

# An Introduction to LEED

## LEED – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design

One of the big questions in implementing sustainable design is, “How can you tell if it is really green?” How do we avoid being fooled by superficial improvements touted as “green” to attract our interest? And how do we get started on deciding what to do to bring green design to our buildings? LEED is a good way to start answering these questions.

LEED is a voluntary, national certification program developed by the US Green Building Council (USGBC), a nonprofit organization. LEED was developed to create concrete standards of measurement to define green buildings. The goal is to encourage buildings that are environmentally responsible, economically effective and healthy places to live and work.

The certification process works by awarding points for concrete measures taken in the categories of Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Energy Performance, Material and Resource Use and Indoor Environmental Quality. Efficient and user-controlled heating and cooling systems, water-conserving toilets, energy efficient light fixtures, non-off gassing paint, and particle board made without formaldehyde are all concrete measures that earn points toward LEED certification. Based on the design, buildings can earn from a basic LEED Certification through Silver and Gold up to a Platinum Certification.

LEED certification is also customized for different types of construction including LEED-NC for new construction, LEED-EB for the retrofit of an existing building, LEED-Homes (homes), and LEED-CI for commercial interiors.

Many cities across the country, including San Francisco, Boston, New York and Chicago, have adopted LEED as the standard for all future city buildings, from public schools to libraries to bus terminals. As a result green construction is being increasingly adopted by the design and construction industry, and finding professionals knowledgeable about sustainable design becomes easier every day.

## LEED Options for Nonprofit Centers

### LEED-CI

A relevant option for many nonprofit centers is LEED-CI which is focused on a building’s interior remodeling and improvement. LEED-CI gives power to make sustainable choices to tenants and designers who do not always have control over whole building operations. Points are awarded in the same LEED categories but customized for the building systems that are under construction in a basic tenant-improvement project.

More than anything, LEED-CI is about people - its guidelines focus on comfortable temperatures, indoor pollution, quality of lighting, and individual control - all proven contributors to employee health and productivity as well as morale. Additionally, the focus on energy and water conservation can save significant operating dollars over time.

### LEED-EB

For organizations who own an existing building, LEED-EB becomes an option that can be implemented any time in your building’s life cycle. It is a method to blend what you can’t change with what you can - keep your plumbing, change your toilet. Emphases on water and energy efficiency mean that tenant and owner alike can reduce the building’s environmental impact and reap the benefits of lower utility costs. Points in this rating system are tailored for the renovation of an entire building and also focus on green operations after construction is complete.

LEED-EB is about making the most with what you have. Optimizing performance, using local, healthy, and sustainable materials allows owners, tenants and visitors to enjoy healthier workspace while minimizing toxics and green house gases released into the environment.

## LEED Certification: What are its benefits? Why do it?

There are multiple benefits of LEED certification, including:

- A healthier environment for clients and staff
- Lower operating and maintenance costs
- A building your staff and board can be proud of

LEED is the national standard for rating and certifying green projects - certification demonstrates to funders and government officials your leadership and commitment to environmental health and to your community.

The benefit of this program is that it provides a well-thought out itemization of concrete measures to implement green design in your facility. A commitment to such a program is an investment in the life of your building, the well-being of its occupants, and the future of our planet.

## Implementing a Sustainable Design Program. Where do I start?

- The first thing you can do is to look over the LEED guidelines themselves, focusing on the program that is most applicable to your project. They're available at the USGBC website. The USGBC's website has all the information needed to get started on LEED, including information on workshops and reference guides. There's also a directory of LEED accredited professionals across the country. You can find their website at: [www.usgbc.org/LEED](http://www.usgbc.org/LEED).
- Whether or not you end up being certified, the check-lists for LEED certification provide an invaluable listing of sustainable design measures you can implement in your office or building, often for relatively little cost. Using The NonprofitCenters Network check-lists for green office operations and green construction ([www.nonprofitcenters.org](http://www.nonprofitcenters.org)) plus the LEED check-lists should definitely get you started on greening your office.
- The sooner that LEED and green design is integrated into redesign and renovation projects, the more cost efficient implementation will be and the more creative your application of the guidelines can be. Materials costs for green and recycled building materials are virtually the same as non-sustainable materials if you incorporate sustainable design requirements into your construction specifications from the beginning.
- The easiest way to ensure your project's LEED certification is to hire an accredited LEED professional to design with LEED standards in mind right from the start. This is often the architect or engineer for the project, but it can also be a project manager.
- Sustainable design projects are easiest to implement when they are championed by a person or group of people. Identify someone who will be eager to fill this role and will enthusiastically support and see the project through.



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