

How to Get LEED Certified for a New Commercial Building

Written by Lisa Alexander

Friday, 18 March 2011 21:25 - Last Updated Friday, 18 March 2011 21:29

To Begin

First hire an Architectural/Engineering firm that has LEED, AP's (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, Accredited Professionals) on staff. This will ensure at the on-set of the project that the owners, stakeholders and design team understand what it will take in preliminary planning, construction and financing, to reach a realistic LEED certification goal and its required prerequisites and points.

- Certified 40 - 49 points
- Silver 50 - 59 points
- Gold 60 - 79 points
- Platinum 80 or more points

Register the Project

Once the design team agrees that the project is a viable candidate for LEED Certification and can meet all of the the LEED prerequisites in 7 required topic areas, then the project can be registered on-line at the GBCI website, (Green Building Certification Institute) at www.gbci.org

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Registration is not only required, but is an important first step that enables communications with GBCI, outlines costs, allows access to software tools, credit details and other related information.

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Document Submittal

You have the option of submitting all of your documents for review at the end of construction or splitting the certification registration into 2 phases; Design and Construction phase. Please note; should you choose the later option and submit your design documentation up front, you will not be awarded any credits until after the construction phase is completed. Instead, your attempted credits will be listed as either 'Anticipated' or 'Denied'. Once all the construction documentation has been reviewed, the design phase 'Anticipated' credits will be labeled as 'Achieved' or 'Denied'.

7 Required Topics Areas for LEED Certification for New Buildings

1. Sustainable Sites (SS) - 26 possible points w/ 1 prerequisite

In choosing a building site, LEED rewards points for selecting a previous disturbed site; reducing construction impact, runoff, waste, and other pollution; managing storm-water, erosion, and heat island effect; providing regional transportation, community connectivity, light pollution reduction and other required site and environmental management plans.

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2. Water Efficiency (WE) - 10 possible points w/1 prerequisite

Buildings use 12 - 15 % of our total potable water. The goal of WE is to reduce the quantity of the water needed for the building and to reduce the municipal water supply and treatment burden. This can be accomplished in many ways including water efficient landscaping, innovative wastewater technologies and water use reduction plans and products.

3. Energy & Atmosphere (EA) - 35 possible points w/3 prerequisites

Buildings consume almost 40% of total energy use and 74% of our electricity consumption. The goals of EA are to optimize energy efficiency, encourage alternative and renewable energy sources, and reduce harmful ozone depleting refrigerants.

4. Materials & Resources (MR) - 14 possible points w/1 prerequisite

Buildings generate a lot of waste and use a lot of resources and materials both during construction and in operation. MR is designed to reduce the amount of materials needed and to use materials w/less harmful environmental impacts, such as sustainably grown, locally produced, reused and recycled products.

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5. Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) - 15 possible points w/2 prerequisite

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, Americans spend 90% of their days indoors and indoor air quality is often far worse than the outdoors. The goal of EA is to establish high quality indoor air, eliminate, reduce and manage the sources of indoor air pollutants, like VOC's (volatile organic compounds) and other chemicals, ensure thermal comfort, control of systems, and provide connection to the outdoors and natural daylighting.

6. Innovation and Design (ID) - 6 possible points

ID provides bonus points for projects that use new and innovative technologies and strategies to improve a building's performance above and beyond what is required by LEED credits. ID also rewards projects for including a LEED AP on the team to guarantee a integrated and sustainable approach to both the design and construction phase.

7. Regional Priority (RP) - 4 possible points

RP awards points for buildings that take into consideration and addressed the local

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environmental concerns of the area the building is located in.

[Regional Priority Credits for your state »](#)

New Minimum Program Requirements

Under the new 2009 LEED for New Construction and Major Renovation version 3, in addition to the required topic prerequisites, projects must now also comply with seven program requirements to be eligible for LEED certification:

1. Comply with existing and regional environmental laws
2. Be a complete, permanent building
3. Use a reasonable site boundary, and no more than needed
4. Building must be a minimum of 1000 square feet
5. Meet specific minimum occupancy rates
6. Report annual building and water use statistics
7. Comply with established building area to site ratio

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LEED Certification provides an independent, third-party verification that the registered building provides the highest possible environmentally sound building practices.

According to the United States Green Building Council a LEED Certified Building will:

- Lower operating costs and increase asset value.
- Reduce waste sent to landfills.
- Conserve energy and water.
- Be healthier and safer for occupants.
- Reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions.
- Qualify for tax rebates, zoning allowances and other incentives in hundreds of cities.
- Demonstrate an owner's commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

Every year the number of LEED Certified buildings multiples as the demand for better performing, energy-efficient and healthy buildings increases.