

# Steps towards LEED Certification

Adapted from The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice Update 2005, originally contributed by John A. Boecker, AIA, LEED AP

January 2007

---

*The AIA collects and disseminates Best Practices as a service to AIA members without endorsement or recommendation. Appropriate use of the information provided is the responsibility of the reader.*

---

## SUMMARY

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) has set a standard for sustainable building performance known as the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) Green Building Rating System™. To receive the prestigious LEED building certification, follow these five steps.

## LEED CERTIFICATION STEPS

As of 2006, LEED certification is available for New Construction, Existing Buildings, Commercial Interiors, Core and Shell Development, Homes, and Neighborhood Development. These categories include subcategories that cover specific building types. LEED for Schools is expected to launch in early 2007.

The LEED certification system consists of these five stages:

1. Register project
2. Integrate LEED requirements
3. Obtain technical support
4. Document the project for certification
5. Receive certification

### STEP 1: REGISTER THE PROJECT

The first step in aiming for LEED certification is to register the intent to pursue it for a project. This should be done as early as possible, typically during schematic design. Registration is accomplished online via the USGBC Web site, which provides clear instruction. Registration consist of inputting project contact information and data, including project name, location, square footage, site area, and building type; a brief narrative description; and a preliminary LEED credit scorecard. Images can be uploaded for inclusion with the project posting on the USGCB Web-site list of all LEED-registered projects. Architects and owners can choose to withhold registration data from public view if they have any confidentiality concerns.

Current registration fees vary based on member status and level of review required; review can include construction-phase drawings, design-phase drawings, or both. Current prices (Fall 2006) for USGBC members range from \$0.01 per square foot with a \$450 registration fee to \$0.35 per square foot. For nonmembers the registration fee is \$600, and fees range from \$0.15 to \$0.45 per square foot.

### STEP 2: INTEGRATE LEED REQUIREMENTS

In this step, architects use the LEED scorecard early on to reveal the project's potential and to expose possibilities for integrated solutions. A good indicator that a particular design solution is effective is when it can be used to achieve, or contribute to achieving, more than one credit. Spending the time and effort to carry out the quantifiable performance and cost analysis that integrated design mandates in the earliest design phase saves time, money, and effort in later phases.

### STEP 3: OBTAIN TECHNICAL SUPPORT

During the design and certification process, LEED-registered projects are allotted two free requests for a credit interpretation ruling (CIR) on questions or situations that may arise during design. Before submitting a request, project teams should check the sizable CIR database to see whether any existing CIRs address the same issue.

Registered project team members also gain access to the electronic LEED "letter template" files that help streamline the certification process. These templates are the primary means for documenting key LEED 2.1 credit certification data, and they represent the core of a LEED certification submittal.

### STEP 4: DOCUMENT THE PROJECT FOR CERTIFICATION

Two parts are required in the LEED certification documentation: (1) a preliminary submission, which can be submitted for comment, then revised and resubmitted, and (2) a final submission. Preliminary certification submissions must include two copies on

CD-ROM of the letter template file and two identical three-ring binders containing the project's LEED scorecard, a project narrative, illustrative drawings and photographs, letter templates, and required backup documentation for all targeted credits, tabbed by credit.

The USGBC plans to transform this process into a paperless one using online submissions. This will make it possible for teams to upload and access documents on a Web location designated for their project.

Upon receipt of a preliminary project submittal, the USGBC performs a technical review of the documentation and issues a "Preliminary LEED Review," which assesses the initial status of the pursued credits. This report includes comments placing each credit into one of four categories: likely to be earned, denied, audited, or pending. A pending assessment provides technical advice to project teams about clarifications that will be required in the final submission. Additional documentation is also required for items in the audited category.

Project teams respond by submitting a final, clarified compilation of the project's documentation.

#### **STEP 5: RECEIVE CERTIFICATION**

Following this second submission, the USGBC issues a "Final LEED Review" report that indicates the final status of all credits being pursued, along with the project's level of certification. Project teams can appeal if they disagree with the final assessment.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

John Boecker, AIA, LEED AP, a partner in the green building and LEED consulting firm 7group, also serves as director of high-performance green design for L. Robert Kimball and Associates Architects and Engineers. A LEED-Accredited Professional, he serves on the USGBC LEED Steering Committee.

#### **RESOURCES**

The LEED Green Building Rating System is a voluntary, consensus-based national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings. The LEED programs can be downloaded at no cost by visiting the Web site at [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org).

#### **More Best Practices**

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 18.11.10 Energy Modeling and Daylighting Analysis
- 18.11.07 Selecting Environmentally Preferable Products
- 18.11.08 Going Green: Where to Find Green Product Info

#### **For More Information on This Topic**

See "Energy Analysis and Design" by Donald Prowler, FAIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, 13th edition*, Chapter 18, page 616. See also "LEED® Certification Services" by John A. Boecker, AIA, in *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice Update 2005*, page 133. The *Handbook* and the *Update 2005* can be ordered from the AIA Store by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending e-mail to [bookstore@aia.org](mailto:bookstore@aia.org).



#### **Feedback**

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact: [bestpractices@aia.org](mailto:bestpractices@aia.org).

#### **Keywords**

- Building performance
- Sustainability
- Sustainable business practices
- LEED