



RATING SYSTEM SELECTION GUIDANCE

Version 4

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Table of Contents

Overview.....	2
Other reference materials that help project teams understand how their project may pursue LEED.....	2
How to use this guidance.....	3
Rating System Selection.....	4
When several rating systems may be appropriate.....	7
Additional Applications and Guidance	8
LEED for Schools Applications.....	8
LEED for Healthcare Applications	9
Residential Applications.....	10
Glossary.....	11

Overview

Which rating system should project teams use for their LEED project?

This document was developed to explain what type of project each LEED rating system was written for. It therefore provides general guidance that the US Green Building Council (USGBC) asks project teams to consider in order to make a reasonable decision before registering their project. This document also picks up where the LEED Reference Guides leave off when deciding which rating system is best for a given project.

Exceptions: LEED for Schools and LEED for Healthcare projects. There are very specific building types that must certify under these rating systems. See the Introduction section of the relevant reference guides and sections below that outline when it is necessary to use these rating systems.

This document does not address the LEED for Neighborhood Development rating system. Please refer to the USGBC website for more details on the LEED for Neighborhood Development rating system.

Occasionally, USGBC and/or the Green Building Certification Institute (GBCI) recognize that an entirely inappropriate rating system has been chosen for a project. In this case, the project team will be asked to change the designated rating system for their registered building project. Please review this guidance carefully, and contact GBCI through the online customer service forms at gbc.org if it is not clear which rating system to use.

Other reference materials that help project teams understand how their project may pursue LEED:

Minimum Program Requirements (MPRs)

The MPRs answer the question 'Can I pursue LEED for my project?' by listing the basic characteristics that a project **must** possess to be eligible for certification. They can be found on all LEED 2009 rating system pages at usgbc.org.

Instead of the MPRs, LEED for Homes project teams should refer to the LEED for Homes Scope & Eligibility Guidelines, available on the LEED for Homes page at usgbc.org.

Rating Systems

Project teams should pay careful attention to the prerequisites and credits outlined in the given rating system, and make sure that the project can earn all prerequisites and enough points to earn certification.

GBCI and the Project Certification Process

GBCI publishes guidance on the certification process at gbc.org under building certification, resources and fees.

Please find underlined and italicized terms in the glossary at the end of this document.

How to use this guidance

First

Determine which construction type the project falls into. Be sure to consider the building in its *entirety* or the *complete interior space*.

Second

If there are multiple rating systems applicable to the construction type, choose one based on space usage type.

Third

If the correct rating system is not obvious, i.e. if different parts of the project are undergoing different kinds of construction or are serving different space usage types, carefully review the 'When several rating systems may be appropriate' section below.

Rating System Selection

First, choose a rating system based on **construction type**

NEW
CONSTRUCTION
AND MAJOR RENOVATIONS
SCHOOLS
HEALTHCARE
RETAIL:
NEW CONSTRUCTION
AND MAJOR RENOVATIONS
HOMES

Complete Construction

Appropriate for:

Buildings that are undergoing new construction or major renovation (or gut rehab, for low- and mid-rise residential) and a complete interior fit-out.

There are five rating systems in this category:

- LEED for New Construction and Major Renovations
- LEED for Schools
- LEED for Healthcare
- LEED for Retail: New Construction and Major Renovations
- LEED for Homes

CORE AND
SHELL
DEVELOPMENT

Core and Shell Construction

Appropriate for:

Buildings that are undergoing new construction or major renovation on its exterior shell and core mechanical, electrical, and plumbing units but NOT a complete interior fit-out. There is only one rating system in this category:

- LEED for Core & Shell

COMMERCIAL
INTERIORS
RETAIL:
COMMERCIAL
INTERIORS

Commercial Interior Construction

Appropriate for:

Commercial Interior spaces that are undergoing a complete interior fit-out of at least 60% of the certifying gross floor area. There are two rating systems in this category:

- LEED for Commercial Interiors
- LEED for Retail: Commercial Interiors

EXISTING
BUILDINGS
OPERATIONS AND
MAINTENANCE

Existing Buildings: Limited Construction

Appropriate for:

Existing buildings undergoing improvement work or little to no construction. There is only one rating system in this category:

- LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance

Second, choose a rating system based on **space usage type**

NEW CONSTRUCTION AND MAJOR RENOVATIONS SCHOOLS

Appropriate for:

- buildings that do not primarily serve K-12 educational, retail, or designated healthcare uses
- high rise (7+stories) residential buildings

Required for:

- buildings made up of *core* and *ancillary learning spaces* on K-12 school grounds

Also Appropriate for:

- buildings made up of *core* and *ancillary learning spaces on non K-12 school grounds*.
- non academic buildings on school campuses

See the Table 1 'Applying the LEED for Schools Rating System' below for more information.

