Local governments of all sizes and resource levels across the nation are using STAR to:

- Demonstrate accountability and commitment to local sustainability;
- Strengthen local plans and policies;
- Receive national recognition for leadership and achievements;
- Improve community conditions by shifting resources and investment toward evidence-based, results-driven solutions;
- Build and strengthen partnerships within government and with community; and
- Benchmark progress against the national standard for community sustainability.

# The STAR Framework

The STAR framework integrates economic, environmental, and social aspects of sustainability and provides communities with a menu-based system to customize their approach based on local conditions and priorities. Sustainability means different things to different people, but STAR provides a customizable, data-driven approach to assessing communities’ sustainability efforts.

STAR is organized into goals, objectives, and evaluation measures; this design is intended to align with local government processes and standard practice. The structure features a set of components that reflect public sector mechanisms that are proven effective in advancing change. Terms are those commonly used by local governments and their community partners to communicate strategic objectives and desired outcomes.

The rating system’s evaluation measures collectively define community-scale sustainability and present a vision of how communities can become more healthy, inclusive, and prosperous. STAR provides a much-needed vocabulary that local governments and communities can use to more effectively strategize and define their sustainability planning efforts.

The rating system is divided into the seven thematic sustainability goal areas below. An eighth category, Innovation & Process, supports the evolution of sustainability practice by recognizing best practices and processes, exemplary performance, innovation, and regional collaboration.

Goal Area	Purpose
Built Environment	Quality, Choice & Access Where We Live, Work & Play
Climate & Energy	Increase Efficiency, Reduce Impact
Economy & Jobs	Quality Jobs, Shared Prosperity
Education, Arts & Community	Vibrant, Connected & Diverse Culture
Equity & Empowerment	Inclusion & Access for All Community Members
Health & Safety	Strong, Resilient & Safe
Natural Systems	Protect & Restore the Resources of Life



Each of the sustainability goal areas is divided into five to seven objectives, aimed at achieving community-level aspirations. These forty-four objectives each contain between eight and fifteen evaluation measures that can be used to benchmark and evaluate community progress.

Built Environment	Climate & Energy	Economy & Jobs	Education, Arts & Community	Equity & Empowerment	Health & Safety	Natural Systems
Ambient Noise & Light	Climate Adaptation	Business Retention & Development	Arts & Culture	Civic Engagement	Active Living	Green Infrastructure
Community Water Systems	Greenhouse Gas Mitigation	Green Market Development	Community Cohesion	Civil & Human Rights	Community Health & Health System	Invasive Species
Compact & Complete Communities	Greening the Energy Supply	Local Economy	Educational Opportunity & Attainment	Environmental Justice	Emergency Prevention & Response	Natural Resource Protection
Housing Affordability	Industrial Sector Resource Efficiency	Quality Jobs & Living Wages	Historic Preservation	Equitable Services & Access	Food Access & Nutrition	Outdoor Air Quality
Infill & Redevelopment	Resource Efficient Buildings	Targeted Industry Development	Social & Cultural Diversity	Human Services	Indoor Air Quality	Water in the Environment
Public Spaces	Resource Efficient Public Infrastructure	Workforce Readiness		Poverty Prevention & Alleviation	Natural & Human Hazards	Working Lands
Transportation Choices	Waste Minimization				Safe Communities	

Each of the STAR objectives contains two types of evaluation measures: community-level outcomes and local actions. Community-level outcomes are quantitative, condition-level indicators that demonstrate community progress within a STAR objective. Examples include reductions in energy use or increased transportation access.

Local actions are the things a community can do to move toward the community-level outcomes – the range of decisions, investments, programs, plans, and codes that a local community puts in place. Examples include passing a complete streets policy, providing training for police officers on non-discrimination, partnering with community groups to promote active living and physical activity, and restoring conserved land to increase natural resource resiliency.

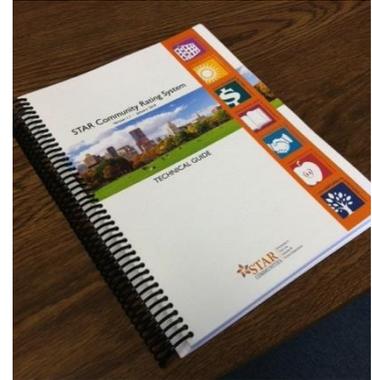
STAR’s evaluation measures can be used as planning tools to help communities to become healthier, stronger, and more resilient. The quantitative outcome measures in the rating system can be used to set future goals and targets, and the qualitative action measures provide best practices and language to address new thematic areas.

STAR measures community-wide sustainability, not just municipal sustainability. Thus, local actions focus on interventions that move the needle toward desired outcomes, and can be done by both the local government and other community groups and partners. Understanding the relationship between outcome measures and local action measures is important when evaluating what programs and policies will improve the outcome measures, and which stakeholders should be involved.

## STAR Tools & Resources

STAR Communities provides a variety of tools and resources that can be of assistance during a planning process. Some of these are available for free on STAR Communities' website and others are available through paid membership subscriptions. The STAR Community Rating System is available as a [free download](#) on the STAR website.

The Technical Guide to the STAR Community Rating System is the primary reference manual for the evaluation measures contained within the rating system. It includes over 300 pages of best practices, definitions, methodologies, and case studies. The PDF document contains links to online resources and examples such as model policy language. The Technical Guide is included with all STAR membership and affiliate subscriptions and can also be purchased as a [standalone publication](#) from the website.



During a planning process, the Technical Guide can serve as a resource for definitions and can also provide context and examples for a specific content area. For example, if you need a definition for “performance-based parking pricing,” you can consult the Technical Guide’s glossary. If you need an explanation on why climate adaptation is important to community sustainability, you can look at the Climate Adaptation objective under the Climate & Energy goal area for context, research, and case studies. If you are new to a topic area like equity, reading the Technical Guide can give you ideas for new program and policies. There is substantial background information on each STAR objective in the Technical Guide and language that will help you to explain new thematic areas to colleagues and other stakeholders.

Each objective in the Technical Guide also includes a section on Communities Leading the Way and Additional Resources. The Communities Leading the Way section offers real examples from cities and counties around the country that are succeeding in each objective. Links to plans, policies, and programs are provided to learn more about the communities’ efforts. The Additional Resources section focuses on practical references and resources for local government staff and sustainability practitioners.

STAR [membership](#) provides access to other tools and resources, such as the crosswalk spreadsheet, mapping handbook, and members-only webinars and educational events. The customizable crosswalk spreadsheet is a project management tool that communities can use to align local plans and policies with the evaluation measures in the rating system. The mapping handbook provides additional guidance and methodologies for measures requiring spatial analysis and includes an example map for each measure. Additionally, membership includes a limited amount of technical assistance from STAR staff.

To support the rating system’s use, STAR Communities publishes [case studies](#) and [articles](#) highlighting best practices and success stories from communities across the nation and also holds periodic [webinars](#) and educational offerings. Information on case studies and [upcoming webinars](#) can be found on the website and is also distributed to all email list subscribers.

