

Guide to LEED Certification: Commercial

Congratulations on your decision to pursue LEED certification for your project!

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You're on your way to increasing the value and environmental integrity of your project. This guide will lead you through the process.

LEED certification involves four main steps:

1. **Register** your project by completing key forms and submitting payment.
2. **Apply** for LEED certification by submitting your completed certification application through and paying a certification review fee.
3. **Review.** Your LEED application is reviewed by Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI).
4. **Certify.** Receive the certification decision from GBCI. If you've earned LEED certification: congratulations!

If you need assistance at any time, please contact us.

Note: Are you working on projects using LEED Volume? Check out our LEED volume program supplement, which works in conjunction with this guide to give you a full picture of the LEED Volume Program.

Register

Registration is an important step in the LEED certification process, signifying your intent to pursue LEED certification.

Before you begin, you'll want to make sure that your project meets all of the LEED Minimum Program Requirements, the minimum characteristics that make a project appropriate for pursuing LEED.

Building projects pursuing LEED 2009 certification must:

- Comply with environmental laws
- Be a complete, permanent building
- Use a reasonable site boundary
- Comply with minimum floor area requirements
- Comply with minimum occupancy requirements
- Commit to sharing whole-building energy and water usage data
- Comply with a minimum building area to site area ratio

Building projects pursuing LEED v4 or LEED v4.1 certification must:

- Be in a permanent location on existing land
- Use reasonable LEED boundaries
- Comply with project size requirements

Visit the LEED Credit Library to read the specifics on Minimum Program Requirements. LEED 2009 projects should also read the Supplemental Guidance to the Minimum Program Requirements.

Next up: select the appropriate LEED rating system for your project using our guidance for LEED v4.

The content in this guide applies to all LEED 2009, LEED v4 and LEED v4.1 commercial rating systems.

- LEED for Building Design and Construction (LEED BD+C)
- LEED for Interior Design and Construction (LEED ID+C)
- LEED for Operations and Maintenance (LEED O+M)

For other LEED rating systems, please refer to the relevant Guide to LEED certification.

Now, onward to registration.

All projects pursuing LEED certification register on the LEED Online platform. Your project name in LEED Online should accurately represent the scope of the project pursuing certification.

In addition to registration, you'll also use LEED Online to submit your application for certification, as well as access a variety of tools and resources, provide the registration information related to your project, submit payment and sign the certification services agreement (the project owner must do this last one). Once you've finished, your project application will be accessible in LEED Online.

From here, you can assemble your project team and the documentation process begins!

Project Team Roles

Individuals on your project team will be called on to perform certain roles throughout the LEED certification process.

Here's a rundown of who's who so you can select your team wisely:

- **Owner:** The owner of the project is the person (or entity) who has the authority to hold and control the real and personal property, and accepts (or authorizes the acceptance of) the certification agreement. While there may be multiple owners for a particular project (if so, please submit a Confirmation of Primary Owner's Authority Form), we ask that you identify a single individual to administer the certification process. Big takeaway: the owner has ultimate control over the LEED certification application, meaning that GBCI (the organization responsible for administering LEED certification) will respond to the owner regarding the administration of the project over any other member of the project team.
- **Agent:** The agent is the person (or entity) who is granted actual authority by the owner to register the project and accept the certification agreement. If you are using this option, remember to upload a signed Confirmation of Agent's Authority Form.
- **Project Administrator:** This team member acts as a project manager, overseeing the LEED project as well as which project team members are responsible for certain tasks, credits or prerequisites. The project administrator plays a key quality role by checking that the LEED application is complete and accurate before submitting the project to GBCI for review and accepting the review results once the review is complete. Note: the individual who initially registers the project will automatically be granted the role of the project administrator, but the owner may transfer this role to another team member at any time.

Important considerations

Deadline for registration

In order to optimize an integrated design process, which is a core part of LEED, we encourage you to register as early as possible – ideally, during the design phase for LEED BD+C and LEED ID+C rating systems, and early in the planning and facility assessment phase for LEED O+M projects. View the LEED registration close and certification close deadlines.

Precertification review

BD+C and O+M

This is an optional review pathway available for a fee for LEED BD+C and O+M projects that is focused on your intended strategies. We offer precertification prior to a full certification application to help you determine which credits and prerequisites your project is likely to achieve during the full review, attract tenants, financiers, and even permitting benefits in certain localities. If you are interested in pursuing precertification, select this option after registration in LEED Online on the "timeline" tab. Achieve precertification by completing the LEED Precertification Worksheet that is provided in LEED Online and in the LEED Credit Library, marking prerequisites and credits as attempted, and submitting the project for review according to the process described below.

