





Achieving Sustainability EXCELLENCE:

The Advantages of LEED Certification

BY ED BAUER

In the pursuit of sustainability, colleges and universities are increasingly turning to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification as a benchmark for excellence in green building practices. LEED certification not only verifies a campus's commitment to environmental stewardship but also offers numerous tangible benefits, ranging from cost savings to improved occupant health and well-being.

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To assist in the pursuit of LEED certification, we looked at critical steps involved in obtaining LEED certification for college campuses, the agencies that can assist in the process, and strategies for promoting LEED certification within the campus community.

First, let's look at the benefits.

Environmental stewardship. LEED certification signifies a campus's dedication to environmental sustainability. By implementing energy-efficient designs, sustainable materials, and water conservation measures, colleges can minimize their environmental footprint and contribute to global efforts to combat climate change.

Cost savings. LEED-certified buildings are designed to optimize energy and water efficiency, resulting in lower utility bills and operational expenses for college campuses. According to the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), LEED-certified buildings consume 25 percent less energy and 11 percent less water on average compared to conventional buildings, translating into significant cost savings over time.

Health and well-being. LEED-certified buildings prioritize indoor environmental quality, promoting occupant health and well-being. By using non-toxic building materials, optimizing ventilation systems, and maximizing natural daylight, colleges can create healthier learning and working

environments for students, faculty, and staff.

Market differentiation. LEED certification enhances the marketability and reputation of a college or university. By demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility, colleges can attract prospective students, faculty, and donors who value green initiatives. A campus with LEED-certified buildings stands out as a leader in sustainable development and innovation.

Before embarking on project for which you intended to seek LEED certification, consider the resources available to your team. There are several places to turn for information, guidance, and a better understanding of the certification process, starting with the USGBC itself. As the leading authority on green building certification, the USGBC provides resources, training, and accreditation for professionals seeking to achieve LEED certification. Colleges can leverage USGBC's expertise and guidance throughout the certification process.

Meanwhile, the Green Building Certification Institute (GBCI) is responsible for administering LEED certification and credentialing professionals in the green building industry. Colleges can work with GBCI-accredited professionals to navigate the certification process and ensure compliance with LEED requirements.

You may also have your own campus office or organizations dedicated to sustainability. These will help support LEED certification efforts by providing expertise, funding, and advocacy to promote sustainable development on campus and facilitate LEED certification projects.

Many campuses have embraced the value of promoting LEED certification in their campus communities to give these projects momentum and buy-in from students, faculty, and staff. Education and awareness campaigns can raise consciousness of the importance of LEED certification and its benefits for the campus community.

These may include hosting workshops, seminars, and campus tours to showcase LEED-certified buildings and highlight their sustainable features.

Engaging students in LEED certification efforts also fosters a sense of ownership and community involvement. Colleges can involve students in sustainability projects, green building design competitions, and campus greening initiatives to promote LEED certification and inspire future sustainability leaders.

Colleges can collaborate with local businesses, government agencies, and community organizations as well to support LEED certification efforts and advance sustainability goals. By leveraging external resources and expertise, colleges can accelerate the certification process and expand their impact beyond campus boundaries.

Steps to Obtain LEED Certification for College Campuses

Before beginning a project, you'll want to understand the steps involved.

Sustainability-minded project planning and design. The first step in obtaining LEED certification is to establish sustainability goals and integrate green building principles into a project's planning and design phase. This involves selecting a LEED-accredited design team and setting performance targets for energy efficiency, water conservation, and indoor environmental quality.

LEED documentation and submission. Once a project is underway, colleges must compile documentation and evidence to demonstrate compliance with LEED requirements. This includes tracking energy and water usage, documenting sustainable materials and construction practices, and conducting performance testing to verify building performance.

LEED certification review. After completing the construction phase, colleges can submit their LEED documentation to the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)

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excellence and reaping numerous benefits, including cost savings, enhanced occupant health, and market differentiation. By following the steps outlined in this article, colleges can navigate the certification process successfully and position themselves as leaders in green building and environmental stewardship. Through education, collaboration, and strategic promotion, colleges can engage the campus community and inspire collective action towards a more sustainable future.

for review and evaluation. A team of LEED reviewers assesses the project's compliance with LEED criteria and awards certification based on the level of achievement: Certified, Silver, Gold, or Platinum.

Areas on Campus to Consider Seeking LEED Certification

The key to earning LEED certification wherever viable is to think ahead about new projects on the horizon and determine if this is something you want to pursue. Consider opportunities in projects both already on the horizon or those a few years down the road:

New construction. Colleges can pursue LEED certification for new building projects, incorporating sustainable design principles and green building technologies to minimize environmental impact and optimize building performance.

Renovation and retrofitting. Existing buildings on college campuses can undergo renovations and retrofits to achieve LEED certification. This may involve upgrading HVAC systems, installing energy-efficient lighting, and improving indoor air quality to meet LEED criteria.

Campus operations. Beyond buildings, colleges can pursue LEED certification for campus-wide sustainability initiatives, such as waste reduction, recycling programs, and transportation alternatives. By addressing operational aspects, colleges can achieve comprehensive sustainability goals and earn recognition for their efforts.

The advantages of earning LEED requirements for campus buildings are plentiful in both the short and long term. Short-term benefits include immediate cost savings from reduced energy and water consumption, enhanced occupant comfort and productivity in LEED-certified buildings, and positive publicity and recognition for sustainability leadership.

Long-term benefits include continued cost savings and operational efficiencies over the lifecycle of your buildings, improved campus resilience to environmental challenges and climate change impacts, and a long-lasting legacy of environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

LEED certification offers college campuses a roadmap for achieving sustainability

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ed Bauer has been in publishing for over twenty years. In his early career years, he worked on the staff at Mount Union College and for the last twelve years as publisher and managing partner at Flaherty Media has been privileged to tour many private higher education campuses and talk with numerous staff members who manage these multiple building facilities. He can be reached at ed@pupnmag.com.

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