



THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

AIA ISSUE BRIEF – GREEN BUILDING RATING SYSTEMS LEGISLATION

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Green building rating systems are used to evaluate the overall performance of buildings in the areas of energy use, water consumption, indoor air quality, resource conservation, and other environmental considerations. Notable programs include the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) suite of certifications and the Green Building Initiative (GBI) Green Globes program.¹

Overlaying their responsibility to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public, architects also have a duty to practice sustainable design as stewards of the environment. The AIA position statement on this issue supports government and private sector policy programs, including the development, evaluation, and use of evidence-based rating systems that promote the design, preservation, and construction of sustainable communities and high-performance buildings.² The AIA also supports the development of comprehensive, coordinated, and contemporary regulations throughout the United States that support these values and meet other criteria for inclusion, fairness, and cost-effectiveness.³

In order to meet their professional obligations, **architects frequently use tools such as ratings systems to guide sustainable design and decision-making.** Legislation or executive orders prohibiting the use of specific rating systems – particularly to public construction projects – unnecessarily restrict design. LEED, Green Globes, and other programs are tools that can help owners achieve sustainability goals and building performance.

LEED is recognized globally as a standard-bearer for green building programs. Developed through a consensus-based process involving more than 185,000 professional credential holders worldwide, LEED offers designers professional support and incentives to innovate through its online platform and customer service network. An entire library of approaches to earn credits and a vast interpretation infrastructure that USGBC updates continuously fosters flexibility and creates options for any project type – key assets to every architect.⁴

LEED projects in the public sector have demonstrated substantial value to taxpayers. It is the most widely used rating system in the federal government, with over 1,000 certified projects encompassing more than 100 million square feet as of February 2013. The federal government also boasts a support network of over 1,400 LEED professionals in its ranks, unrivaled by any other level of government.⁵ The General Services Administration (GSA), which manages America's public property assets, also participates in the LEED Volume Program, which can reduce certification fees by up to 80 percent.⁶ Some state and local governments with larger



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property portfolios could leverage these assets with this program when considering new projects and major renovations.

Studies show that compared to similar non-certified projects, those earning green building certification cost less to operate, improve worker productivity, attract and retain talent, and encourage investment in emerging technologies and practices in the private sector.⁷

There are many other green building rating systems and recognized beyond code programs that designers use regionally and internationally.⁸ Interest in the GBI Green Globes rating system is at an all-time high because of its perception as an achievable, affordable rating system for limited budgets or special project attributes (e.g. large institutional campuses or other publicly-funded projects).⁹

Whatever the reason, **the choice should be left to the owner and the architect** about what tools will best achieve the goals of each project and provide added value to the client. Policymakers should support healthy places for people to live, work, and learn by keeping all design options available and encouraging sustainable choices in the public and private sectors.

Visit the [AIA Codes Advocacy program](#) and the [AIA State and Local Government Relations program](#) for more resources on the building regulations, laws, and policies that most directly impact architectural practice.

For more information on some of the voluntary rating systems discussed above, please visit the websites for the U.S. Green Building Council at <http://www.usgbc.org/leed> and the Green Building Initiative at <http://www.thegbi.org>.

¹ For more, view the [AIA Introduction to Codes and Standards](#).

² AIA Board of Directors. *Directory of Public Policies and Position Statements*. "Supporting Position Statement: Sustainable Architectural Practice and the Built Environment." III-C-1, page 17. Approved December 2014, through December 9, 2017. <http://www.aia.org/aiaucmp/groups/aia/documents/pdf/aia078764.pdf>.

³ AIA Board of Directors. *Directory of Public Policies and Position Statements*. "Supporting Position Statement: Building Codes and Standards." II-A-1, page 11. Approved December 2013 through December 31, 2016. <http://www.aia.org/aiaucmp/groups/aia/documents/pdf/aia078764.pdf>.

⁴ U.S. Green Building Council. "Why LEED?" <http://www.usgbc.org/leed#why>.

⁵ U.S. Green Building Council. "LEED in the Public Sector Saving Taxpayers Money, Creating American Jobs and Leading by Example." February 2013. http://www.usgbc.org/sites/default/files/LEED%20Public%20Buildings%20Brief_2%5b2%5d.pdf.

⁶ Leonard, Patrick. "How LEED Volume Can Help Facility Managers." *FacilitiesNet*. January 2012. <http://www.facilitiesnet.com/green/article/How-LEED-Volume-Can-Help-Facility-Managers--12932#>.

⁷ Simcoe, Timothy, and Michael W. Toffel. "Public Procurement and the Private Supply of Green Buildings." Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 13-030. September 2012. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:9527320>. <http://bishop.hul.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/9527320/13-030.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁸ Building Codes Assistance Project. *Online Code Environment and Advocacy Network*. "Recognized Beyond Code Programs." <http://energycodesocean.org/efficient-codes-and-standards>.

⁹ Melton, Paula and Tristan Roberts. "LEED vs. Green Globes: A Definitive Analysis." BuildingGreen, Inc. 2014. Report available by purchase: <https://www2.buildinggreen.com/article/buildinggreen-present-green-globes-vs-leed-analysis>.