Note, precertification is valid for three years.

Campus projects

If you are planning to bring more than one building located on a single shared site and under the control of a single entity (for example, a corporate or educational campus, government installation or commercial development) through certification, you may register your project as a campus or group project to streamline the documentation you'll need to submit for review. Please note, however, that individual building registration and certification fees apply to campus and group projects. Depending on the campus approach you select, you will pursue a slightly modified registration process, as compared to one-off project registration.

Campus credit approach: This approach enables you to streamline the documentation process by earning “campus credits” – prerequisites and credits that can be applied to all LEED projects on the master site. You will need to register a “master site,” which includes a general narrative of the overall campus projects and a schematic site plan, in addition to registering each individual project on the site.

If your team is pursuing this approach, be sure to document all campus credit information within the master site.

Campus group project approach: In this approach, you'll register the group of projects on the site as a single LEED project that will then receive a single LEED rating and certification. To be eligible for this approach, LEED BD+C and LEED ID+C projects must be under the same construction contract and be constructed at the same time, and LEED O+M projects must be under the same ownership and management, share the same performance period and have substantially similar space types. For this approach, your team's campus project documentation must demonstrate that the group of projects collectively meets the credit requirements using a “group credit.” You may use a campus group project certification independently or in combination with campus credits documented under a master site review, through the campus credit approach above.

For more information on submittal requirements for master sites, campus credit approaches, campus group approaches, visit the LEED Credit Library and the LEED Campus Guidance.

Recertification (LEED O+M)

Recertification, now available for all LEED commercial rating systems, is an important step in protecting your building asset. Please see the latest Recertification Guide for details.

Apply

Now comes the fun part: you're ready to collect and submit the appropriate documentation so that GBCI may review your project. Working with your project team, you will identify LEED credits to pursue and assign them to project team members. Your team will then collect information, perform calculations and analysis, and prepare documentation demonstrating your achievement of the prerequisites and your selected credits.

Once your application is prepared, upload your completed materials and make sure to perform a rigorous quality check of your entire application before submitting for review. We suggest that you open each form and check that you have included all required information and open each file to verify that you have submitted the correct document. Cross-check credits and prerequisites to make sure that you have reported common data points, such as floor area, occupancy and total materials cost consistently. Want more tips? Here are some characteristics common among high quality submissions:

- Relevant prerequisite/credit information is clearly highlighted within the submission
- File attachments are clearly and intuitively labeled
- Only required documentation is submitted (if only a few pages of a large report are needed to provide the required credit/prerequisite information, provide the relevant sections only, no need to submit more!)
- Concise narratives are included to describe project-specific circumstances (these are really helpful for the GBCI reviewer)

All finished? Ready, set, submit! Don't forget to pay your certification review fee - and remember, your review will commence once your payment has cleared our system.

Important considerations

Performance Periods

If pursuing LEED 2009 or LEED v4 O+M for the first time, you may choose to extend the performance period for any prerequisite or credit to a maximum of 24 months preceding your certification application, in case you need more time to establish performance. All performance periods must overlap and come to a conclusion within one month of each other. If pursuing LEED v4.1 O+M for the first time, a 12-month reporting period must be used.

The LEED v4 O+M recertification performance period includes the entire time since the previous certification and must be at least a year in length but may be up to five years in length. You'll need to track and record building performance data throughout the entire recertification performance period.

The LEED v4.1 O+M recertification reporting period is the one year prior to submitting for recertification. You'll need to track and record building performance data throughout the entire recertification performance period of up to three years.

Review

After you've submitted your application and paid the certification fee, GBCI will conduct a thorough technical review. But don't kick back yet – you'll need to be an active participant throughout the process.

While the type of review you'll undergo will vary depending on your sustainability goals, the specific needs of your project, and the rating system under which you are certifying (more on that below), the general review process is the same:

Part 1: Preliminary Review

- You will first submit your application for a preliminary review. GBCI will check your application for completeness and compliance with the selected rating system and attempted credits.
- GBCI will respond with its preliminary review within 20-25 business days, indicating which prerequisites and credits are awarded and which are marked as pending, with a request for more information.
- Your team can accept the preliminary review results as final if you are satisfied, or prepare new or revised documentation or attempt additional credits before submitting for final review.

