Across the Chicago Region, municipalities are voluntarily taking steps to become more sustainable and help their communities become healthier, safer, and more beautiful places to live. The Greenest Region Corps is a program designed to bring talented professionals into Chicago-area municipalities for one year. During their service, these individuals work in a full-time capacity to accomplish the sustainability goals and objectives of their host communities. As a team, Corps members gain valuable professional experience, contribute to collaborative progress across the region, and get sustainability done at a local level.

“GRCorps has been a tremendous opportunity for the City of Highland Park to help bring the City’s Sustainability Plan goals from planning to action. By providing the City with a skilled GRCorps volunteer, we are achieving many of our sustainability goals that we previously didn’t have enough manpower to complete as efficiently. This has been a tremendous program and a great value to the City of Highland Park.”

--Rob Sabo, Assistant City Manager, City of Highland Park
In 2014, the Mayors Caucus developed the Greener Region Compact (GRC) to support and guide communities in planning for sustainability. The GRC fosters regional collaboration by identifying broad consensus sustainability goals and initiatives to achieve them. With 128 communities in formal support of the GRC serving 6 million residents, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus comprises the largest regional municipal sustainability collaborative in the United States.

The Greener Region Compact outlines 49 high-level goals in 10 different categories. The Compact then expands upon each goal by offering objectives and strategies that municipalities can employ to work towards their desired goals.
THE GREENEST REGION CORPS

From Planning to Action

The Need for Dedicated Sustainability Professionals

While many communities have identified sustainability as a priority in their communities, a large majority have reported that lack of staff time and other resources is a significant barrier in reaching their goals.

In 2018, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus partnered with AmeriCorps and the U.S. EPA to develop a program to address these limited municipal resources. The program selects talented professionals with experience and expertise in sustainability to dedicate a year of service towards improving the sustainability of the Chicago Metropolitan Region. GRCorps Members are placed in municipalities and partner organizations, where they work in a full-time capacity to accomplish the sustainability objectives and goals of their respective community.

The AmeriCorps Pledge

I will get things done for America - to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier. I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities. Faced with apathy, I will take action. Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground. Faced with adversity, I will persevere. I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond. I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done.

"Getting Sustainability Done"

Embodying the AmeriCorps motto, "Get Things Done," Greenest Region Corps Members truly get sustainability done at a local level. The inaugural 2018-2019 Corps accomplished an impressive 205 out of the 421 objectives in the Greenest Region Compact, covering all 10 categories. Read more about the 2018-2019 Corps' achievements on the following pages.
The inaugural 2018-2019 Greenest Region Corps accomplished an impressive 205 out of the 421 objectives in the Greenest Region Compact. Their work covered topics in all 10 GRC categories. See the chart and table below for a breakdown of the GRCorps’ focus categories:

The following pages describe each category in more detail.
GRC CATEGORIES IN ACTION

**Climate**
- 12 out of 22 climate-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
  - Data collection support for greenhouse gas inventory, Highland Park, Park Forest & Evanston
  - Community education regarding climate change through interactive activities, Evanston
  - Established the first Sustainability Advisory Committee, South Barrington

**Economic Development**
- 8 out of 12 economic-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
  - Acknowledgement of sustainable business practices via sustainable business recognition programs, Evanston & Libertyville
  - Supporting of composting programs and waste hauling invoices, Highland Park

**Energy**
- 22 out of 37 energy-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
  - Assisting with SolSmart designation, Libertyville & Round Lake Beach
  - Advocating for renewable energy for businesses, Grayslake
  - Submission of an application for a Community Solar Group Buy, Highland Park

**Land**
- 43 out of 89 land-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
  - Researching Rain Ready programs to provide information, Highland Park
  - Researching pesticide application regulations, Highland Park
  - Creation of a Wetland Management Plan and a Natural Management Plan, Round Lake Beach

**Leadership**
- 10 out of 11 leadership-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
  - Presentations on climate change and waste reduction at community events, schools, and businesses, Evanston, South Barrington
  - Organization of July MMC Environment Committee Meeting, Highland Park, Grayslake
  - Event management, coordination, and speaking, SMHEC
### Mobility

18 out of 41 mobility-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
- Researching of alternative fuel vehicles for Village operations, anti-idling technology for police vehicles, Grayslake
- Researching and writing memo on elective vehicle charging stations, Grayslake
- Production of a cost-benefit analysis of EV chargers, Highland Park

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<tr>
<th>Mobility</th>
<th>43.9% Completed</th>
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### Municipal Operations

23 out of 33 municipal operations-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
- Creation of a Sustainability Plan, Round Lake Beach
- Advising of sustainability interns, Evanston
- Serving as dedicated staff member on sustainability, Grayslake & Libertyville
- Served on the Sustainability Commission and Emergency Management Committee, South Barrington

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<tr>
<th>Municipal Operations</th>
<th>69.7% Completed</th>
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### Sustainable Communities

32 out of 60 community-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
- Development of webpage, flyers, and newsletters, Round Lake Beach & Highland Park, SMHEC
- Educating public on recycling practices, Grayslake & Libertyville
- Connecting people to resources that support health and wellness, SMHEC

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<tr>
<th>Sustainable Communities</th>
<th>53.3% Completed</th>
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### Waste & Recycling

23 out of 34 waste & recycling-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
- Drafting of commercial solid waste franchise RFP, Evanston
- Educating of commercial business on free recycling options, Grayslake & Libertyville
- Institution of a new recycling program at City Hall, Highland Park