# Ways to Use STAR to Support Planning

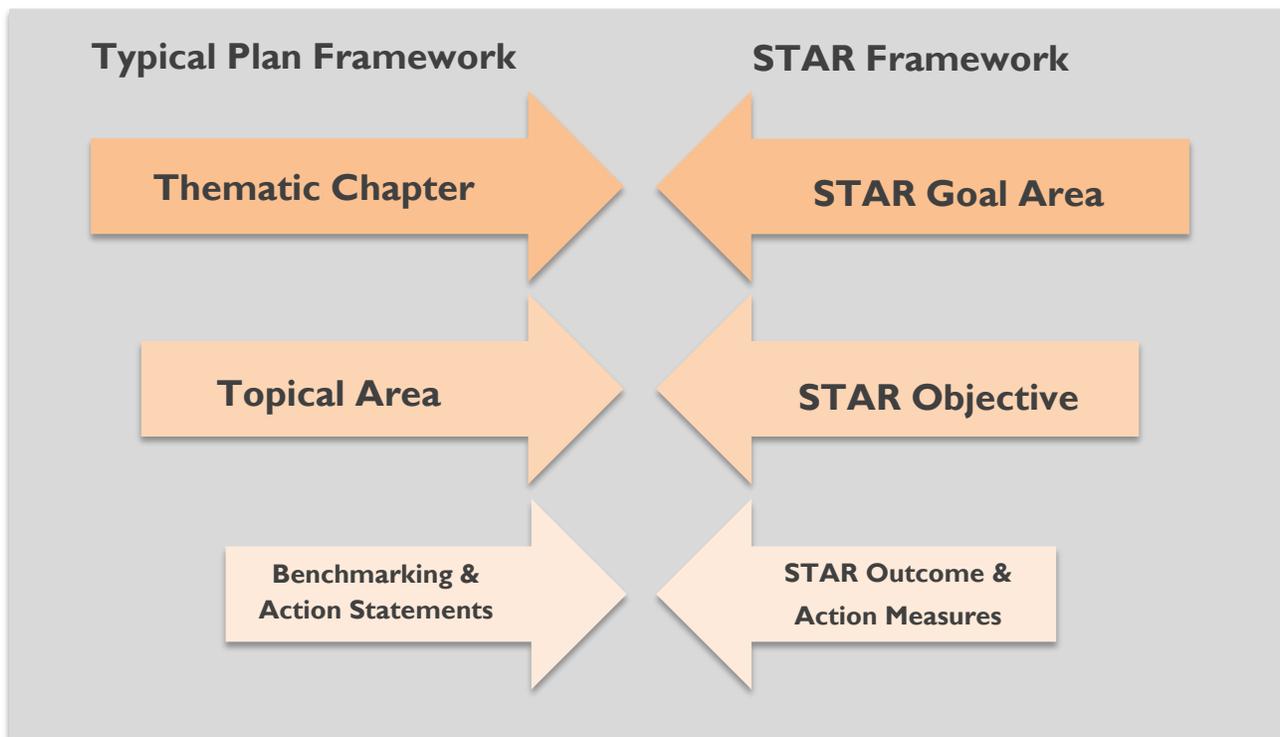
The following sections provide ideas for the specific ways to use the STAR Community Rating System in a planning process, along with case studies for each example.

## 1) Align with the STAR Framework

STAR was designed to support communities as they make plans and guide the allocation of resources and the patterns of future development. STAR's framework is deliberately designed to mirror the structure of a community plan, and includes the policy mechanisms, programs, and strategies that a local government can use to affect change within a topic area.

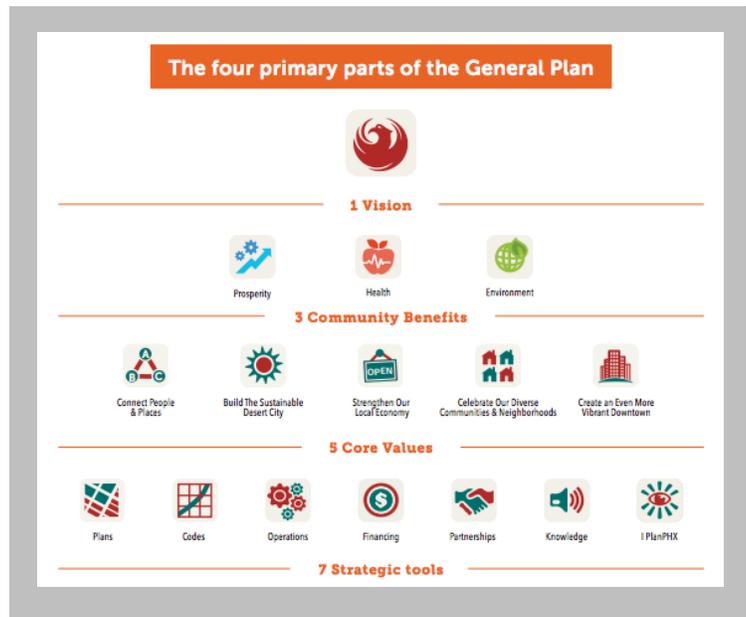
Community plans tend to share a common structure whether they are comprehensive, strategic, or sustainability-focused. A plan typically begins with a big-picture assessment of current community conditions and puts forth a vision for future community development. Then the plan is divided into thematic chapters, such as land use or economy, which serve as the organizational structure of the plan. The thematic chapters may be broken down further into topical areas such as housing, transportation, and workforce readiness. The chapters detail the specific policies and actions that will address targeted community needs and set benchmarks for measuring progress.

The STAR framework can provide the structure of a community plan and can also help users to understand the relationship of different sustainability themes. If you are just starting out, you can use the STAR goals and objectives to frame out chapters and identify content areas. Then you can use STAR's outcome and action measures to build out the chapters. The quantitative outcomes can become targets and benchmarks, while the actions can provide ideas for policies, programs, and other tools.



## CASE STUDY: Phoenix, AZ

In Phoenix, AZ, city staff used the STAR Community Rating System as a guide and a framework when performing the ten year update of their comprehensive plan, PlanPHX. Over the 2.5-year process, the City held 150 meetings and collected input from 1,300 web users that generated 9,700 big ideas to consider. The feedback resulted in the vision of a “connected oasis” with a vibrant and connected network open space.



Five core values underpin the plan, which aims to: celebrate diverse communities and neighborhoods, strengthen the local economy, connect people and places, build the sustainable desert city, and create an even more vibrant downtown. “The Mayor charged us with making the plan more user-friendly, since the previous plan was 500 pages,” said Josh Bednarek, Principal Planner for Phoenix. “We really liked the layout and framework that STAR provides in allowing the reader to dive into the topic area and very quickly figure out what we were going to do to address that.”

Alignment with PlanPHX also helped with data collection for STAR. As Rosanne Albright, Brownfields Program Manager, said, “Since Phoenix is such a big city that has so many programs going on at once, it really helped that all the departments were already collecting data for the general plan. In some cases, especially in the area of equity, STAR helped to identify new metrics that we can track to make sure we are meeting our goals.”

“STAR’s Outcomes provided metrics that really dovetailed well with our five core values,” said Bednarek, “It was a really valuable tool for us to highlight where our plan lined up and point out things we hadn’t addressed, either because they aren’t required by state statute or the ideas hadn’t come up in conversation with the public.”

A Vision for the Future of **Phoenix**...

## OUR CONNECTED OASIS

Phoenix will continue to be like no other city in the world – a place steeped in history, defined by its beautiful desert landscape, activated by unique neighborhoods and businesses and embodied by a pervading sense of opportunity and equity. Phoenix will become an even greater city by building on its existing wealth of assets and by enhancing residents’ opportunities to connect to these assets and each other. By becoming a more “connected” city, Phoenix residents will benefit with enhanced levels of prosperity, improved health and a thriving natural environment. Bringing the great people and places of this flourishing desert metropolis together is what will solidify Phoenix’s identity as the Connected Oasis.