Part 2: Final Review (optional)

- The final review stage allows you to submit supplementary information requested by the reviewer during the preliminary review or amend the application. GBCI suggests you submit these clarifications within 25 business days after receiving the preliminary review results. GBCI will then review revised or newly submitted prerequisites and credits, and reconsider any awarded credits or prerequisites for which information has changed since the return of the preliminary review was completed.
- GBCI will respond with a final LEED certification review report within 20-25 business days, marking prerequisites and attempted credits as either awarded or denied.
- Like the preliminary review, you can either accept the review results as final, or revise your application and resubmit for a supplemental (appeal) review.

Part 3: Supplemental (appeal) Review (optional, fees apply)

- The supplemental (appeal) review stage provides an additional round of review and allows you to submit additional information, amend the application or add new credits not previously attempted. GBCI will review the previously denied or newly submitted prerequisites and credits, and reconsider any anticipated credits or prerequisites for which information has changed since the return of the final review. The fee associated with supplemental (appeal) reviews varies depending on the level of complexity of the credits or prerequisites submitted. In cases where credits are directly linked to a base prerequisite, only the prerequisite needs to be appealed.
- GBCI will respond with an updated LEED certification review report within 20-25 business days, indicating which prerequisites and attempted credits have been either awarded or denied.

- Like the final review, you can either accept the supplemental (appeal) review results as final or submit for additional supplemental (appeal) reviews. There is no cap on the number of supplemental (appeal) reviews you can receive.

Standard review (all rating systems)

Through the standard review path, you will submit your entire application (all credits and prerequisites) once you've completed your project.

Split review (LEED BD+C and LEED ID+C rating systems)

You may choose to pursue split review if you are certifying under a design and construction rating system. To do this, you'll submit part of your application at the conclusion of your project's design phase (design credits and prerequisites), and the rest at the conclusion of construction (construction credits and prerequisites), completing two phases of reviews. The split review is designed to help your team determine if your project is on track to achieve LEED certification at its preferred level. Please note that only credits and prerequisites identified as design credits can be submitted during the design review.

If any changes occur to the project after the design review that might affect the point total, approach or credit/prerequisite compliance, those changes must be re-reviewed by GBCI. In these cases, documentation for the affected credits must be updated and submitted for one additional round of review during the construction phase.

Expedited review

In a time crunch? Contact GBCI at least 20 business days (please allow longer if you are paying by check) prior to submitting an application to request an expedited review to cut your review time in half (reduced from 20-25 business days to 10-12 business days per review phase). Please note that there is an additional charge for this service, and GBCI's ability to fulfill your request depends on their current review capacity. If your request can be accommodated, GBCI will confirm availability and provide an updated review schedule for your project.

Submitting an inquiry

Having difficulty fulfilling a rating system prerequisite or credit? Have you thought of an alternative way to interpret a credit or path to fulfill it? We've established inquiries so that you can gain clarification before you register your project or plan or as you're working through your LEED application. Here are your options:

Credit Interpretation Ruling (CIR): A CIR allows you to obtain technical guidance related to a particular credit or facet of the LEED rating system. Our review team will let you know if your interpretation of a particular credit or prerequisite is consistent with published rating system requirements. When it comes time to submit your application for review, you will need to provide documentation demonstrating fulfillment of the CIR and indicate the approved CIR within your application for certification. You may file an appeal if you are not satisfied with the result of your CIR using the process above. Keep in mind, also, that CIRs are not precedent setting; your project team can only utilize the ruling for the project under which the CIR was submitted. CIRs for LEED commercial projects are filed through LEED Online.

LEED Interpretation: Administered by USGBC, LEED Interpretations focus on the evolution of the LEED rating system and are published periodically in the form of official addenda. They are developed through a deliberative process involving LEED committees. Like Project CIRs, LEED Interpretations provide answers to technical inquiries about applying LEED in situations not already addressed by the rating systems, reference guides and MPRs. They differ from Project CIRs in that, as USGBC issued addenda, these rulings are precedent-setting and applicable to all projects registered in the future. As in the case with all addenda, projects registered before a LEED Interpretation is published may voluntarily elect to follow these revisions. You can access published LEED Interpretations online in our searchable addenda database.

Contesting a review ruling: If resolution of a technical issue related to a review ruling has not been achieved via GBCI's customer support channels and discussion with GBCI reviewers, GBCI has put in-place a Review Challenge Policy whereby a project team may challenge the accuracy of a review decision regarding the sufficiency of already submitted materials. Please refer to the GBCI Review Challenge Policy which outlines the process for doing so.

Important considerations

Deadline for submitting for review

For LEED BD+C and LEED ID+C rating systems, you will need to submit for your construction phase review (preliminary standard review or preliminary construction review) no later than two years after your project is substantially completed (the date on which your building receives a certificate of occupancy or similar official indication that it is fit and ready for use).

