



Gold Star Standard in Energy Overview

The Gold Star Standard in Energy identifies actions and levels of performance that municipalities can and must achieve for us to reach our goals for a sustainable and low-carbon New Jersey. The award of a Gold Star indicates that a municipality is making a fair and timely contribution to the collective achievement of our sustainability goals as set forth in the [2017 New Jersey Sustainable State of the State Report](#):

1. Decrease **greenhouse gas emissions** in time to avoid catastrophic climate impacts (minimize environmental harm).
2. Increase the **renewable energy** fraction (decrease vulnerability of energy system).
3. Increase **affordability** of energy.
4. Increase **resilience** (decrease outages and vulnerability to disruptions).
5. Decrease **risk to human health** from the energy system.

The primary goal is reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and responding to this overarching imperative will help achieve all the other goals.

Since Sustainable Jersey created the Gold Star Standard in Energy in 2016, the [Clean Energy Act](#) was signed in 2018, calling for a comprehensive transformation of the state's energy system. In early 2020, [New Jersey's Energy Master Plan: Pathway to 2050](#) was released, providing a comprehensive state-wide roadmap to meet the Clean Energy Act goals and ensure 100% clean energy by 2050. In November of 2021, [Executive Order 274](#) accelerated the Global Warming Response Act (GWRA) by calling for a 50% reduction of 2006 GHG emissions by 2030.

The Dual Municipal Role

Not only do municipal operations contribute significantly to GHG emissions, municipalities also play a key role in influencing GHG-emitting behavior in the broader community. Our analysis indicates that known municipal strategies can achieve a 100% reduction of emissions from municipal operations. Municipal governments have less control over the businesses and residents in their communities, so they can be held responsible for a lower rate of GHG reductions expected from the community as a whole.

To reflect this dual role, the Gold Star Standard in Energy will be met when a municipality meets two standards:

1. [Municipal Operations action](#). To be approved for this action, a municipality must demonstrate reductions in GHG emissions from municipal operations at an average annual rate of 3.6% per year for three years (i.e., a rate amounting to 10.8% over three years or less).
2. [Community-Wide Emissions action](#). To be approved for this action, a municipality must be approved for six community energy actions. Municipalities must select two community energy actions within each category (Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy, and Transportation).

To meet the requirements of the Community-wide Emissions portion of the Gold Star Standard in Energy, municipalities must implement two actions in each of three categories – energy efficiency, renewable energy, and transportation – at the Gold Star level as described in each action.

Energy Efficiency

- [Commercial Energy Efficiency Outreach](#)
- [Residential Energy Efficiency Outreach](#)
- [Energy Assistance Outreach](#)

Renewable Energy

- [Make Your Town Solar Friendly](#)
- [Municipally Supported Community Solar](#)
- [Solar Outreach](#)

Transportation

- [Make Your Town Electric Vehicle Friendly](#)
- [Public Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure](#)
- [Electric Vehicle Community Outreach](#)

Sustainable Jersey will accept alternatives to one or more of the above actions. We will be rigorous in assessing proposed substitutes. If a municipality wishes to pursue an alternative approach, its representatives must contact us and work directly with the staff to coordinate your submission. Contact info@sustainablejersey.com or call 609.771.2938.

Community Energy Planning

Strategy Six of the New Jersey's Energy Master Plan is: "Support Community Energy Planning and Action with an Emphasis on Encouraging and Supporting Participation by Low- and Moderate-Income and Environmental Justice Communities." Community Energy Plans (CEP) are essential in implementing the State's Energy Master Plan at the local level.

The Gold Star Standard in Energy and community energy planning are very related. If a municipality is doing a CEP, they should include the Energy Gold actions and components of those actions. Likewise, a CEP can help a municipality complete Energy Gold actions and achieve the Gold Star Standard in Energy.

To create a Community Energy Plan, the municipality should complete the [Community Energy Plan Workplan Template](#). A completed workplan can be directly utilized to create the community energy plan, as seen in the [Model Community Energy Plan](#) [also available in word format upon request for easy cut and paste for each municipality].

The [Sustainable Jersey Guide for Sustainable Energy Communities](#) provides examples of high-impact activities at the local level and resources and case studies to illustrate how to achieve them. This guide includes an Appendix that shows how the State's Energy Master Plan, Sustainable Jersey actions, and the Gold Star Standard in Energy actions overlap.

Energy Data

Energy-related datasets created by Sustainable Jersey can provide insight into current trends in energy usage, electric vehicle adoption, energy efficiency efforts, and deployment of renewable energy at the municipal level in New Jersey. Analysis of the impact of outreach campaigns can help inform strategic assessment of community engagement opportunities. Data can be found on the [Sustainable Jersey Data Center](#). In particular, the following datasets may be of use in informing efforts to achieve the Gold Star Standard in Energy as well as to create a Community Energy Plan:

- [Community Profile Data by Municipality](#)
- [Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas \(GHG\) Emissions Data](#)
- [Solar Installation Data](#)
- [Energy Efficiency Program Participation \(2008-2021\)](#)
- [NJCEP Local Government Projects 2008-2021](#)