

# Ann Arbor's Green Business Challenge Toolkit

Summer 2025

## Introduction

The Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge (A2 GBC) is a recognition and certification program that honors and supports local business actions to advance sustainability. By providing recognition, technical support, and peer learning opportunities to our local businesses we can make notable progress towards our community's goal of achieving a just transition to community-wide carbon neutrality by 2030 (known as [A<sup>2</sup>ZERO](#)), while simultaneously honoring the sustainability actions of our local businesses and solidifying Ann Arbor's position as a national leader in sustainability.

A2 GBC has four certification levels—bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. The certification level that a business achieves is based on the number of points they accumulate across seven areas of sustainability - energy, water stewardship, circular economy, mobility, resilience, education, and supply chain. Some areas have more points than others, but all areas are important to fostering greater business-related sustainability. In addition to the formal certification levels, there are also recognition opportunities for those entities that improve their performance year-over-year, regardless of their status. Businesses are also able to earn “innovation” points for undertaking novel practices or implementing policies not explicitly listed in the framework.

**Table 1.** A2 GBC scoring and associated certification levels.

Level	Point Range
<b>Bronze</b>	141-176
<b>Silver</b>	176-227
<b>Gold</b>	228-280
<b>Platinum</b>	281-352

All seven areas have a point of contact in the Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations that businesses can reach out to with questions or for support. Table 2 identifies points of contact for each area of the A2 GBC. Participants are also welcome to contact [sustainability@a2gov.org](mailto:sustainability@a2gov.org) with more general questions.

**Table 2.** Technical Assistance Contacts for A2 GBC.

AREA	NAME	EMAIL ADDRESS
<b>Circular Economy</b>	Genevieve Rattray	GRattray@a2gov.org
<b>Energy</b>	Joe Lange	JLange@a2gov.org
<b>Mobility</b>	James Burnham	JBurnham@a2gov.org

Resilience	Bryce Frohlich	Bfrohlich@a2gov.org
Water Stewardship	City of Ann Arbor Water Department	Water@a2gov.org
Education	Jordan Larson	Jlarson@a2gov.org
Supply Chain	James Burnham	JBurnham@a2gov.org

[The City of Ann Arbor’s Office of Sustainability and Innovations along with Ann Arbor SPARK are pilot testing the A2 GBC in 2024. The goal is to establish a long-term program that helps businesses advance their sustainability practices, recognize high performers, and draw attention to the incredible sustainability work happening in the city and broader region. Given this is a pilot program, participants in the first year will be directly engaging with the City and SPARK to refine the program, having numerous opportunities to provide real-time and continuous feedback on strengths and areas of improvement for the program. In addition, all 2024 A2 GBC participants, regardless of their certification level, will be honored at a fall celebration for their contribution to making the A2 GBC a success.]

## Background

In April 2020, the City of Ann Arbor published [A<sup>2</sup>ZERO](#), Ann Arbor’s living plan for becoming carbon neutral in a just and equitable way by the year 2030. The A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Plan focuses on seven overarching strategies and forty-four actions across all sectors and segments of society to achieve this goal. One of the actions in the A<sup>2</sup>ZERO plan calls for designing and launching the Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge (A2 GBC).

A2 GBC is a sustainability-centered certification program that **ANY** Ann Arbor business with a physical space in the City can participate in. A2 GBC is for local businesses:

- Looking to improve their sustainability performance,
- Seeking support in undertaking new or advancing existing sustainability activities,
- Eager to gain recognition for their sustainability commitments, or
- Willing to share their sustainability practices with peers.

A2 GBC has seven areas where businesses can earn points—energy, water, circular economy, mobility, resilience, education, and supply chain. Four of the seven areas have a “baseline,” which is a requirement that businesses must achieve before earning points in that category (circular economy, energy, resilience, and water stewardship). More details about the A2 GBC, including technical fact sheets, the registration portal, links to technical assistance, events and upcoming activities, and more can be found on the [Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge](#) website.

The A2 GBC is a pilot program that will run from May 2024 – September 2024. After completion of the pilot, the program will be evaluated, re-designed, and launched as a formal program of Ann Arbor’s Office of Sustainability and Innovations. Early participating businesses will be recognized as foundational A2 GBC members and recognized as a fall celebration event.