STAR can help a community identify areas that haven't been looked at before or that haven't been considered part of sustainability. The framework and evaluation measures can broaden the definition of sustainability in a community beyond just the environment. "The citizen-based Phoenix Environmental Quality Commission recognized the value of STAR's comprehensive sustainability measures and were advocates of utilizing STAR measures within the general plan," said Albright.

Now that the general plan is complete, attention is focused on implementation. Phoenix achieved a Certified 3-STAR Community Rating in July 2015. "How we're going to measure success, that's where STAR will really come in handy," said Bednarek. "In some cases, we're not quite there yet, but thanks to PlanPHX and STAR, we're well on our way."

STAR COMMUNITY RATING	Connect People and Places	Build the Sustainable Desert City	Create an Even More Vibrant Downtown	Celebrate Our Diverse...	Strengthen Our Local Economy
<b>Built Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compact &amp; Complete Communities</li> <li>- Housing affordability</li> <li>- Infill &amp; Redevelopment</li> <li>- Public Spaces</li> <li>- Transportation Choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community Water System</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Housing Affordability</li> <li>- Infill &amp; Redevelopment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ambient Noise &amp; Light*</li> <li>- Public spaces</li> <li>- Compact &amp; Complete Communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Infill and Redevelopment</li> </ul>
<b>Climate &amp; Energy</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Climate adaptation*</li> <li>- Greenhouse gas mitigation</li> <li>- Greening the energy supply</li> <li>- Resource efficient buildings</li> <li>- Resource efficient public infrastructure</li> <li>- Waste minimization</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Industrial sector resource efficiency</li> </ul>

Left: STAR objectives aligned with the five core values in PlanPHX.

Below: This snapshot from PlanPHX shows multiple alignments with the STAR framework. The title aligns with the STAR objective of Infill & Redevelopment, while Measures for Success are similar to STAR Outcomes and Policies and Actions mirror STAR Actions.

### REDEVELOPED BROWNFIELDS

Brownfields are vacant or underutilized plots of land often thought to be unusable due to contamination. These properties are an untapped economic resource that when redeveloped, will stimulate the local economy and environment. Brownfields are a resource and a liability for the city. They are a resource because their redevelopment contributes to the elimination of blighted property, creation of jobs, and generation of tax revenues. Brownfields are liability because they pose a risk to public health, create barriers in maximizing existing infrastructure and have unknown environmental conditions and liability.

THE GOAL

**Commit to brownfield cleanup and redevelopment.**

MEASURE FOR SUCCESS

Increase the **percentage of development** on brownfield sites.      **Develop an inventory of brownfield sites.**

#### Land Use and Design Principles

**LAND USE** Promote new development located on infill, previously developed, brownfield, and greyfield sites.

**LAND USE** Recommend land-use actions that promote restoration and more efficient use of brownfields within Phoenix.

**DESIGN** Restore brownfields sites with uses that support the character and vision of the surrounding area.

#### Policy Documents and Maps

[Del Rio Area Brownfields Plan](#)  
[Brownfields Land Recycling Program](#)

#### Tools: Policies and Actions

**PLANS** Create general guidelines for identifying and redeveloping brownfield areas.

**PLANS** Continue to implement and pursue funding for the Del Rio Area Brownfields Plan.

**OPERATIONS** Utilize the city's existing Brownfields Land Recycling Program by creating more incentives to encourage the private sector to reuse brownfields.

**FINANCING** Defray the costs of new infrastructure by pursuing Brownfield Assessment and cleanup funding (grants, revolving loans, tax credits, and supplemental funding) through the EPA, State, and other environmental agencies.

**FINANCING** Increase funding for development of a city-wide brownfields inventory.

**PARTNERSHIPS** Collaborate with state and federal authorities to advance brownfield cleanup and redevelopment.



**Rio Salado Audubon Center**

Constructed on a brownfield site, the [Rio Salado Audubon Center](#) restored the barren site using native landscape and earned the first LEED Platinum Certification within the city of Phoenix. The Center's sustainable features include a photovoltaic system, a waste water recycling system, low water use fixtures, [rain gardens](#) and [rain barrels](#) to capture rain and run-off water and energy efficient mechanical and electrical systems.

## 2) Set Benchmarks & Targets

A common complaint about community plans is that they can be too visionary with no real means built in to track progress towards the lofty goals. This problem can lead to plans being scrutinized and dismissed, diminishing the importance of creating plans. The metrics in the STAR Community Rating System can help to integrate targets and benchmarks into community plans and address these complaints.

An additional benefit of having quantifiable benchmarks in a community plan is that it allows you to communicate to decision makers and the public that you're making progress.

Communities looking for metrics and targets should look at STAR outcomes, which are measurable condition-level indicators that depict a community's progress toward a preferred state or condition within the STAR objective it supports. Outcomes are quantitative metrics and are represented as trend lines, targets, or thresholds in the rating system. Each outcome has an associated performance threshold, which is required to receive credit for STAR certification. These performance thresholds can be used to identify appropriate targets for plan metrics.

For example, if diversity in transportation modes emerges as a community priority for a new plan, you could consult STAR's Built Environment goal area, where there is an objective on Transportation Choices that can provide guidance and metrics. The purpose of this objective is to "Promote diverse transportation modes, including walking, bicycling, and transit, that are safe, low-cost, and reduce vehicle miles traveled." There are four quantitative outcomes that can be inserted into a community plan as a metric for tracking community progress towards this objective.

### **Outcome 1: Mode Split**

10 points

**Achieve the following thresholds for journey-to-work trips:**

- **Drive alone maximum: 60%**
- **Bike + Walk + Transit minimum: 25%**
- **Bike + Walk minimum: 5%**

To use the STAR outcome to the left, in the transportation section of the plan, the community's goal could be written out as: "We will strive to reach the following journey-to-work mode split over the next ten years: a drive alone maximum of 60%, a bike + walk + transit minimum of 25%, and a bike + walk to work minimum of 5%."

The metrics used in the STAR Community Rating System were established by topical area experts, with input from community staff, and are widely accepted as national standards and benchmarks for community sustainability that all local governments should strive to meet. By integrating STAR metrics into local planning documents, a community can efficiently take advantage of the time and efforts spent creating the metrics and better concentrate their community's resources on implementing new programs and policies.

## CASE STUDY: Los Angeles, CA

On April 8, 2015, Mayor Eric Garcetti released Los Angeles' first-ever sustainable city plan (pLAN). The pLAN is the first truly comprehensive effort to identify the city's needs and opportunities across the environmental, social equity, and economic spectrum. It contains both short term and longer-term targets across 14 categories and utilizes an [interactive online dashboard](#) to track progress of quantifiable measures.

The ambitious plan includes dozens of major benchmarks for Los Angeles to reach by 2025 and 2035, such as reducing the amount of imported water used by Angelenos, improving air quality levels, and reducing greenhouse emissions over the next two decades.

The plan is arranged around the three pillars of sustainability. The big question while crafting the plan was "How do we have a city where people thrive, rather than just be accommodated?" [according](#) to Matt Petersen, Sustainability Director for Los Angeles. "That means we have to help the environment, we have a robust economy and we create an equal opportunity for every Angeleno."

During plan development, Los Angeles' sustainability staff and planners used the tools and resources provided in the basic STAR Membership subscription to identify benchmarks and targets. Concurrent with the stakeholder engagement process, the Mayor's Office of Sustainability worked in [collaboration with Global Green USA](#) to identify how the STAR Rating System criteria could strengthen and enhance the pLAN's approach to local needs while reflecting national best practices.

