



# **RATING SYSTEM SELECTION GUIDANCE**

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Version 2

## Overview

This document provides guidance to project teams attempting to choose a rating system for all LEED projects. These are not rigid rules; however, if it is clear that the wrong rating system has been chosen, the project team will be asked to make a switch post-registration. Project teams are encouraged to review this guidance carefully before making a decision, and [contact GBCI](#) if the correct path is unclear.

Note that the [Minimum Program Requirements](#) (MPRs) (required for LEED 2009 projects only) may also help guide a project team in their choice of rating system. MPRs are available in the LEED Resources and Tools section of [usgbc.org](http://usgbc.org).

Terms defined in the glossary at the end of this document are underlined and italicized the first time they appear.

This guidance is not fully reflected in the reference guide introductions or the rating system selection tool in LEED Online v3. However, this document takes precedence over those tools and resources.

## Choosing between rating systems

The following “40/60 rule” provides guidance for choosing between rating systems. To use this rule, first ‘assign’ a rating system to the different parts of the building (for example, Existing Buildings: O&M for an existing structure, and New Construction for an addition being built onto it). Then, choose the best rating system depending on the resulting percentages.

Keep in mind that the gross floor area of a LEED project must be certified under a single rating system, and is subject to all prerequisites and attempted credits in that rating system, regardless of a mixed-use or -scope situation.

- a) If a particular rating system is appropriate for 40% or less of the gross floor area of a LEED project building or space, then that rating system should not be used.
- b) If a particular rating system is appropriate for 60% or more of the gross floor area of a LEED project building or space, then that rating system should be used.
- c) Project teams with buildings and spaces that do not fall into the scenarios described in a) and b) must independently assess their situation and decide which rating system is most applicable.

## When to Use Each Rating System

### LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance

This rating system is appropriate for existing **whole buildings**. Typically, these buildings undergo only improvement work. However, it is normal and acceptable for different levels of construction work to be going on in different parts of a building, if the majority of the floor area remains occupied. Project teams in this situation should review the 40/60 rule, described above, and the [Minimum Program Requirements Supplemental Guidance](#) (available in the LEED Resources and Tools section of usgbc.org) on MPR #5, **Must Comply With Minimum Occupancy Rates**.

### New Construction and Major Renovations Rating Systems

In terms of construction scope, these rating systems are appropriate for **whole buildings** that are undergoing new construction and/or *major renovation* (note that this includes completing the interior *fit-out*). Rating system-specific explanations are outlined below to address the distinction between building functions.

#### LEED for New Construction and Major Renovations

LEED for New Construction and Major Renovations is appropriate for all buildings with functions not addressed by another rating system in this category.

#### LEED for Schools New Construction and Major Renovations

This rating system is appropriate for buildings that provide both *core learning spaces* and *ancillary learning spaces*. LEED for Schools was developed with children in grades K-12 in mind, but it may be used for other age levels as well. Table 1 below lists the relevance of the different kinds of learning spaces when determining the appropriateness of LEED for Schools for a building.

Table 1: LEED for Schools Applications

	% of building square footage dedicated to learning space		
	over 60% core and ancillary including 25%+ core	40-60% core and ancillary, including 10%+ core	40% or less core and ancillary OR less than 10% core
K-12	should use LEED for Schools	may use LEED for Schools	should not use LEED for Schools
other than K-12	may use LEED for Schools	may use LEED for Schools	should not use LEED for Schools

#### LEED for Healthcare

This rating system is appropriate for buildings that serve individuals who seek medical treatment, including licensed and federal inpatient care facilities, licensed and federal outpatient care facilities, and licensed and federal long term care facilities. These are considered LEED for Healthcare 'designated' uses. Buildings with other kinds of medically-related uses, such as unlicensed outpatient facilities, medical, dental and veterinary offices and clinics, assisted living facilities and medical education & research centers are examples of 'non-designated' uses, and may use LEED for Healthcare at the project team's discretion.

#### LEED for Retail – New Construction and Major Renovation

This rating system is appropriate for buildings dedicated to the sale of goods or commodities directly to consumers who come onto the premise for the purpose of obtaining those goods or commodities. Includes (but is not limited to) banks, restaurants (quick and full-serve), stores of any kind, spas, etc. Includes both direct customer service areas (showroom) and preparation or storage areas that support the customer service.

### LEED for Core and Shell Development

This rating system is appropriate for **whole buildings** in which the entity pursuing certification controls the design and construction of all *primary structural components* and the *exterior skin* but not the *interior fit-out* (with the exception of common spaces, such as lobbies, etc).