At its core, the A2 GBC is designed to offer recognition to local businesses while also helping them lower their operating costs, create a stronger brand, build a more sustainable culture, enhance employee and customer satisfaction, and reduce the environmental footprints of local businesses. The A2 GBC program provides guidance, resources, and recognition via certification, branding support, and implementation

assistance to businesses in the City of Ann Arbor that voluntarily participate. Every year businesses will have the opportunity to complete the A2 GBC, presenting a chance to not only be recognized for current practices, but to be honored for progress made between years. Financial awards will also be given to high performers and those that make the greatest improvements year over year. Awards are anticipated to be allocated as outlined in Table 3.

## Glossary

**Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge (A2 GBC):** Ann Arbor’s environmental certification program for businesses to reduce their environmental footprint, save resources, and demonstrate their commitment to local sustainability, all while getting recognized for their work.

**A<sup>2</sup>ZERO:** City of Ann Arbor’s plan for achieving a just transition to community-wide carbon neutrality by 2030.

**Carbon Neutrality:** An approach to address climate change by which the same amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere is removed by various means. The City of Ann Arbor has a goal of community-wide carbon neutrality by the year 2030.

**Circular Economy:** A model of production and consumption that involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible. The idea of a circular economy is to reduce “waste” and keep goods, supplies, and materials in circulation.

**Mobility:** The ability to move or be moved freely and easily. Sustainable movement is the idea to limit excessive fossil fuel consumption and promote public transportation, biking, and walking when possible.

**OSI:** The City of Ann Arbor’s Office of Sustainability and Innovations.

**Resilience:** The ability to bounce forward, regardless of what impacts, or events occur.

**Water Stewardship:** The use and treatment of water in ways that are socially equitable, environmentally sustainable, and economically beneficial.

## Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge (A2 GBC) Criterion

The Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge (A2 GBC) is composed of seven areas and X points. Below are details on each of the areas and the point structure for each area.

### Energy

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The City of Ann Arbor's carbon neutrality plan has set a goal of 100% renewable energy powering the community by 2030 as well as investments in deep energy waste reduction and beneficial electrification (or the transition to electric-powered equipment and appliances). Numerous supportive programs are available through the City's Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI) and its collaborators to help achieve these goals, including support with conducting energy assessments, installing renewable energy, and installing more energy efficient appliances and equipment. In addition, there are numerous federal and state-level incentives to support the transition to more efficient operations and the adoption of clean energy solutions.<sup>1</sup> Some of these resources include:

- [Federal Tax Incentive programs](#) for installing renewable energy technologies.
- Ann Arbor's [Solarize](#) program, which offers group buy discounts to help smaller businesses and residents lower the cost of installing solar.
- A [Commercial Solar Program](#) to help businesses access renewable energy.
- A [landlord resource hub](#) for rental property owners, including tips on becoming more energy efficient.
- For buildings over 20,000 square feet, [energy and water benchmarking support](#) through EPA Energy Star Portfolio Manager, with support provided by the Ann Arbor / Washtenaw 2030 District.
- For smaller buildings, [Michigan Saves](#), Michigan's nonprofit green bank, provides numerous programs and service offerings.
- [Energy assessment](#) grants towards building energy audits for qualifying buildings along with tips to reduce energy usage and save money through the [Ann Arbor / Washtenaw 2030 District](#). The Ann Arbor / Washtenaw 2030 District can also help businesses set sustainability-related goals and offers free webinars that provide detailed technical support and examples of sustainability in action.
- [PACE financing](#) programs to help to help fund energy improvements.
- [Business energy consultations](#) with DTE to help identify energy savings opportunities.
- [Energy incentives](#) through DTE.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Tax Incentive program for installing renewable energy technologies:

<https://programs.dsireusa.org/system/program/detail/658/business-energy-investment-tax-credit-itc>

Federal Income Tax Credits and Other Incentives for Energy Efficiency

[https://www.energystar.gov/about/federal\\_tax\\_credits](https://www.energystar.gov/about/federal_tax_credits)

You can benchmark your facility with EPA Energy Star Portfolio Manager comparing your facility to comparable buildings in the US and earn recognition – <https://www.energystar.gov/buildings>

\$500 tax credit for Businesses creating jobs that install solar, geothermal, etc. -

<https://programs.dsireusa.org/system/program/detail/22294/green-job-creation-tax-credit> - expires 1/1/2025

Businesses can earn up to 63 points for actions related to energy. Table 2 provides details about the various actions and the associated points for each action. The innovation category is for businesses undertaking other energy-related activities not listed in Table 4, but which help advance sustainability.