[Global Green](#), supported by STAR Communities and the Summit Foundation, cross-referenced the overall pLAN structure, topics, metrics, and types of suggested initiatives with the STAR goals, categories and outcome criteria. Through this process, Global Green and city staff arrived at a series of beneficial modifications, adjustments, and fine tunings to the pLAN.



The City is tracking performance on an [online dashboard](#), which includes targets and benchmarks, along with current progress. Some of these targets are aligned with the national standards found in STAR.



*Los Angeles' target for food access is inspired by HS-4: Food Access and Nutrition Outcome 3, which says "Demonstrate an increase over the past three years in the percentage of residents within a walkable 1/4 mile of a healthful retail food outlet."*

*The target for park access is inspired by BE-6: Public Spaces Outcome 2, which says "Demonstrate that housing units in the community are located within a 1/2 walk distance of a public space based upon population density as follows:*

- *High or Intermediate-High: 85%*
- *Intermediate-Low or Low: 70%"*



The plan's "Lead by Example" category includes a commitment to achieving a 4-STAR Community Rating by 2017 and a 5-STAR Community Rating by 2025. STAR certification will help the City to track pLAN performance and sustainability progress in the future. To Lead by Example means encouraging and cajoling peer cities to step up their game, and achieving STAR certification will help Los Angeles not only to demonstrate accountability to residents but also to show national leadership.

Walker Wells, director of green urbanism at Global Green USA, [said](#) "Over the next year, we at Global Green are excited to be supporting the Office of Sustainability as they implement the pLAN and begin to layer in the data for the STAR outcomes and actions. Let's hope that others are inspired to follow the city's leadership."

### 3) Discover Best Practices

Local actions describe the range of decisions and investments that a local government or community can make, or the activities that they can engage in, that are essential to achieving desired outcomes. Local actions in the rating system focus on the key interventions that move the needle towards STAR’s identified outcomes. Communities looking for best practices or ideas for actions for a new plan can look to STAR’s local actions for best practices.

There are nine defined action types in the rating system. These action types can help you to identify different types of strategies for each content area within STAR. For example, if you are looking for ways for your city council to support sustainability work, start by reviewing STAR’s Policy & Code Adjustment actions. If you are looking for ways to engage with community stakeholders and partners, look at STAR’s Partnerships & Collaboration actions.

Action Types	
Education and Outreach	
Plan Development	
Policy & Code Adjustment	Preparatory
Partnerships & Collaboration	
Practice Improvements	
Inventory, Assessment or Survey	
Enforcements & Incentives	
Programs & Services	Implementation
Facilities & Infrastructure Improvements	

STAR’s local actions offer standards and language that are supported by experts in the topic areas and are being utilized by cities and counties around the country. You can modify the language from actions and then add them into your plan, including local details or specifics where necessary. For example, within the Built Environment goal area, the Transportation Choices objective provides guidance and example actions for communities that are prioritizing diverse transportation modes. See the below table for ideas on how to adapt the STAR actions for a plan.

STAR Action Type	STAR Action Measure	Corresponding Line in Plan
Policy & Code Adjustment	Subdivision and other development regulations require walkability standards that encourage walking and enhance safety	The City will adopt new codes to require walkability standards such as ADA compliance, sidewalks on both sides of roadway, and roadways designed for a max speed of 25 mph in subdivisions.
Practice Improvements	Local government offers employee incentives to encourage commuting by modes other than single-occupancy vehicles	The City will provide incentives, such as free bus passes, to employees that use alternative modes of transportation.
Plan Development	Adopt a bicycle and/or pedestrian master plan that prioritizes future projects to improve safety and access to non-motorized transportation	The City will adopt a bicycle plan with a target mode share for biking, a safety goal and a target crash reduction.

## CASE STUDY: Plano, TX

When Plano launched its comprehensive plan update in 2009, the city was at a transition point. The city's existing plan from 1986 came from a perspective of generating new growth – in fact, much of Plano's housing stock was built between the 1970s and 2000s. Now, less than 1% of the land zoned for residential is vacant and Plano has three times the national average amount of retail space. With the population still growing but becoming more diverse and aging along with the shopping malls, Plano needed a new vision.



Plano's new comprehensive plan, Plano Tomorrow, focuses on maintaining and redeveloping its current assets in order to remain a vibrant, resilient, sustainable and complete city in the future. The recession drove home this vision; while the Dallas-Fort Worth area fared relatively well compared to other parts of the country, the City of Plano chose to be fiscally conservative and ensure the city was prepared to respond to the changing national economic conditions. During that time, some major projects, such as the comprehensive plan, were suspended to ensure the city maintained the highest quality of services for Plano residents.

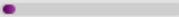
When the planning effort restarted in 2013, it was well timed to utilize STAR. Plano was accepted into STAR Communities' Leadership Program, which provides extensive technical and peer support for communities seeking STAR certification. The Long-Range Planning Division led the completely in-house comprehensive plan process while the Department of Environmental Health took the lead on collecting data for STAR.

"The cross-department collaboration on these parallel efforts was extremely useful," said Lori Schwarz, AICP, Comprehensive Planning Manager for the City of Plano. "It ensures that departments across the city are moving in the same direction and that important conversations were had before plans and programs are established."

The Plano team discovered that STAR helped to both provide a structure and build out the details of the plan. The five pillars that organize Plano Tomorrow—Built Environment, Social Environment, Natural Environment, Economic Environment, and Regionalism—roughly correspond to the STAR goals areas. Within the pillars, there are ten components that match up with many STAR Objectives, such as Transportation Choices and Workforce Readiness.



To support the visions established by the five pillars and ten components, Plano staff used STAR to round out the plan and topical identify areas where they had not received public feedback. They also used STAR to capture ideas that were already in practice or under discussion, but had not yet been formally placed in a planning document, such as creating a 20-year solid waste plan or conducting a community health impact assessment.

Redevelopment of Regional Transportation Corridors Action Statements	Status
Develop a U.S. Highway 75 Corridor Plan to guide infill and redevelopment efforts.	PENDING 
Update the <a href="#">Urban Centers Study</a> to reevaluate locations that may serve as catalysts for redevelopment.	PENDING 
Adopt regulatory strategies that permit or incentivize residential, employment, and other diverse uses in locations identified for compact complete centers.	PENDING 
Develop design guidelines for residential development adjacent to expressways that reduce noise and provide for proper filtering, ventilation, and exhaust of vehicle air emissions.	PENDING 

In other areas, STAR provided ideas for new policies and actions. For example, under Land Use & Community Design, there is a strategy to redevelop regional transportation corridors that includes a vision to “encourage reinvestment and redevelopment of identified regional transportation corridors to create cohesive developments that incorporate well-designed housing, commercial, and retail opportunities.” One of the four action statements to support this vision is derived from STAR’s “Compact & Complete Communities” Objective.

The Compact & Complete Communities Objective played another role in the plan. The objective requires that applicants complete a spatial analysis to identify and then analyze compact and complete centers, which are human-scaled, walkable centers and neighborhoods that connect to transit, offer diverse uses and services, and provide housing options for families of all income levels. Plano staff used the analysis performed for STAR to update the City’s future land use map and to identify areas for future compact, mixed use development.

In May 2015, the City of Plano received a Certified 4-STAR Community Rating. The data collected for STAR will be used to evaluate the success of Plano Tomorrow’s implementation as part of the city’s performance measures program. “STAR provides a good measuring stick for the long-term,” said Schwarz, “It will help us determine if we are meeting our goals.”

## 4) Communicate Sustainability & Engage the Public

An integral part of all planning processes is engagement of key stakeholders, including the public, other local government departments, and planning committees. Effectively engaging stakeholders requires clear communication about the goals of the plan and topical areas to be explored. The STAR Community Rating System provides a framework that can be used to guide those discussions.