### Commercial Interiors Rating Systems

In terms of construction scope, these rating systems are appropriate for interior spaces that are undergoing *alteration work* for at least 60% of the certifying gross floor area.

If the following two statements describe the project, then a New Construction and Major Renovation rating system should be used

- 1) the entity conducting the work leases OR owns and controls 90% or more of the building that the space is located in
- 2) the same entity is conducting new construction or *major renovation* in 40% or more of the gross floor area of the building  
(note that New Construction and Major Renovation rating systems requires 100% of the gross floor area to be included in the LEED project boundary)

Rating system-specific explanations are outlined below to address the distinction between building functions.

#### LEED for Commercial Interiors

LEED for Commercial Interiors is appropriate for all spaces with functions not addressed by another rating system in this category (currently, only retail is available).

#### LEED for Retail – Commercial Interiors

This rating system is appropriate for buildings dedicated to the sale of goods or commodities directly to consumers who come onto the premise for the purpose of obtaining those goods or commodities. Includes (but is not limited to) banks, restaurants (quick and full-serve), stores of any kind, spas, etc. Includes both direct customer service areas (showroom) and preparation or storage areas that support the customer service.

### LEED for Homes

This rating system is appropriate for **whole** single family and low-rise (1-3 stories) multifamily *residential* buildings that are undergoing new construction or a *gut rehab*.

If the building contains kitchen(s), dormitories and/or assisted living facilities, it may use LEED for Homes, at the project team's discretion. If the kitchens are in-unit, as opposed to central, project teams are strongly encouraged to use LEED for Homes.

Mid-rise (4-6 stories) multifamily residential buildings, dormitories, and assisted living facilities may use either LEED for Homes OR the LEED for Homes Mid-Rise Pilot Rating System (again, if kitchen facilities are present), which is a modified version of LEED for Homes.

## Glossary

**Alteration:** Also known as a fit-out. Includes *improvement* work in addition to the rearrangement of any interior space by the construction of non-bearing walls, partitions, ceilings, and floors, the addition or elimination of any interior door or window, the extension or rearrangement of any MEP or service system (peripheral or core), and the installation of any additional equipment or fixtures. Typically work does not extend to the *primary structural components*, *exterior shell*, or roof of the building.

**Ancillary Learning Spaces:** Informal learning spaces, including corridors, cafeterias, gymnasias and indoor swimming pools.

**Core Learning Spaces:** Formal learning spaces, including classrooms, instructional pods or activity areas, conference rooms, libraries, offices, speech clinics, offices used for educational purposes and music rooms for instruction, practice and performance.

**Core and Shell Construction:** The construction of a building's exterior shell and core mechanical, electrical, and plumbing units.

**Exterior Shell:** Any part of a building structure that acts as a barrier between the interior and exterior.

**Fit-out:** See 'alteration'.

**Gross Floor Area:** (*based on ASHRAE definition*) Sum of the floor areas of the spaces within the building, including basements, mezzanine and intermediate-floored tiers, and penthouses with headroom height of 7.5 ft (2.2 meters) or greater. It is measured from the exterior faces of exterior walls or from the centerline of walls separating buildings, or (for LEED CI certifying spaces) from the centerline of walls separating spaces. Excludes non-enclosed (or non-enclosable) roofed-over areas such as exterior covered walkways, porches, terraces or steps, roof overhangs, and similar features. Excludes air shafts, pipe trenches, and chimneys.

**Gross Square Footage:** See *gross floor area*

**Gut Rehab:** A building that a) is stripped to the studs on at least one side of the entire insulated envelope (exterior walls and insulated ceiling or roof) for insulation installation and inspection, and b) is receiving replacements for most systems and components (HVAC, windows, etc).

**Improvement:** The restoration or application of interior finishes and fixtures, MEP and service system equipment repair/replacement/upgrades, minor space-use changes, and preventative or corrective maintenance.

**Interior Fit-Out:** See 'alteration'.

**Major Renovation:** Includes extensive *alteration* work in addition to work on the *exterior shell* of the building and/or *primary structural components* and/or the core and peripheral MEP and service systems and/or site work. Typically, the extent and nature of the work is such that the *primary function space* cannot be used for its intended purpose while the work is in progress and where a new certificate of occupancy is required before the work area can be reoccupied.

**Primary Function Space:** The floor area that serves the main purpose of the building or space.

**Primary Structural Component:** Any component of the load-bearing structure of a building including footings, piles, foundations, columns, girders, beams, joists, wind or seismic bracing.

**Residential:** A space or building that is defined as a 'dwelling unit' by all applicable codes, and has a cooking area (comprised of sink(s), cooking appliance(s), preparation space(s) and a bathroom.