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<tr>
<th>Waste &amp; Recycling</th>
<th>67.6% Completed</th>
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### Water

14 out of 82 water-focused objectives were addressed by GRCorps members.
- Contribute local data on water supply, quality, and operations to support state and regional stewardship, South Barrington
- Educate customers about public water supply and wastewater operations through media and events, Grayslake and SMHEC
- Encourage residents and businesses to adopt green infrastructure practices, Park Forest and Evanston

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<tr>
<th>Water</th>
<th>17.1% Completed</th>
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Round Lake Beach: Wetland Management Plan

GRCorps Member Dezirae Gonzalez addressed the need for a comprehensive Wetland Management Plan in the Village of Round Lake Beach. The Village did not previously have the capacity to prioritize wetland and natural areas maintenance. Using her expertise in wildlife management and conservation, Dezirae conducted an intensive review of the community’s wetlands and channels. She identified the wetland areas throughout the Village and visited each location in order to assess the obstacles and priorities of proper maintenance. Her thorough work culminated in a comprehensive, 50 page plan that identified priority areas, outlined necessary management practices, and spelled out the financial implications of short term and long term goals. Since completing her service, Dezirae's recommendations have been incorporated into the Round Lake Beach Comprehensive Plan.
Highland Park: Chicken-Keeping Ordinance

GRCorps Member Katie Friedman was tasked with providing expertise and policy recommendations on the controversial topic of residential backyard chicken-keeping in the City of Highland Park. To assess this question, Katie conducted a thorough review of local municipal ordinances, conferred with local leaders to gather feedback on the impact of chicken-keeping on neighboring communities, and consulted state and federal public health officials and wildlife specialists in order to evaluate the public health benefits and risks associated with backyard chicken-keeping. Under the supervision of Assistant City Manager Rob Sabo, Katie summarized her findings and recommendations in a concise, two-page staff report and prepared a presentation for City Council. After the recommended regulations were approved, Katie helped to prepare a Chicken-Keeping Permit Application as well as FAQs and a Press Release for the City website.
Evanston: Sustainable Business Program

GRCorps Member Alyson Wright developed and launched a sustainable business recognition program for the City of Evanston. Prior to Alyson's involvement, the City had not engaged much with businesses. Evanston’s recognition program, dubbed Sustain Evanston, provided a means by which the City could form relationships with local businesses, understand their barriers, and promote local change. In developing a program to best fit the needs of the community, Alyson conducted extensive research, attended the Green Business Engagement National Network (GBENN) Summit, and worked closely with the City's Economic Development Department. Sustain Evanston launched in June 2019 and the recognition period ended with 17 recognized businesses.

Through the process, Alyson connected with over 50 businesses and had open discussions with them about their barriers to sustainability, what mattered to them, and how the City could best support and assist them in their efforts.
2018-2019
GREENEST REGION CORPS MEMBERS
Inspiring and Training Emerging Sustainability Professionals

Jordan Francisco, Villages of Grayslake & Libertyville

"Prior to this job, I was not well versed on the issues the Chicagoland region faced. After working almost a year in local government, I learned and was able to help find solutions to sustainability issues involving waste management, renewable energy, and how to create resilient communities."

Dezirae Gonzalez, Round Lake Beach

"Having the ability to not only attend but be a part of large events such as workshops and conferences allows Corps members to better understand sustainability and discover where their interests lay."

Jacquelin Knox, the South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium

"This program has opened my eyes to the importance of local government, and it has inspired me to take more action within my own hometown."

Katie Friedman, City of Highland Park

"My favorite part of this position was connecting with different stakeholders in the community... I was excited to engage with them, listen to their concerns and ideas, and work with them to become part of a larger effort to improve the sustainability of their community."
Alyson Wright, City of Evanston

"This program has opened my eyes to the importance of local change and the need to help communities as climate change continues to be a threat."

Andrew Brown, Village of Park Forest

"I believe the most important experience I gained was understanding the sustainability industry better and making connections in the Chicagoland area."

Kimberly White, Village of Hoffman Estates

“Local governments have a huge role in supporting and improving the sustainability of their community and the entire region, and the GRCorps was a major influence on my decision to continue my career in local government.”

Thomas Cordell, Village of South Barrington

"The Greenest Region Corps is an awesome opportunity to offer young professionals a first step into the environmental field. The program increased my knowledge about sustainability, specifically at the municipal level. It was very interesting to learn how a local government runs, and how I impacted that process. The connections I made were the most valuable asset from the experience."
The Metropolitan Mayors Caucus is a non-profit membership organization of the Chicago region’s 275 municipalities. The Caucus launched the Greenest Region Corps program in 2018 in partnership with AmeriCorps and U.S. E.P.A Region 5.

For more information about the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and its work to support Chicago-area municipalities, visit https://mayorscaucus.org/

**Contact**
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312-201-4506

AmeriCorps is a network of national service programs that each take a different approach to improving lives and fostering civic engagement. Members commit their time to address critical community needs like increasing academic achievement, mentoring youth, fighting poverty, sustaining national parks, preparing for disasters, and more. AmeriCorps provides the primary funding for the Greenest Region Corps program.

To learn more about AmeriCorps, visit https://www.nationalservice.gov/

To apply, visit https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/join-americorps

The U.S. E.P.A Region 5 has been a valuable partner to the Greenest Region Corps Program. We especially thank the U.S. E.P.A for their assistance in the design of the program and annual training of the GRCorps Members.

For more information about the U.S. E.P.A Region 5, visit https://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/epa-region-5

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