**Table 4.** A2 GBC energy criterion and possible points.

ENERGY CRITERION	Applying for (Yes, No, Not Applicable)	Points
<b>BASELINE (REQUIRED ACTION):</b> benchmark & disclose energy usage (see OSI's <a href="#">"Commercial and Multifamily Benchmarking"</a> as a resource)		5
Create a plan to reduce energy usage and/or increase the amount of renewable energy used		5
Create an inventory of all appliances used by the business, inclusive of type and age (year manufactured)		2
Research renewable energy options and present viable options to leadership (e.g., solar, geothermal, etc.) (Can reach out to Ann Arbor 2030 District for help)		1
Install renewable energy OR participate in green purchasing program (e.g., <a href="#">MIGreenPower</a> , <a href="#">Arcadia Power</a> , Wheeler Center Solar Park)		5
At least 50% of your annual energy usage comes from renewable energy sources (either through onsite generation or via third party programs) (10 Points for 50% and 20 points for 100%)		10
Electronics and lights are turned off nightly or when not in use (e.g., via a power switch, networked software, or other automatic control devices)		2
All indoor and outdoor lighting is LED		3
Programmable thermostats are installed to reduce energy		2
Demonstrated reduction in energy usage by at least 5% from previous year		10
At least 10% of appliances have been switched to electric based on the baseline assessment		5
Regularly (at least annually) monitor annual kWh electricity usage and maintain benchmarking report		3
Annual report operations greenhouse gas emissions to third party certification site		10
<b>OTHER:</b> Energy Innovation		10

## Water Stewardship

Water is a finite resource and one of the most important compounds on planet earth. Freshwater shortages are becoming more common across the country due to increasing demand and compromised water quality (e.g., pollution, microplastics, stormwater runoff). Even though Michigan is a state surrounded by lakes, residents should still practice responsible stewardship of water resources.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a WaterSense program,<sup>2</sup> which aims to educate Americans about the need for water saving practices and actions to reduce water usage. This program is a great place to start your water saving journey. Additional resources about water conservation can be found on the City of Ann Arbor's Water website.

Businesses can earn up to 51 points for actions related to water. Table 5 provides details about the various actions and the associated points for each action. The innovation category is for businesses undertaking other water-related activities not listed in Table 5, but which help advance sustainability.

**Table 5.** A2 GBC water criterion and possible points.

WATER CRITERION	Applying for (Yes, No, Not Applicable)	Points
<u>BASELINE (REQUIRED ACTION)</u> : Benchmark and disclose water usage		5
Create a plan to reduce water consumption		5
Sign-up for <a href="#">AquaHawk</a> and receive water use alerts		3
Inspect the following monthly: faucets, fixtures, and toilets for water leaks and then promptly fix them or notify management about the need for repairs		3
Install water saving technologies (e.g., WaterSense labeled appliances, low flow faucet, aerators, shower heads, water efficient toilets, etc.) (2 points for each technology adopted)		10
Ditch disposable water bottles and single-use cups and stock reusable glasses and mugs		2
Where possible, install microplastic filters		3
If applicable, install water conservation infrastructure in your outside space (e.g., rain gardens, green roof, native plants, rain barrels, bioswale etc.)		10
Other: Water Innovation		10

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/watersense>

## Circular Economy

The City of Ann Arbor promotes circular economy practices including source reduction, material repair, reuse, recycling, composting, and zero waste events. Ann Arbor encourages businesses to maximize environmentally friendly behaviors, minimize usage of single-use products, and repair equipment instead of replacing, wherever possible. One way you can learn more about ways to improve the circularity of your materials is through the U.S. [EPA's online marketplace](#) for "greener products and services."<sup>3</sup>

Businesses can earn up to 52 points for actions related to circular economy practices. Table 6 provides details about the various actions and the associated points for each action. The innovation category is for businesses undertaking other circular economy-related activities not listed in Table 6, but which help advance sustainability.