Utilizing the STAR goal areas—Economy & Jobs, Equity & Empowerment, etc.—can be a useful way to frame public meetings to attract people that are interested in specific topics. The goal areas can also be used as ways to categorize topical planning subcommittees and when developing outreach and marketing materials. The rating system is broad and encompasses many different themes; bringing the STAR framework chart to meetings can help stakeholders to understand where and how their work fits into the community’s sustainability work. Finally, using the leading national framework for sustainability can lend credibility to the process.

The Innovation & Process section of the rating system also provides guidance for best practices in Public Engagement. These best practices provide a template that can be used throughout the planning process to guide all public engagement.

IP-1b: Public Engagement		
	Required Best Practices	Description
✓	Inclusiveness	Community decision-making processes are as inclusive as possible with deliberate, substantial effort focused on engaging community members who are typically underrepresented in decision-making and those who are likely to be significantly impacted by the outcome
✓	Context-Sensitive Processes	Use creative and effective outreach, collaboration, and engagement tools, exercises, and technologies tailored to the context of the process to engage community members in ways that meaningfully shape the outcome
✓	Transparency	Set clear, authentic expectations about how decisions will occur and how community engagement will influence the outcome
✓	Accountability and Implementation	Community decision-making processes lead to action, keep decision-makers accountable, and continue to engage the public in implementation
✓	Capacity Building and Empowerment	Support development of community leaders and groups empowered to take action and shape future decision-making with increased public input



# CASE STUDY: Lee County, FL

In Lee County, FL, sustainability and planning staff used the STAR framework of goals and objectives to explain sustainability to the community, both in publications and in public meetings.

Lee County began the process of creating a Sustainability Plan in 2010 by establishing the Office of Sustainability. The new office completed a preliminary sustainability assessment in 2012 and then the County started to collect data for the plan, partnering with over 35 organizations and developing goals. STAR provided the framework for the sustainability assessment. Having a nationally recognized framework and evaluation measures provided an “out-of-the-box” solution that helped the new office to quickly complete the assessment and move into the plan writing phase.

The goal of the Sustainability Plan was to identify synergies to maximize benefits for Lee County. This meant prioritizing goals and capitalizing on opportunities to achieve the most benefit for the greatest number of stakeholders. At the time, a sustainability office was an unfamiliar concept in Southwest Florida, so a secondary goal for the plan was to create a tool to demystify and somehow quantify community sustainability.

The infusion of the STAR methodology in the community led to unprecedented collaboration amongst local partners, fueling the creation of and demand for the community’s first sustainability plan. In one public workshop in March 2013, nearly 80 community members showed their support for the Sustainability Plan, CompleteLee. The purpose of the workshop was to educate community members about sustainability and get their input on the development and prioritization of goals in the Plan. Participants were asked to rank priorities within the environment, society and economy pillars using the STAR framework. Index cards with the STAR objectives were used to lead exercises to sort and prioritize content areas.

**Goal Area**  
CLICK HERE TO see what we have already accomplished!

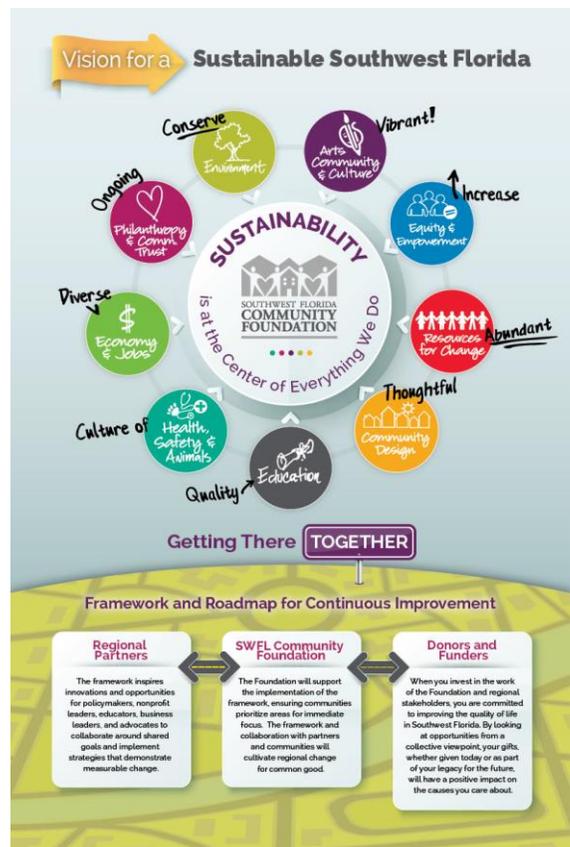
Goal Area Acronym	Goal Area	Goal Icon	Objective Number	Goal Objective (not a current plan priority)
BE - BUILT ENVIRONMENT	CLIMATE & ENERGY	HEALTH & SAFETY	GOAL AREA	GOAL OBJECTIVE
Be-1 Ambient Noise & Light	Ce-1 Climate Adaptation	Ee-1 EQUITY & ENGAGEMENT	GOAL ICON	Prioritized Objective (objectives we plan to tackle in this plan)
Be-2 Community Water Systems	Ce-2 Greenhouse Gas Mitigation	He-1 Active Living	GOAL OBJECTIVE	Goal Objective (not a current plan priority)
Be-3 Compact & Complete Communities	Ce-3 Greening the Energy Supply	Ne-1 Green Infrastructure	Objective Number	Goal Objective (not a current plan priority)
Be-4 Housing Affordability	Ce-4 Industrial Sector Response	He-2 Community Health & Health System	Goal Objective	Goal Objective (not a current plan priority)
		He-3 Civil & Human Rights		
		He-4 Food Access & Nutrition		
		Ne-2 Invasive Species		
		Ne-3 Natural Resource		

**Prioritized objective**

The Lee County sustainability office spent a significant amount of time engaging and educating the public on the importance of sustainability. For example, they developed a short but powerful video of community leaders from groups such as the United Way and the Chamber of Commerce discussing why sustainability was important to them and their work.

The office used a variety of outreach strategies to give residents multiple opportunities to learn about sustainability and participate in the development of the plan and setting of priorities. Strategies included:

- A public workshop focused on narrowing priorities;
- A detailed five-part survey that received more than 1,000 responses;
- A three-week virtual Lee County Town Hall campaign;
- A series of face-to-face business and community leader interviews representing each of the Sustainability Plan goal areas;
- Interviews with Lee County Department Directors and key staff; and
- Public presentations in a variety of forums throughout Lee County.



In February 2014, Lee County achieved a Certified 3-STAR Community Rating. While the CompleteLee plan did not end up being ratified by the County, it has since been officially transferred to the Southwest Florida Community Foundation, where it is being used as a guide for sustainability progress not only in Lee County, but in a five-county region.



