



Top-Ten Tips for First-Time LEED Teams™

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As the number of USGBC LEED® projects begins to increase, this is a good time to review the experiences of first-time LEED teams who've learned some valuable lessons. While your team may come together out of its desire to create a green or sustainable project – how well you manage the process and documentation will largely determine whether it earns LEED certification. A successful team will understand from the start that LEED projects require a whole-systems design approach, and will depend throughout on collaborative, interactive, and multidisciplinary teamwork. Here are ten tips that will guide your first-time team.

1) Plan Early.

A common mistake for first-time teams is trying to work LEED goals into a project that is too far along in the design process. Make the decision to pursue LEED certification as early as possible, ideally in pre-design. Design strategies should be developed collaboratively from the start. The best results are achieved when the design is a result of the team's sustainable objectives and goals, rather than trying to shoehorn LEED features into a set design, or "chase" points to make them fit. The owner's sustainable priorities will be your guide.

2) Delegate or Hire a LEED Manager.

The LEED Manager knows where you need to go and how to get you there. While all teams benefit with an experienced LEED Manager or Champion driving the boat, it is essential for first-time LEED teams. The most important thing is to have one qualified person responsible for coordinating, tracking, and reviewing the LEED requirements and submittals for the whole team all along the way.

3) Start with an Eco-Charrette (LEED-Kickoff).

"Hold charrettes early and often and be certain that the gamut of stakeholders are active participants" advises Professor Brian Dunbar, USGBC LEED Faculty and director of the Institute for the Built Environment at CSU. Prior to any drawings, gather the entire team of design and construction professionals as well as the owner, occupants, maintenance personnel and perhaps even local officials, community members, utility company rep, or product manufacturers for a pre-design charrette. The length and frequency of charrettes will vary based on the size and scope of the project. Ideally they will occur in each design phase. Also consider a team tour of an exemplary facility to inspire integrated thinking and to see what works in your area.

4) Get some (or more) LEED training.

Attend a LEED workshop (cost about \$375 including materials) or arrange for a private seminar for your office or team members new to LEED. GreenBuild 365 is the USGBC source for educational courses, webinars, and conference archives found at www.usgbc.org.

Become a LEED Accredited Professional (exam fee \$300 for USGBC members). Exam info site is www.gbci.org. The current LEED Professional Accreditation Exam Study Guide (\$50) is available through the USGBC Colorado Chapter to assist in becoming an effective LEED AP and includes a practice test and new EB and CI sections.

Buy and study the USGBC LEED Green Building Design and Construction 2009 Edition Reference (\$150 member price). Attend the annual USGBC Greenbuild conference for a powerhouse experience of sustainability and LEED. Attend local state USGBC Chapter educational presentations and events. While charrettes often include an introduction to LEED for first-time teams, I recommend prepping before then to be ready to hit the ground running. As the LEED Administrator and Manager, my ideal LEED team would all be LEED AP's from the start.

5) Include LEED Requirements and Specs in RFPs, bid packages, and Construction Documents.

If it's not in the specs, it won't be LEED. LEED Requirements directly impact numerous Specification sections, in addition to the Division 1 section dedicated to LEED Requirements. It is most important to include what submittals will be required of each team member and their vendors in the specs and bid package. Additionally, contractors are probably not accustomed to submitting Management Plans for Construction Waste or Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) as a requirement.

Purchase or develop contract specifications for LEED Requirements, including sample management plans and templates for the contractor. BSD SpecLink, Arcom's MasterSpec, SpecText, and GreenSpec Guideline Specifications are four products for construction document LEED Requirements. Research building materials and products early, as they typically impact numerous credit point outcomes, and request product submittals from the contractor for approval well in advance too. Monthly progress reports from the General Contractor are important to write into the specs to gauge whether they are on track for achieving project goals. Supply the project specific LEED Letter Templates for Contractor's in bid packages so they get a look at what type of submittals and backup data will be required of them.

6) Hire experienced LEED consultants.

LEED has spawned a new field of specialists that will help you achieve sustainable and LEED goals. Be prepared for some new team members. LEED specialists can include daylighting/electrical engineers, energy modelers & analysts, sustainable technology designers, commissioning authorities, sustainable design charrette leaders, and the LEED Manager or Consultant.

7) Document as you go.

Gather the submittals necessary for certification all along the way. If you wait until the end of the project you will be chasing down recycled content cut sheets, MSDS forms for VOC content, GreenGuard certificates, or FSC wood chain-of-custody



certificate numbers from vendors who have new work on their radar and will therefore be harder to obtain.

Be familiar early with the LEED Letter Templates and requirements that you are responsible for submitting and the documentation that may accompany them so you know what to compile or calculate. If you are the LEED Manager, create a simple checklist to track receipt, review and completion of each credit point submittal. Study the “Submittal Documentation” section of each credit point and Prerequisite in the Reference Guide in addition to the LEED Letter Templates. A non-interactive PDF version of the Letter Templates is available on the USGBC website for anyone to see. Only registered projects have access to the interactive Letter Templates which include calculators.

