



Rushing for the Green: Guidelines for earning LEED-EB

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When was the last time you went through a day without hearing about LEED for existing buildings (LEED-EB)? Everyone associated with commercial real estate has been “rushing for the green” in one way or the other. LEED is the hottest topic in the industry in 2008, yet there is a lot of mystery surrounding it. That’s why I have created the following guidelines for building owners and managers who are considering pursuing LEED-EB certification for their buildings.

Green Is GOOD!

Challenges are everywhere. Energy costs are volatile and rising. Landfill costs are out of sight. Water is becoming a concern, and it is hard to recruit and retain good people. LEED-EB certification can help. While LEED-EB won’t solve all your problems, it certainly can be an asset for you.

LEED-EB 2008: It’s about Performance!

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) made a commitment last year to change the certification requirements for LEED-EB. The original requirements retained more of the flavor of LEED for new construction (LEED-NC), which associated sustainability with how the site was developed, or how the building was constructed, rather than how it was operated. The 2008 revision, which has been approved pending release of the reference manual, aligns sustainability more with operations, and the results generated by green practices. While the changes do bring certification within reach of more building owners and managers, the new requirements truly require buildings to be highperforming, thereby maintaining the end value of the certification.

Quick – Let’s Go Register!

Here’s the good news: every building in the U.S. can be green. The bad news is that not all buildings will be able to obtain the LEED-EB certification. That is because your building must satisfy nine prerequisites and earn at least 34 credits to meet the minimum requirements for LEED-EB. Meeting the prerequisites can present a challenge for some buildings, especially meeting the following three requirements.

1. The building must have had a minimum occupancy of 75 percent over the past 12 months.
2. The building must have a minimum ENERGY STAR score of 69 (only 31 percent of the benchmarked buildings in the system are more efficient).
3. The building must meet minimum water fixture efficiency levels. Before making commitments to certify a facility, make sure you understand what is required, and that you are indeed able to meet the requirements. Many of my clients ask me to perform a GAP Analysis, which is a quick study to see how their current operations compare to the LEED-EB requirements. This study creates a detailed comparison, as well as time and cost estimates. The cost of a study ranges from \$4,500 and up, and can help you make a decision on whether to proceed toward certification.

Do Your Homework

I recommend education for every building owner, manager and engineer. Take the LEED-EB Technical Review session to take the mystery out the process. Even more importantly, understand your goals and motives for being green. We should all be green for socially responsible reasons, but sustainable practices must make sense in the business world. The magic question is: Why do you want to be green? Perhaps it is to:

- reduce your utility costs (for analogy reasons, use \$2 per square foot);
- make your building more attractive to potential tenants and increase lease rates (\$20 per square foot); and/or
- hire and retain employees and increase their productivity (average \$200 per square foot).

You will have choices to make when you pursue certification credits. If you understand your motive for being green, it will allow you to put your time and money in the correct places.

I Want It, and I Want It Now

Part of the education process is to understand the rules or process for achieving certification. There are three key phases.

- Pre-performance period: This is the time when you ensure all the green processes needed to achieve the credits are implemented. This period of time is dependent upon progress at the site, and can easily run three months.
- Performance period: This is a minimum three-month period to prove you are meeting the requirements and maintaining documentation to show compliance.
- Finalization of application/USGBC review period: During this period, your documentation is submitted to the USGBC, which reviews it and answers your questions. The time for this period varies, but expect three to four months.

It is important to establish realistic expectations when it comes to the schedule and the time and effort required to meet it. This is a major project in every sense of the word and can last 10 months or longer. It should not be underestimated. Just as with any major project, consider using a project manager to help meet your goals and keep the project on-schedule and within budget. I strongly suggest that you consider using a resource with knowledge of the material and the process, and an ability to manage the effort. Having an accredited LEED-AP on the project team is also worth a credit toward certification.

