



July 2026

It's Your Turn!

Now Accepting Round 3 Livable Communities Initiative Applications



Keith Creek neighborhood is beginning construction on a flood park. Midtown is narrowing down their wishlist and will soon have an implementation plan.

Who's next?

R1 is now accepting applications from eligible neighborhoods for the next round of LCI technical assistance. The list of eligible middle neighborhoods has been expanded, to include 18 communities in Rockford and Belvidere.

Applications must be received by **Tuesday, September 8 at 5:00 pm**. Applicants will present their proposals to the Community Advisory Forum at the October 22 meeting, which will select a proposal to

recommend for board approval.

"LCI projects are community-driven, quality of life initiatives that address each neighborhood's unique priorities," said Chloe Barnes, R1 Regional Planner and LCI lead. "This approach results in tailored solutions that meet local needs."

LINKS

Download Application

https://r1planning.org/media/ezdo5yux/_lci-2026-application_fillable.pdf

Check Neighborhood Eligibility

<https://bit.ly/lci-eligibility-map>

About LCI

<https://r1planning.org/planning/livable-communities-initiative/>



Click on the survey title to participate



[Housing Coordination Plan](#)

This housing playbook provides recommendations and tools for municipalities as they create plans to preserve, enhance, and grow regional housing. The draft plan is complete and needs your feedback.



[EPA Brownfield Coalition Grant](#)

R1 can assist with costs for conducting environmental assessments and developing cleanup plans for Boone and Winnebago County brownfield sites. Submit a property you think may be eligible for brownfield assessment at the link above.

Rockford Clean Energy Workforce Development Elevates Lives



“By owning my own company, I can hire my fellow program graduates, who I know have the skills and knowledge but just need the opportunity.”

~ **Julian Holt**, CEJA participant, trainer, and entrepreneur



Top: In just over one year, Julian Holt, Chief Operating Officer of Zenith Eco Engineering LLC, completed Zion West's solar training and Contractor Incubator entrepreneurship courses, was hired as Head Instructor for new solar trainees, and is now building business for his sustainable energy and building systems company.

Left: U.S. Senator Dick Durbin showed his support for CEJA workforce training programs and their role in building out the clean energy economy.

Right: Antonio Arras, Climate Works graduate, leads participants through a welding demonstration, one of several clean energy trades explored through the pre-apprenticeship program.

The Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) workforce development programs are turning training into jobs, opening doors for local workers seeking lasting careers. Since launching in 2024, 129 have graduated from job-specific training programs, with a 64% employment rate.

Local, state and federal lawmakers celebrated that success during a CEJA showcase on June 30 at Think Big! Program participants shared their success stories and partner organizations displayed the clean energy skills they offer during training.

The Rockford region is home to four state CEJA grants that support clean energy careers:

- Climate Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program: Introduces participants to clean energy trades that are likely to grow
- Energy Transition Navigator: Conducts outreach and recruitment for all other CEJA programs.
- Workforce Network Hub: Provides training, certification, job placement, and wrap-around support

for entry-level jobs in solar, energy auditing, EV maintenance, and CNC operation.

- Contractor Incubator: Offers training, mentoring, and connections for contractors expanding into clean energy

Programs are run by a partnership that includes The Workforce Connection, Goodwill Industries of Northern Illinois, Awaken Foundation L3c, Hire360, Zion West Enterprise, Rock Valley College, Think Big!, the Small Business Development Center at Rock Valley College, and R1.

Why CEJA matters: CEJA-funded workforce development programs provide accelerated training for living-wage careers with a focus on equity. They also connect clean energy entrepreneurs with projects that sustain their businesses - all while providing local businesses with a pipeline of skilled employees. This initiative also helps Illinois achieve its goal of transitioning to 100% clean energy by 2050.

EV Use Accelerates

Charging Smart Program Helps Communities Power Up

If it seems like more electric vehicles are quietly passing by on your local roads, you're not imagining things. Electric vehicle (EV) adoption has increased by 29% across northern Illinois.*.

	Number of Registered EVs		
	June 2026	June 2025	Percent Change
Winnebago County	2,015	1,531	32% ↑
Boone County	441	333	32% ↑
McHenry County	4,604	3,603	28% ↑
Stephenson County	153	118	30% ↑
Ogle County	284	217	31% ↑
TOTAL	7,497	5,802	29% ↑

EVs need places to recharge. If your community doesn't already have charging infrastructure in place, you might be missing out on economic growth.

R1's Charging Smart program leads local governments through the steps to adopt policies, procedures, and programs that attract investment in charging stations. R1 staff will guide municipal and county staff through the steps to earn an industry-recognized designation that announces your community is EV-friendly and ready for investment.

The best part of Charging Smart? It's free to participate. Contact Hailey Blanchard, R1 Economic Development Planner, at hblanchard@r1planning.org to join the next cohort.

Charging Smart is offered through R1 with funding from the Interstate Renewable Energy Council.

*Source: <https://www.ilsos.gov/departments/vehicles/statistics/electric.html>

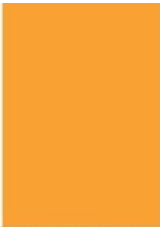
Resilience Improvement Plan Released



The Rockford region's Resilience Improvement Plan is here! This plan focuses on preparing the region for the impacts of a changing climate and increasingly extreme weather events.