## 5) Conduct a Baseline Assessment & Identify Gaps



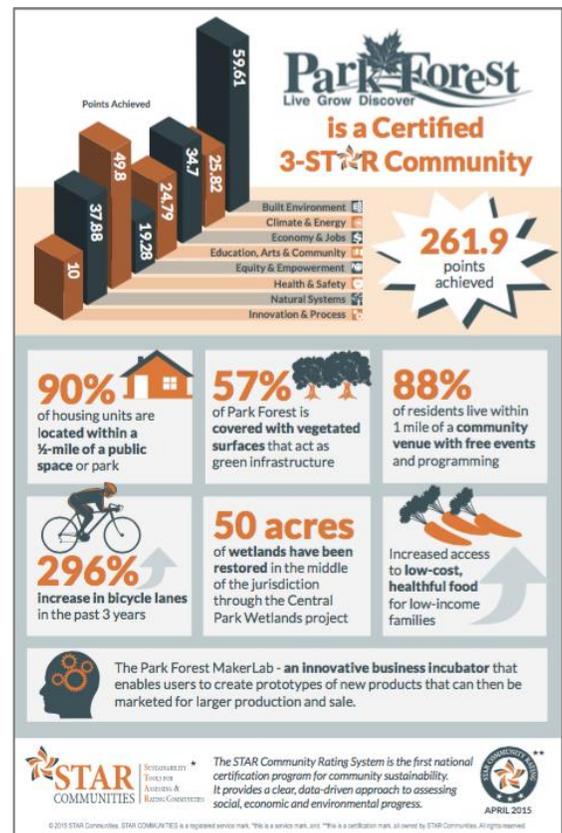
Successful plans contain accurate baseline information detailing where a community currently stands in order to more accurately plan for future growth and development. That is why whenever a community begins a new planning process, a substantial amount of effort is spent on research and data gathering. However, communities often have trouble determining what metrics to use to first establish a baseline and then set targets for improvement.

By going through the STAR certification process and obtaining an independent third party verification of current local sustainability, communities develop a robust hub of baseline data and a suite of corresponding performance metrics to integrate within the plan. Additionally, since STAR standards are used by communities across the country, they can compare their progress with other communities.

U.S cities and counties of all sizes and resource levels have achieved certification under the rating system. Communities begin by aligning their existing programs, policies, and plans with STAR. Then they gather data on the evaluation measures of their choice from the rating system, enter the data into STAR's online data entry and reporting platform, and submit their online application for verification. The STAR Technical Team performs a robust verification process to ensure that the community meets STAR's performance thresholds and assigns a STAR Community Rating®, which lasts for 3 years, at which point the community is expected to report on progress and recertify.

Many communities have reported efficiencies and benefits from collecting the information for STAR certification in tandem with a planning process, since significant resources are already being invested to conduct community research and gather information. In addition, you may find that integrating the standard set of metrics found within the STAR Community Rating System into a community plan during the data gathering process saves valuable time and limited resources.

In addition to providing a set of measures to track progress, STAR Certified communities report that the certification process itself provides a comprehensive assessment of community strengths and gap areas. By analyzing their certification results, communities can identify strategic actions for future investment.



## CASE STUDY: Dubuque, IA



STAR certification can help a community to set a baseline, identify gaps, and prioritize next steps, like in Dubuque, IA, where certification helped to determine the need for a community-wide equity initiative and identify gaps that are now being addressed by community working groups.

Over the past decade, Dubuque has seen the makeup of its population start to shift—the overall population is aging and the percentage of minorities is increasing. In 2012, the City recognized that the changing demographics were starting to have community-wide consequences. Businesses identified retaining a diverse workforce as their top challenge, neighborhoods were struggling with shifting demographics, and individuals had trouble accessing essential services.

With a shared desire to understand challenges and engage residents in the discussion, community leaders came together. The local government partnered with the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, the faith community, nonprofit, philanthropy, and business leaders to create a new community-wide equity initiative called Inclusive Dubuque. The intent was to form a group that could challenge social and economic structures and to organize community members to create a more equitable and inclusive city.

At around the same time as Inclusive Dubuque was getting off the ground, the City of Dubuque joined STAR as part of the Spring 2014 Leadership Program. While the City performed well overall, receiving a Certified 4-STAR Community Rating, the results confirmed what residents were seeing and feeling. Equity & Empowerment was Dubuque’s lowest scoring goal area, receiving just 42 of the 100 available points.

With the STAR baseline behind them, the city then turned to the task of interpreting results and implementing solutions. Shortly after achieving certification in January 2015, Inclusive Dubuque launched a Community Equity Profile. The profile was designed to be a process that discovered how diverse groups were affected by various systems in the community and to develop a deeper understanding of the changing landscape of the city and the needs of its citizens.

As the partnership began to collect quantitative and qualitative information on demographics and how the city’s citizens experienced and accessed services in the community, they were able to use STAR’s metrics to support the process. “While the community had been making progress towards our sustainability goals and had identified targets and best practices in some areas, we looked to STAR’s nationally-developed outcomes and indicators regarding equity to help us identify what we wanted to measure in the community equity profile, said City of Dubuque Sustainable Community Coordinator Cori Burbach.

The STAR framework provided benchmarks on data that the equity profile wanted to measure; for example, STAR contains metrics on food access and educational attainment. The STAR outcomes typically establish a community-wide benchmark—i.e. a 90% graduation rate for all students in the whole community. To get a more detailed picture, Inclusive Dubuque took a finer grain approach by further breaking down some of STAR’s metrics by race, income level, gender, and other factors.

In addition to combing state and national data sets like the U.S. Census and Iowa public health data, the Inclusive Dubuque partnership wanted to include the input of as diverse of an audience as possible. To do this they took a unique approach that lasted eight months and employed a variety of data gathering strategies. A community dialogue was held each month, with facilitators collecting the perspectives and experiences of Dubuque’s citizens. A tremendous amount of data was collected; over 600 people participated in the dialogues and over 2,000 people responded to surveys. The information is now publicly hosted on Inclusive Dubuque’s [website](#).

The final Community Equity Profile is divided into 7 categories that align with areas of the STAR framework:

- Economic Wellbeing
- Housing
- Education
- Health
- Safe Neighborhoods
- Transportation
- Arts/Culture

The focus of Inclusive Dubuque has now shifted into assessing the data and developing actions to address equity-related challenges. To take on this task, Inclusive Dubuque has formed six working groups involving over ninety residents and representatives from network partners. These groups meet monthly to set priorities, develop measurable indicators of progress, and identify partners and programs that can be engaged to affect change.

The working groups are using Results-Based Accountability, a data-driven, decision-making process to help communities and organizations get beyond talking about problems to taking action to solve problems. They will also utilize a community-involvement strategy called Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) to bring together Dubuque’s many great programs and resources to move toward a more equitable and inclusive community.





## CASE STUDY: Northampton, MA

Since Northampton, MA became the nation's first Certified 5-STAR Community in May 2014, the city has been busy using their STAR results in a number of strategic ways, including integrating multiple areas of sustainability such as climate change and public health. "Our comprehensive plan is eight years old and we are planning to revise it in two years. We did an informal internal staff assessment and board consultation on the strengths and weaknesses of the plan and used our STAR assessment to provide an outside perspective," says Wayne Feiden, Northampton's Director of Planning and Sustainability. "Both approaches led us to realize that while we were strong on climate mitigation and strong on adaptation practices, we didn't have a good climate adaptation framework."

After analyzing their current plans and efforts, Northampton decided to become more strategic about their approach to climate change by creating a climate adaptation plan. Feiden says, "We kicked off the process having the American Institute of Architects Sustainable Design Assessment Team come give us an outside perspective, and the Mayor committed us to the Compact of Mayors. We felt that we could not do a climate adaptation plan without a specific focus on public health risks."

To incorporate public health into climate change planning, the Office of Planning and Sustainability reached out to the Northampton Health Department. These two institutions have a history of working closely together; they participate in multiple partnerships such as Healthy Hampshire, which works to promote healthy and active living. They decided to work with Human Impact Partners to develop strategies to mitigate the health impacts of climate change.

