

LEED-CI – Ready to Go!

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The interest has been high, the wait long and the contributors have numbered in the hundreds, but at last, LEED for Commercial Interiors (LEED-CI) is concluding its pilot phase. Written to address the specifics of tenant spaces primarily in office and institutional buildings, LEED-CI fulfills requests from architects, interior designers and their clients for a rating system to help them make sustainable choices with respect to the scope of work under their direct control. Applicable to tenant spaces in new or existing buildings LEED-CI's mission is to foster market transformation in the construction of high-performance, healthy, durable, affordable, and environmentally-sound commercial interiors.

The development of LEED-CI evolved over five years and included the participation of experts from diverse fields: interior designers, architects, engineers, product manufacturers, academics, scientists, government and commercial real estate representatives, developers and others. A charrette was held at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Pocantico Conference Center where stakeholders were able to concentrate their efforts on the primary areas of concern: design issues and innovation, site selection, energy and water, indoor environmental quality, and materials and resources. A core group, the LEED-CI Steering Committee, completed the work necessary to bring the rating system to the pilot phase and is continuing to guide its progress.

LEED-CI closely follows both the format and structure of LEED for New Construction (LEED-NC) but modifies credits as necessary to make them applicable to an interiors project. In most cases, the intent of each credit remains the same while the requirements vary. For example, some of the energy and atmosphere credits that are unattainable in an interiors project have been altered to recognize strategies that reduce the environmental impacts associated with excessive energy use; i.e. connected lighting power density, lighting controls and connected equipment and appliance loads. Site selection credits

reward many of the same strategies as LEED-NC – encouraging urban development and alternative transportation – while eliminating those out of the interiors scope of work. Many of the materials and resources and indoor environmental quality credits are nearly identical to the original but in some cases have been expanded to recognize the significant environmental impact of furniture and furnishings in an interiors fit-out.

Since the US Green Building Council announced the start of the LEED-CI pilot program, more than 100 projects have applied to participate. The projects selected are diverse in scope, geographical location, market segment and budget in order to get the best possible feedback. The pilot phase has run for close to two years during which time data has been collected to guide any necessary adjustments to LEED-CI prior to the official USGBC membership balloting process and public launch of the new rating system in the fourth quarter of 2004. All projects that successfully complete the requirements will receive LEED-CI certification according to the scale established by LEED – certified, silver, gold or platinum based on the number of points achieved.

It is appropriate that the LEED-CI pilot program is being funded in large part through generous grants from the General Services Administration (GSA). As the world's largest landlord, GSA has a heavily vested interest in assuring that occupants are able to make sustainable choices as they build out interior spaces, even if the building itself is not particularly green. In addition to the pilots, the grants have also been used to develop the LEED-CI Reference Guide and training materials that are essential aids in the certification process.

The addition of the commercial interiors product is an important step in USGBC's goal of transforming the design and construction of buildings to one that encourages a collaborative and innovative process that optimizes environmental and economic factors. Its introduction reinforces the serious intent of the LEED program to help the built environment become a catalyst for the ultimate goal of regenerating the natural environment.