**Table 6.** A2 GBC circular economy criterion and possible points.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY CRITERION	Applying for (Yes, No, Not Applicable)	Points
<b>BASELINE (REQUIRED)<sup>4</sup>:</b> assess your annual waste to establish what items are being composted, recycled, and sent to landfills (this assessment can be up to 3 year old to qualify). The County's Waste Knot program can help with these assessments		10
Use annual waste assessment baseline to establish a waste reduction goal that can include source reduction, reuse/repair, recycling, and composting goals		5
Reduce or eliminate single use plastics and bioplastics by at least 75% AND sign a <a href="#">Zero Waste Pledge</a>		5
Commit to and contract for year-round composting		3
Commit to year-round recycling		2
Install accessible recycling & composting bins		2
Create an organizational policy (and implement) to keep technology resources (like computers, televisions, cell phones) in use for at least 6 years and donate them for reuse at end of life		5
Use a certified electronic recycler, such as eSteward or R2 (for reference see <a href="#">the EPA's certified electronic recyclers</a> ), to recycle electronics		5
Donate excess materials (e.g., office supplies, materials, edible excess food) to re-use centers and food rescue organizations (e.g., <a href="#">Food Gathers</a> )		5
Other: Circular Economy Innovation		10

<sup>3</sup> For sustainable products and services visit EPA website: <https://www.epa.gov/greenerproducts>

<sup>4</sup> This baseline is a program requirement.



## Mobility

A<sup>2</sup>ZERO aims to reduce the miles we travel in our vehicles by at least 50% by 2030 (Strategy 4),<sup>5</sup> while also working towards zero traffic fatalities ([Vision Zero](#)). In addition, the City of Ann Arbor has put together resources on [electric vehicles \(EVs\)](#), [non-motorized transportation](#), and [public transit](#) to help support more sustainable mobility practices.

It might seem like changes in mobility are difficult for businesses to support. However, there are steps that businesses can take to increase sustainable mobility options and help Ann Arbor achieve its goals. Businesses have a role to play in supporting public transportation and biking infrastructure and promoting, where applicable, flexible working schedules for staff.

In this category, businesses can earn up to 47 points for actions related to mobility practices. Table 7 provides details about the various actions and the associated points for each action. The innovation category is for businesses undertaking other mobility-related activities not listed in Table 7, but which help advance sustainability.

**Table 7.** A2 GBC mobility criterion and possible points.

MOBILITY CRITERION	Applying for (Yes, No, Not Applicable)	Points
Provide employees with discounted bus passes (2 points) OR with free bus passes (5 points)		5
Ensure employees and guests have access to a bike rack and other appropriate bike parking infrastructure (e.g., air pump, hand pump, etc.) (CommonCycle is a great resource for support on biking)		5
Ensure employees and guests have access to electric vehicle charging stations		5
If applicable, replace older vehicles with electric vehicles in your business fleet		5
Employees AND customers can access your business without having to drive (e.g., walking, public transit, bike, or via an online shopping site)		2
Participate in the 2030's District's annual transportation survey		5
Participate in annual "Bike to Work" days and celebrations (see Conquer the Cold)		5
If applicable, business leverages virtual technologies (e.g., Zoom, Teams) to reduce driving for staff/clients/customers and allows telework for employees		5
Other: Mobility Innovation		10

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<sup>5</sup> Strategy 4

<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/sustainability/Documents/A2Zero%20Climate%20Action%20Plan%204.0.pdf>

## Resilience

Changes to our climate are already leading to significant local impacts, necessitating that residents prepare and enhance their own resilience. Being prepared for emergency situations (e.g., power outages, snowstorms, etc.) is important for businesses, your employees, and your clients. Having a plan can prevent loss and damages to equipment and supplies and ensure the safety of employees and customers. Additionally, many residents rely on goods and services that businesses provide, making them vital for the community during emergencies. As a result, this criterion encourages businesses to invest in efforts to reduce their vulnerability and enhance their operational and staffing resilience.

In this category, businesses can earn up to 50 points for actions related to resilience practices. Table 8 provides details about the various actions and the associated points for each action. The innovation category is for businesses undertaking other resilience-related activities not listed in Table 8, but which help advance sustainability.