What's next? R1 will support its stakeholders in finding and securing grants to implement these resiliency actions. This will help strengthen the transportation system to withstand future challenges.

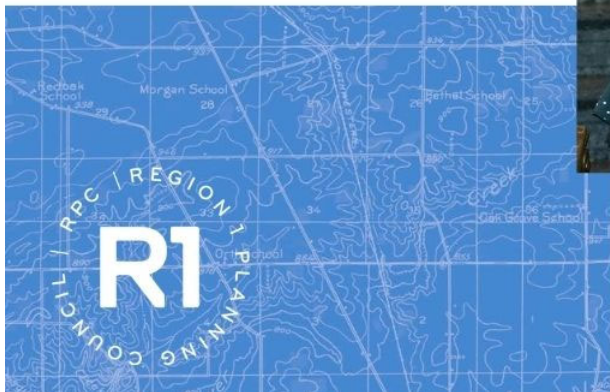
Read the full plan at <https://engage-r1.com/resilience-improvement-plan>



Brittany Allen

APEX Accelerator Advisor

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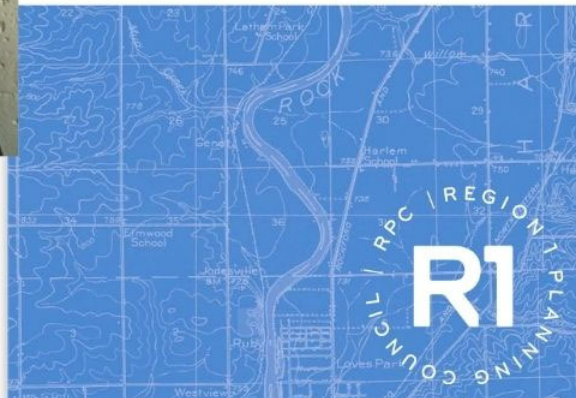


Brittany Allen joins R1 as an APEX Accelerator Advisor. She has over seven years' experience in government contracting, previously supporting Prime contracts with the Department of Defense. She is also a licensed cosmetologist and small business owner - all experience that allow her to help local small businesses explore government contracting. At R1, she will be using that passion to connect small businesses with resources, strategies, and opportunities so they can thrive.

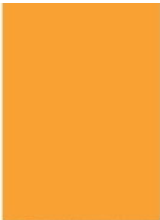


Lucy Miller

**Economic Development & Policy
Intern**



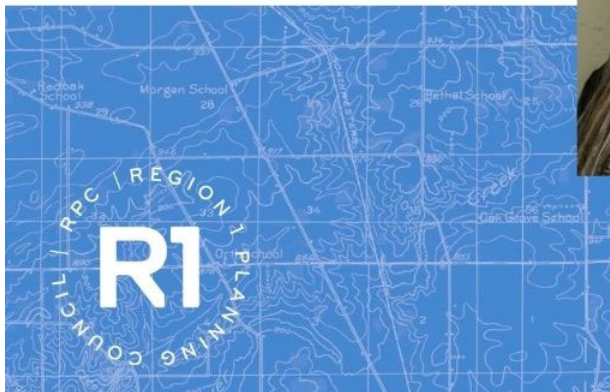
Lucy Miller joins the summer intern team as an Economic Development and Policy Intern. She is a Master's of Public Administration student at the University of Illinois Springfield, graduating in July 2026. Her studies have included on promoting social equity through public investment projects, including a capstone project that addressed emerging food deserts in Peoria.



Nia Hodges

Government Affairs Intern

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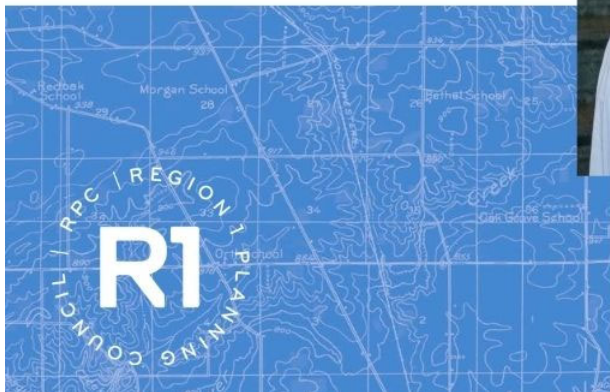


Nia Hodges joins the summer intern team as a Government Affairs Intern. She is a student at Howard University, majoring in Business Management. Her campus involvement as vice-president on the Howard Towers West Council, a member of Black Women in Pre-Law and other social impact groups, has developed her interest in the intersection of business, policy, and community impact.

Ahmed Hani Yousef

Data Intelligence Specialist

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Ahmed Hani Yousef joins R1 as a Data Intelligence Specialist. He has a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from Lake Forest College. He is originally from Jordan and Palestine, a quick 13-hour flight home. At R1, he will be contributing to the Land Bank auction site, WCCMHB data dashboard, and Safe Streets 4 All.

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