LEED O+M:

- Initial certifications and all recertifications required to submit for review within 60 days of the end of their performance period.
- Initial certifications and all recertifications must also submit for Final Review within 60 days of receiving the preliminary review results in order to ensure that the certification reflects recent performance.
- Initial certification and recertifications submitting for Final Review more than 60 days after receiving the preliminary review results must update the application's performance period to end within the 60 days prior to the date of submission for final review.

If you decide you no longer want to pursue LEED certification for your project, we understand. Please contact GBCI so that your application can be closed, and accurate records maintained.

Campus Credit Approach

We recommend that you complete the master site review prior to submitting any associated, individual or group projects for review, since the campus credits earned through the master site review will then become available to your individual or group projects associated with it. Review processes for the master site and the individual or group projects proceed as outlined above. You have the option to select standard or split reviews for design and construction rating systems.

Certify

Congratulations, it's time to accept your review results to confirm your LEED certification! Once your final application review is complete, your project team can either accept or appeal GBCI's final review report or request an additional supplemental (appeal) review.

Once you've accepted the final certification report, you will no longer be able to submit for supplemental (appeal) reviews, or contest review decisions for specific credits or prerequisites. Please double (or triple) check that you have achieved all prerequisites and targeted credits before accepting the final certification.

Certification Levels

While all LEED-certified projects and plans are a cut above the rest, each is assigned one of four levels of certification to acknowledge the degree of achievement. The number of points that your project earns determines the level of LEED certification that you will receive.

- LEED Certified™: 40-49 points earned
- LEED Silver®: 50-59 points earned
- LEED Gold®: 60-79 points earned
- LEED Platinum®: 80+ points earned

Promote your project

Once you've earned certification, it's likely that you'll want to tell the world. You should. LEED certification benefits your business's bottom line and underscores your sustainability efforts. It's a cause for celebration!

Our public relations guide for LEED-certified projects can help you do that. You'll also have the option to order formal certificates of recognition, and can choose to order LEED plaques and certificates. [Learn more.](#)

(Psst... did you know that USGBC Platinum-level members receive 20 hours of dedicated public relations support from USGBC's in-house communications team? [Learn more about Platinum membership.](#))

Project information: How USGBC handles your data

Your work with LEED is something to be celebrated – and communicated to the world at large. Achieving LEED certification gives you the opportunity to share your project strategies, photos and insight, and play a pivotal role in educating other project teams.

How is USGBC utilizing your project data?

We use your project data for the greater good: to educate and provide resources for LEED project teams and others around the world, showcase your strategies, and share the size and power of the green building movement.

LEED-registered and certified projects are, by default, considered “public” projects, and thereby included in USGBC's public LEED project directory. A listing in this directory allows the general public and members of the media to look up your project listing and its related details.

Here's a full list of the data and project elements that may be listed in the project directory:

Project directory information

- Project name
- Project ID
- Physical address
- Date of registration
- Date of certification
- Certification level
- Total points earned
- Project scorecard
- ACP (Alternative Compliance Path) selection
- Rating system and version
- Owner type
- Owner name
- Owner organization
- Gross square footage
- Total property area
- Project type
- Recognition for reporting energy, water, waste, transportation and human experience performance data

All “public” projects also benefit from publicity opportunities: we may utilize your project data to create case studies highlighting your project's features, reference your project on our website or to the media, or create other derivative works.

Information that may be used for articles, project profiles, other features:

- Service providers

- Project team members
- Promotional or other project photographs
- Project strategies for certification
- Quotations from team members

You are free to opt-out of the LEED project directory and publicity opportunities as a “private project” at the time of registration: specific instructions on how to do so are available in LEED Online. All private projects that earn certification will be prompted once more to transition to public status (we can’t help ourselves, we love sharing good news!). You will need to re-confirm your “private” status at that time, if you wish to retain it.

Please note, confidential, or private LEED-certified projects are not authorized to use the LEED certification logos. Please carefully review the LEED Trademark Policy and Branding Guidelines for more information.

Important considerations

Deadline for achieving certification

Each rating system will remain open and available for certification after the rating system registration close date. To certify your project under a specific rating system, you must submit for certification by that rating system's certification close date, also called the sunset date. If you have difficulty meeting this deadline, please reach out to GBCI—they’ll work with you on a solution for your project. View the LEED registration close and certification close deadlines.

Maintaining LEED certification

Remember, LEED certified projects are required to track and report energy and water data, at a minimum, as described in:

- LEED 2009 Minimum Program requirement 6 (Must Commit to Sharing Whole-Building Energy and Water Use Data)
- LEED v4 and LEED v4.1 EA prerequisite Building-Level Energy Metering
- LEED v4 and LEED v4.1 WE prerequisite Building-Level Water Metering.