**Table 8.** A2 GBC resilience criterion and possible points.

RESILIENCE CRITERION	Applying for (Yes, No, Not Applicable)	Points
<u><b>BASELINE (REQUIRED):</b></u> Business has an emergency plan in the event of a natural disaster (e.g., ice storm, thunderstorm, snowstorm, etc.).		5
Employees are trained on the business's emergency plan		5
Support is provided to employees so they can create personal emergency plans AND emergency kits		5
Business has a battery for back-up energy provision		5
Business has researched AND installed indoor air quality monitoring devices		5
Business becomes a warning and cooling center location during shock events by developing/signing an agreement with the Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations		10
Business provides free education to the public on resilience-related activities		5
Other: Resilience Innovation		10

## Education

A<sup>2</sup>ZERO offers many ways for community members and business owners to get involved in sustainability initiatives. As a great place to start, we encourage businesses to spread the word about the A2 GBC as well as the other sustainability initiatives unfolding. Learn more on the City's website: [www.a2gov.org/sustainability](http://www.a2gov.org/sustainability). This category also includes hosting events and speaking at community forums about why sustainability matters to you and your business. Significant opportunities exist in this category for innovation points so if you have an idea for how to engage with and educate members of the public about sustainability, reach out to [sustainability@a2gov.org](mailto:sustainability@a2gov.org) for help putting your idea into motion.

In this category, businesses can earn up to 40 points for actions related to educational practices. Table 9 provides details about the various actions and the associated points for each action. The innovation category is for businesses undertaking other education-related activities not listed in Table 9, but which help advance sustainability.

**Table 9.** A2 GBC education criterion and possible points.

EDUCATION CRITERION	Applying for (Yes, No, Not Applicable)	Points
Support a business employee with participating in the City's <a href="#">A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Ambassador Program</a>		5
Share information about the A2 GBC and A <sup>2</sup> ZERO with clients/customers/staff (e.g., flyers in store, info on website, etc.)		3
Host an event with the A <sup>2</sup> ZERO Team for staff, management, clients, or the community		5
Became an <a href="#">A<sup>2</sup>ZERO Collaborating organization</a>		7
Speak on a A2 GBC or other community panel about sustainability practices in your business		5
Participate in a formal OSI event to share your sustainability-related experience		5
Other: Education Innovation		10

## Supply Chain

A functional supply chain is critical to helping businesses run smoothly and meet their needs and goals. Supply chains can have a significant environmental footprint due to transportation, manufacturing, and sourcing of materials. Businesses that choose to optimize their supply chains can reduce their carbon emissions, energy consumption, and resource use, contributing to the City's overall sustainability efforts.

It is recognized, however, that supply chain practices vary greatly between businesses (for an example in the food system, please see [Good Food Purchasing Program](#)). As such, many of the possible actions below may not apply to your business. If that is the case, share what actions you are taking to make your supply chain more sustainable and apply for innovation points!

In this category, businesses can earn up to 49 points for actions related to greening their supply chains. Table 10 provides details about the various actions and the associated points for each action. The innovation category is for businesses undertaking other supply chain-related activities not listed in Table 10, but which help advance sustainability.

**Table 10.** A2 GBC supply chain criterion and possible points.

SUPPLY CHAIN CRITERION	Applying for (Yes, No, Not Applicable)	Points
Conduct supply chain study to identify areas for improvement		5
Implementation of one improvement identified in the study above		5
Partner with neighboring businesses to identify shared improvements in overall supply chain for commonly used products and services		10
Ask suppliers about their sustainability practices (2 points) AND/OR use suppliers/vendors that utilize sustainable practices (e.g., post-recycled content, local farm and agriculture vendors)		4
Require your vendors to have a sustainability plan		10
Create a supplier sustainability pledge and ask vendors to agree to the terms (consider using items from the A2 GBC as part of your pledge)		5
Other: Supply Chain Innovation		10

## Verification

Businesses are required to submit proof of points by submitting documentation by emailing [jburnham@a2gov.org](mailto:jburnham@a2gov.org), with the subject line: A2 GBC Submittal. Upon receipt of documentation, it may take multiple for the Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations to review and verify materials. Questions about verification or required forms can be submitted to [jburnham@a2gov.org](mailto:jburnham@a2gov.org). Guidance about what constitutes as proof of an action can be provided on the [Ann Arbor Green Business Challenge](#) website.

## Certification Maintenance

A2 GBC certifications are good for two years. However, a business can resubmit documentation after the first year if they would like to achieve a higher rating. Documents need to be resubmitted by May 2026 if a business wants to maintain or continue participating in the A2 GBC program. Continued verification materials can be submitted by emailing them to [jburnham@a2gov.org](mailto:jburnham@a2gov.org) with the subject line: A2 GBC certification maintenance.