



What does LEED mean?

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, is a building certification process developed by the [U.S. Green Building Council \(USGBC\)](#), a non-profit organization (*not* a government agency) headquartered in Washington, D.C.

The USGBC developed the LEED certification process to enhance environmental awareness among architects and building contractors, and to encourage the design and construction of energy-efficient, water-conserving buildings that use sustainable or green resources and materials.

The LEED certification process uses a point system to determine the environmental merits of a building; there are different rating systems for homes, commercial buildings, interior renovations, schools, neighborhood developments, and other construction projects.

For most projects, there are four levels of LEED certification, depending on how many points the project has earned: certified, silver, gold or platinum. According to the USGBC, there are nine key areas measured by LEED:

- Sustainable Sites
- Water Efficiency
- Energy and Atmosphere
- Materials and Resources
- Indoor Environmental Quality
- Location and Linkages
- Awareness and Education
- Innovation in Design
- Regional Priority

Since its inception, the point system and many other parts of the LEED certification process have been dogged by criticism from architects, building contractors, and environmental activists. Many have claimed its value as a marketing tool trumps its use as a green-building evaluation system. Others have complained that it has too many loopholes to merit serious consideration, and that the certification process is cumbersome, wasteful, and ineffective at achieving true green credibility. As a result, the USGBC has continued to streamline and modify the LEED certification process.