Human Impact Partners developed a report for the City of Northampton that highlights locally specific health risks associated with climate change and proposes strategies for reducing vulnerabilities. A major theme of the report is that climate change disproportionately impacts the health of vulnerable populations and disadvantaged communities, including elderly, young, and low-income communities, as well as communities of color, thus amplifying existing social and health inequities.

Potential climate change impacts and health risks vary by physical location and local demographics. In the Northeast United States, impacts include an increase in extreme heat and severe weather events that will result in heavy rain and snow, affect air and water quality, and more. Some of the specific



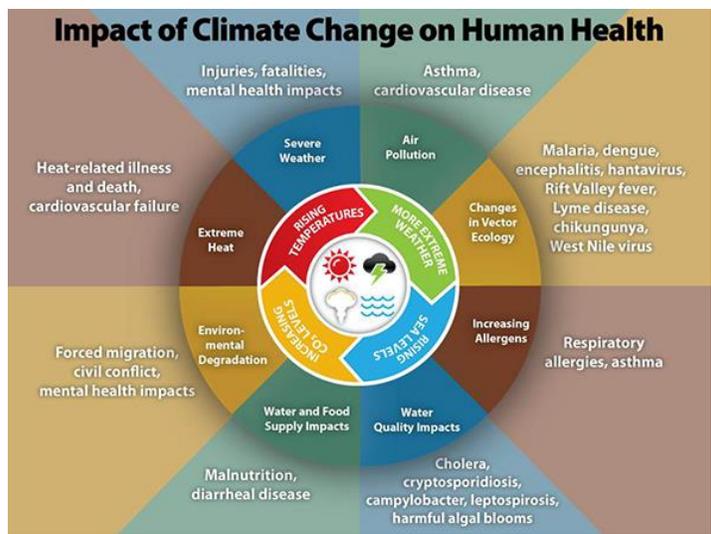
public health risks that may arise in Northampton include increased rates of heat-related illnesses, asthma, seasonal allergies, and vector-borne diseases such as Lyme disease and West Nile virus.

The report outlined 7 strategies to address these vulnerabilities in Northampton:

1. Promote community resilience to climate change to reduce vulnerability.
2. Educate, empower, and engage Northampton residents, organizations and businesses to reduce vulnerability through mitigation and adaptation.
3. Improve public health preparedness and emergency response.
4. Work in multi-sectoral partnerships (local, regional, state, and federal), identifying and prioritizing mitigation and adaptation planning and strategies with public health benefits.
5. Conduct applied research to enable enhanced promotion and protection of human health.
6. Implement policy, systems, and environmental changes at local, regional and national levels, integrating climate, health, and equity considerations into all policies and processes.
7. Strengthen public health and health care system capacity to prepare and respond to climate change events (e.g. power outages and hospitals closures) and provide continuity of medical care following extreme events (e.g. access to medication and medical records).

These strategies will be incorporated into the various climate adaptation efforts the city has underway. “We already have a number of activities in effect, planned, or under discussion, such as a formal cooling shelter, a micro-grid planned for our hospital/public works/vocational school/cooling shelter complex, and increased monitoring of mosquito populations potentially carrying diseases. We also have a focus on the effects of more frequent and larger storms that can physically and socially isolate our most vulnerable populations, and a general focus on healthy living for all populations but especially vulnerable populations,” says Feiden.

These local actions will no doubt help Northampton to be better prepared for climate change impacts and reduce vulnerabilities and health risks in the future. Continued partnership with the Northampton Health Department will also be essential to implementing the strategies the report put forward. These actions and partnerships will help Northampton to demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement and measurable sustainability progress when working towards recertification under the STAR Community Rating System.



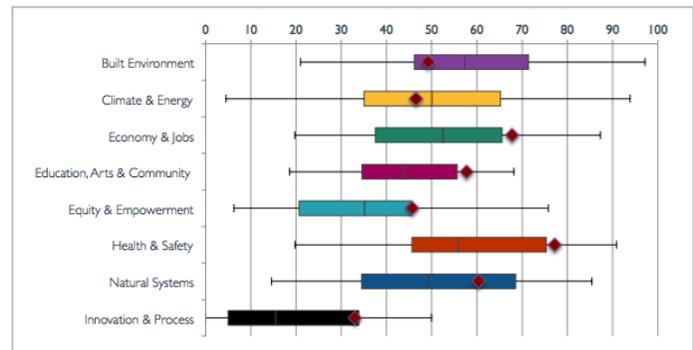
## 7) Use STAR to Track Implementation & Progress

Just having metrics and targets in a plan does not guarantee successful implementation and results. Local governments must report back to stakeholders and community members and demonstrate progress over time. STAR can help communities to demonstrate a clear commitment to transparent and accountable sustainability reporting.

The STAR Community Rating System offers clear and accessible performance measures, allowing staff, officials, businesses, and residents to easily track progress over time. STAR compares local efforts against performance outcomes and actions based on best practices used in communities across the country. The quantitative outcome measures in STAR provide standards that are nationally recognized and supported by topical area experts.

Having a STAR certification as a baseline can also help to measure the success of community plans that are put in place. One of the core values of STAR Communities is continuous improvement. STAR certification is good for three years, at which point the community is expected to recertify and demonstrate improvement. If a gap is identified after the initial certification and actions are taken to address the issue, an improvement should be seen in the next certification. On the other hand, if improvements are not being seen, then the community will know the actions that were taken were not adequate or need to be adjusted. Using metrics in this way ensures transparent, efficient governance.

Certification can also help with transparent reporting. All STAR-certified communities receive an online dashboard on the STAR website that displays their performance. Many certified communities have begun to incorporate STAR metrics into performance-based budgeting and departmental annual progress reports.

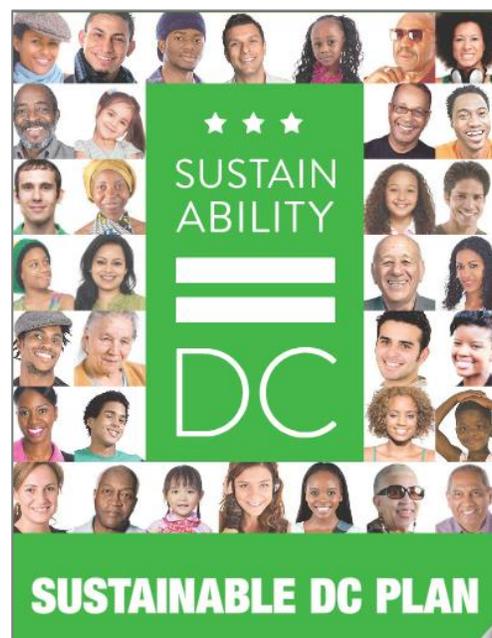


Communities can also use STAR to track performance against other certified communities. STAR Communities offers a variety of reporting technical assistance. The box-and-whisker graph at the right demonstrates community performance in pink diamonds on top of the distribution of scores of all certified communities.

Finally, STAR Communities is developing a new data visualization and annual reporting platform called the Leading STAR Community Indicators. This is designed to be a complimentary program to certification that provides a way for communities to report annually in between re-certifications, as well as a less rigorous starting point for performance management for communities not yet ready for certification. The Leading Indicators are a subset of twenty-one outcomes pulled from across the seven STAR goal areas that will also elevate the sharing and comparing of data between participating communities using common, defined methodologies. Access to the Indicators will become a standard part of STAR membership in Fall 2016.

## CASE STUDY: Washington, DC

In July 2011, then Mayor Vincent Gray announced the Sustainable DC initiative, which aims to transform the District of Columbia into the healthiest, greenest, and most livable city in the United States in one generation—just twenty years. The vision states “An international destination for people and investment, the District will be a model of innovative policies and practices that improve quality of life and economic opportunity. We will demonstrate how enhancing our natural and built environments, investing in a diverse clean economy, and reducing disparities among residents can create an educated, equitable and prosperous society.”