Projects must commit to sharing with USGBC the resulting whole-project energy and water usage data for a five-year period beginning on the date the project accepts LEED certification or typical occupancy, whichever comes first.

All buildings free access to Arc, a performance platform helping streamline this process.

Tracking and reporting waste, transportation and human experience performance is also encouraged for all projects – this is a way to showcase your project’s continuing commitment to being a high performing building!

Expiration of LEED certification

If you’ve earned certification under LEED v4 O+M, you must recertify within five years of the previous certification. If you’ve earned certification under LEED v4.1 O+M, you must recertify within three years of the previous certification.

Revocation of LEED certification

In rare situations, LEED certification may be revoked. We’ve created the GBCI Certification Challenge Policy to ensure that all LEED project submittals and subsequent reviews by GBCI team members are done so with integrity, accuracy and truthfulness. A certification challenge may be initiated by GBCI or by any third party within 18 months of a project’s certification. The certification challenge may include additional review of project documentation, the review of supplemental information, and/or a site visit. In line with the policy, you’ll need to retain all project documentation related to your certification, and the achievement of prerequisites and credits, for two years after receiving certification, to ensure that this information is available in case of a challenge.

Fees

LEED certification provides an exceptional value for your money: So, how much will it cost to certify your project?

Registration fee: There is a flat registration fee calculated on a per-project (building) basis that you'll pay up front at the time of registration. Rates are based on the fee schedule published at the time of registration.

Certification fee: The certification fee is charged on a per-project (building) basis and based on the size of the project and the rating system under which the project is registered. Certification fees are due within 30 calendar days from when you submit your application for review. After all that work you did to submit your documentation, don't forget to send your payment! Remember, GBCI will not begin your review until payment in full has been received and cleared our system (thank you!). Also, please note that certification fees are based on the fees published at the time the project is submitted for review and cover both the preliminary and final reviews for either review path (standard or split review).

Pre-pay: Certification fees may be paid in advance. If certification fees are paid in advance, you will not be charged for the difference should a subsequent increase in fees occur. If your project increases in size, you will be charged any additional fees at the increased rate. If your project decreases in size, upon request, you will be refunded any fees at the rate at which you pre-paid.

Gross square footage changes between design and construction review: Additional design phase fees will apply if your project increases in size between the design and construction phases of review. This additional fee will be added to the construction phase certification fee invoice and is calculated based on the added floor area and the fee schedule that was in place when the design application was originally submitted for review.

Other fees: Other fees related to expedited reviews, supplemental (appeal) reviews, and other optional aspects of the LEED certification process may apply, should you pursue these avenues.

Payment terms: Invoices must be paid within 30 calendar days. A one-time extension of an additional 30 calendar days is available – please contact GBCI. If invoices are not paid within the required timeframe, they will be cancelled, and in subsequent requests for services, the invoice amount may change according to the prevailing fee schedule. Fees are non-transferrable and non-refundable. In the case of registration, non-payment of registration may result in a cancellation of project registration.

Member discounts: USGBC Silver, Gold and Platinum level member organizations benefit from discounted LEED registration and certification fees. Discounts are available based on the membership status of either the owner or the project administrator for a given LEED project. Visit the fee charts page below for more information on available discounts.

View all of the fee charts - [LEED Certification Fees | U.S. Green Building Council \(usgbc.org\)](#)

Resources & Tools

USGBC offers a number of resources and tools to support you during the process of LEED certification.

General resources

- Credit Library
- Addenda database
- Pilot Credit library
- Regional Priority Credit lookup
- LEED Online
- Education @USGBC
- Arc

- Legal agreements: LEED Certification Agreement, Confirmation of Agent's Authority, Confirmation of Primary Owner's Authority, Change of Owner Agreement

BD+C specific

LEED v4

- Reference Guide
- Rating System Document
- Checklist

LEED 2009

- Reference Guide
- Supplements: Healthcare, Retail
- Rating System Document: New Construction, Retail, Healthcare, Schools, Core & Shell
- Checklist: New Construction, Core & Shell, Schools, Healthcare

ID+C specific

LEED v4

- Reference Guide
- Rating System Document
- Checklist

LEED 2009

- Reference Guide
- Retail Supplement
- Rating System Document: Commercial Interiors, Retail
- Checklist: Commercial Interiors, Retail

O+M specific

LEED v4

- Reference Guide
- Rating System Document
- Checklist

LEED 2009

- Reference Guide
- Rating System Document
- Checklist