LEED-Online is the LEED certification web tool and project repository for documentation. The worksite allows team members to upload the required Letter Templates and associated submittal documents on this central project website. I suggest the two-phase certification submittal whereby Design credit documentation is submitted for USGBC review prior to the Construction Phase. This is preferred over one submittal of both the Design and Construction documentation following construction.

8) Build-in extra points for LEED certification.

For teams new to LEED without an experienced LEED Manager, plan on USGBC denying several points that you submit. Study the Credit Interpretation Requests & Rulings (CIRs) on the USGBC site to get a good idea about which approaches and design strategies fly and which get shot down. The Innovation (ID) points can be more unpredictable than others. Consult the ID Credit Catalog USGBC has compiled for approved ID credits. Shoot for another 3 or 4 points that you'd like to achieve but for various reasons, may not materialize prior to submittal. Consider targeting one full certification level higher than you would be satisfied with. If you should find yourself short at the end, purchasing renewable energy credits (RECs) for the extra Green Power credit has turned into an “insurance” point for some teams. Go to www.green-e.org for more information on purchasing green power.

9) Bring-in the Commissioning Authority early.

Teams new to LEED may overlook the need to bring the Commissioning Authority (CxA) in during the early design phase to document the owner's energy-related project requirements. The CxA needs to review both the Owner's Project Requirements (OPR) as well as the Basis of Design (BoD) at specific stages. The Commissioning requirements need to be in the construction documents. The CxA role continues through the design and construction phases and in the case of the Enhanced Commissioning point, through the first year of post-occupancy.

Make certain that you understand who is qualified to serve as the Commissioning Authority. The LEED Reference Guide has a very thorough explanation on this and the requirements of both the Fundamental Commissioning (EAp1) and Enhanced Commissioning (EA c2) credit. As an example, the Enhanced Commissioning credit requires the CxA to be from an independent firm who is not involved in the project design or management and cannot be hired by firms holding construction contracts. The Fundamental CxA in some cases may be from the same firm of a project team member, but this Prerequisite needs to be reviewed



carefully for compliance. Visit the www.usgbc.org website for a chart entitled “Who can serve as the Commissioning Authority?”

Fundamental Commissioning of the building energy systems is a Prerequisite of LEED and one that you can't backtrack on if you haven't incorporated it from the start.

10) Stay current.

Become familiar with the USGBC website, www.usgbc.org. It is where you register your LEED project. It is a wealth of information on everything LEED, including the reference guides, LEED rating systems and application guides now active, in pilot, or under development; registered and certified projects; events, sustainable industry resources, news, reports, research, case studies, member's directory, LEED AP listings, and more. Members and registered projects have more access to these online resources. LEED Letter Templates, Reference Guides, Errata and Credit Interpretation Rulings (CIRs) are found here, but Letter Templates and CIRs can be accessed on the LEED-Online workspace for more central management of your LEED project.

Plan for the upcoming LEED v3 which includes the LEED for 2009 harmonized rating systems and major changes to the program launching April 27, 2009.

Attend a green building conference. The US Green Building Council's annual Greenbuild Conference & Expo will be in Phoenix November 2009. Attendance was over 28,000 at Greenbuild 2008 in Boston. Don't miss it!

Sign up for the electronic USGBC Newsletter. Check out the published studies to help you present LEED to clients with confidence such as Examining the Cost of Green, Making the Business Case for LEED, and others under Member Resources.

Get on a Corresponding Committee with USGBC to stay current with your particular area of interest. There are 25 such committees ranging from schools, state & local government, laboratories, lodging, and healthcare facilities to name a few. It is a selective way to focus your LEED interests.

Become a member of your local state Chapter of the USGBC to connect with active professionals and receive communications of valuable local talks, seminars, events, tours and more. Monthly chapter presentations are a good way to learn and network green. Join online through the USGBC site under the “Chapters” link. Don't forget about the Green Drinks networking get-together every month too!

Also check out www.BuildingGreen.com, the authoritative information source on environmental building and authors of GreenSpec, Environmental Building News (EBN), Green Building Advisor and over 100 Case Studies. Try out their list of free content for non-subscribers that includes a sample newsletter, the latest GreenSpec products with reviews and manufacturer links, case studies, and their EBN bulletin.

Their online BuildingGreen Suite by subscription is an invaluable design resource for sustainable and LEED projects that I have come to rely on. One of the Suite products is the online GreenSpec directory, searchable by LEED credit, CSI designation, green attribute, or



by U.S. EPA CPG Recycled Content Products listing. It also includes Guideline Specification language. The EBN newsletter is cutting-edge unbiased journalism with no advertising. BuildingGreen is listed as a resource under countless credit points in the USGBC Reference Guides. GreenSource Magazine is another of their publications, in partnership with McGraw-Hill.

In years past, I have recommended various periodicals and e-newsletters for high performance buildings and LEED but the list of options has grown so long now, it would be a review unto itself.

Challenge your team! You'll be surprised at the sustainable solutions you'll discover together and the spirit that is created once you've established your vision and intention for the project.

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