Washington, DC has been involved in STAR since the beginning, as a beta community and then a pilot community, and the city used the rating system as a framework and resource during the development of the Sustainable DC plan. To create the plan required 18 months of planning, over 180 public meetings and events, and almost 5,000 people consulted. The plan was released in February 2013, and five months later, a supporting package of legislation called the Sustainable DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2014 was signed into law to support the plan.

With the planning and policies out of the way, the city turned to tracking and measuring performance. In September 2014, Washington, DC demonstrated their commitment to measuring sustainability progress by receiving a Certified 4-STAR Community Rating. They then analyzed their STAR results and focused on recommended areas for improvement. Using Sustainable DC as a foundation, and in partnership with community organizations and residents, the District has continued to implement strategies and programs to address areas of concern.





Every year, the city puts out an annual report to the community to report on progress. Many of the metrics used in the progress reports mirror outcomes and actions in the STAR Community Rating System. Progress reports are prominently displayed on the Sustainable DC website and include bright eye-catching graphics (like the infographic to the left). Summary and detailed reports are available to provide different levels of analysis for different audiences. At the end of each progress report, a full list of plan actions and associated statuses are listed (graphic below).

There is much progress to report! Since 2014, 80% of the 143 actions in the Sustainable DC Plan are underway, another 15% are complete and 86% of actions in the Plan have been included in agency fiscal year performance plans. Ten task forces have also been developed to make recommendations to tackle the Plan's toughest actions.

Moving forward, the District will add to their annual reporting efforts using the Leading STAR Community Indicators.

This chart lists progress made on all 143 actions in the Sustainable DC Plan. For more details on the progress of an individual action, please visit [www.sustainabledc.org/planprogress](http://www.sustainabledc.org/planprogress). A list of acronyms can be found at [www.sustainabledc.org/acronyms](http://www.sustainabledc.org/acronyms).

**PROGRESS KEY**

- Not started
- Initiated
- Moderate progress
- Significant progress
- Complete

ACTION	TIME FRAME	LEAD AGENCY	PROGRESS
<b>GOVERNANCE</b>			
<b>Goal 1: Expand District Government leadership to implement the Sustainable DC Plan.</b>			
1.1 Dedicate District Government staff and funding to implement the Sustainable DC Plan, track progress, and make results publicly available.	Short	EOM	●●●●
1.2 Implement a process to collect, analyze, and report data to ensure progress toward goals and targets by prescribed dates.	Short	EOM	●●●●
1.3 Identify existing laws, regulations, and policies that conflict with sustainability goals and areas where new authority is required.	Short	EOM	●●●●
1.4 Expand public/private collaboration to meet sustainability goals.	Short	EOM	●●●●
1.5 Expand sector-based sustainability pledges and challenges to promote adoption of sustainable practices.	Short	EOM	●●●●
1.6 Continue annual "Budget Challenge" competition for innovative sustainability projects within District Government.	Medium	EOM	●●●●
<b>JOBS &amp; THE ECONOMY</b>			
<b>Goal 1: Grow and diversify DC's business sectors for sustained economic prosperity.</b>			
1.1 Complete a review of regulatory reform options to make it easier to do business in the District.	Short	DCRA	●●●●
1.2 Formally recognize corporations that meet independent social and environmental performance standards.	Medium	DCRA	●●●●
1.3 Use anchor institutions to create local markets for sustainable enterprises.	Medium	OCP	●●●●
<b>Goal 2: Expand the number and range of jobs available to District residents and ensure access to new jobs through appropriate skills training.</b>			
2.1 Improve integration of sustainable jobs training into school curricula to expose schoolchildren to new careers.	Short	OSSE	●●●●
2.2 Partner with the Workforce Investment Council to develop targeted workforce development strategies.	Short	DOES	●●●●
<b>HEALTH &amp; WELLNESS</b>			
<b>Goal 1: Inspire healthy, active lifestyles for all residents, regardless of income, ability, or employment.</b>			
1.1 Expand public park access and programming to promote healthy lifestyles through physical exercise.	Short	DPR	●●●●
1.2 Invest in a public health campaign to promote the benefits of healthy eating and active living.	Short	DOH	●●●●
<b>Goal 2: Create safe environments that are conducive to healthy living.</b>			
2.1 Develop a "Healthy by Design" program for new affordable housing projects, with priority focus in low-income and underserved neighborhoods.	Medium	DCHA	●●●●
2.2 Complete a feasibility study to understand the environmental, economic, and social barriers to healthy lifestyles that are specific to the District.	Short	DOH	●●●●
<b>EQUITY &amp; DIVERSITY</b>			
<b>Goal 1: Ensure that all school-age children in the District are educated in sustainability and prepared for a changing green economy.</b>			
1.1 Modernize all public school buildings.	Medium	DGS	●●●●
1.2 Increase the quality and number of Early Childhood Development Centers.	Short	DME	●●●●

# Get Started with STAR

We hope that this guide has provided you with lots of ideas on how the STAR Community Rating System can support and enhance your community's planning efforts. Whether you want to align your plan with the STAR framework, discover best practices and action ideas, or set benchmarks and measure progress, STAR can help you get there. The measures and guidance in the rating system can be adapted to support all types of plans. STAR provides a robust, data-driven framework that allows communities to define sustainability for themselves and then evaluate and improve economic, environmental, and social performance.

To learn more about the framework, [download](#) the STAR Community Rating System for free from the STAR Communities website. STAR also publishes occasional free case studies and webinars on best practices under the [Discover Best Practices](#) section of the website. You can also sign up for the STAR newsletter to be alerted of future case studies and webinars.

To support the needs of different communities, STAR Communities offers multiple subscription services and packages for local governments. STAR [membership](#) is the most basic way for a community to join the network of communities leading the way in sustainability practice. Membership is designed as an introduction to the STAR Community Rating System and a way to support and be involved in the on-going research and development for communities who are not pursuing certification. It includes basic trainings and resources such as the Technical Guide to the Rating System that can be used to support your planning efforts.

If you are interested in performing your first baseline sustainability assessment by pursuing [STAR Certification](#), you will need access to STAR's custom reporting tool. You can either upgrade your membership and work on your own towards certification, or consider joining the STAR Community Leadership Program, which runs twice a year. The Leadership Program is a one-year all-inclusive package that provides extensive staff support to a cohort of communities as they pursue STAR certification for the first time. The [STAR website](#) can help you to determine which path is right for your community.

If you are not a representative of a local government, but your organization, company, or institution wants to be a part of the STAR network, you can join the [STAR Affiliate program](#). Affiliates gain access to tools and resources and can serve on STAR's technical and governance committees.

Both STAR Member Communities and Affiliates can receive limited technical assistance via phone and email from STAR staff. STAR Communities can also help to organize and run a custom [workshop](#) for your city staff or other stakeholders. If you would like to discuss ways that STAR can help support your local planning effort, STAR staff members are available to help and answer questions.

Please contact STAR at 855-890-STAR or [info@starcommunities.org](mailto:info@starcommunities.org) for assistance.

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  - Image 3: photo provided by City of Northampton
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  - Climate Effects and Health [graphic](#) by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Page 28:
  - Sustainable DC plan cover by [City of Washington, DC](#)
  - Image from Sustainable DC [photo gallery](#)
- Page 29:
  - Images from Sustainable DC Plan Progress Reports by [City of Washington, DC](#)