HEALTHCARE

Required for (beginning January 1, 2012):

- 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.

Also Appropriate for:

- 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.

See Table 2 'Applying the LEED for Healthcare Rating System' below for more information.

RETAIL: NEW CONSTRUCTION OR MAJOR RENOVATIONS RETAIL: COMMERCIAL INTERIORS

Appropriate for:

- buildings or interiors 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 customer service.

HOMES

Appropriate for:

- low-rise (1-3 stories) residential buildings. The LEED for Homes Multi-Family Midrise rating system, located on the LEED for Homes page within usgbc.org, is appropriate for mid-rise (4-6 stories) residential buildings.

See Table 3 'Applying the LEED for Homes Rating System' below for more information.

COMMERCIAL INTERIORS

Appropriate for:

- interiors dedicated to functions other than retail.

Third, making a decision

When several rating systems may be appropriate

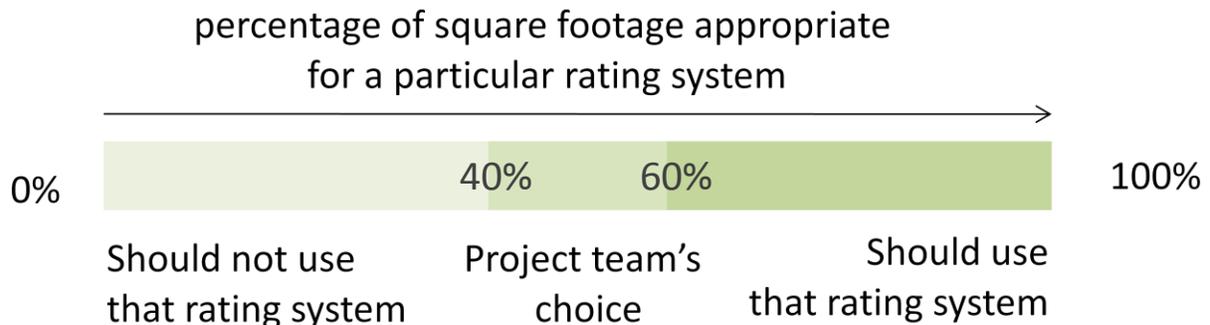
40/60 rule of thumb

The following “40/60 rule” provides guidance for making a decision when several rating systems appear to be appropriate for a project. To use this rule, first ‘assign’ a rating system to each square foot of the building based on the guidance in this document.

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. Be sure to include the entire certifying square footage (but no more) in this exercise.

Keep in mind that the entire 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 construction or space usage type.

- a) If a rating system is appropriate for less than 40% of the gross floor area of a LEED project building or space, then that rating system should not be used.
- b) If a rating system is appropriate for more than 60% 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. This is further illustrated in the diagram below.



Additional Applications and Guidance

Meeting the definition of a construction type

Many projects will be undergoing construction work that does not fall neatly under one construction type definition (such as ‘major renovation’ or ‘interior fit-out’). It is the project team’s responsibility in this case to make a reasonable determination on which definition best fits their project. A strict application of each definition is not required.

Maximum amount of work for interiors projects

If *both* the following two statements describe the project, then a whole building rating system, with the exception of LEED for Commercial Interiors or LEED for Retail: Commercial Interiors, 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

LEED for Schools Applications

Use Table 1 to inform a decision between LEED for Schools and a complete design and construction rating system.

Table 1. Applying the LEED for Schools Rating System

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

LEED for Healthcare Applications

Use Table 2 to inform a decision between LEED for Healthcare and a complete design and construction rating system.

Table 2. Applying the LEED for Healthcare Rating System

	% of building square footage dedicated to healthcare use		
	more than 60%	40-60%	Less than 40%
Licensed or federal inpatient care, outpatient care, long-term care	Must use LEED for Healthcare*	Should use LEED for Healthcare	May use LEED for Healthcare
Other medically-related buildings	May use LEED for Healthcare	May use LEED for Healthcare	May use LEED for Healthcare

** Effective January 1, 2012*

Residential Applications

Use Table 3 to inform a decision between LEED for Homes, Multi-family Mid-rise, and a complete design and construction rating system. *LEED for New Construction (NC)* is listed here for the purposes of brevity.

Table 3. Applying the LEED for Homes Rating System

	# of occupiable, above-grade stories	% of square footage that meets the definition of 'residential'		
		<40%	Between 40 and 60%	>60%
Single-family home	n/a	n/a	n/a	<i>LEED for Homes</i>
Multi-family with HVAC systems shared across living units	1-3 stories	<i>NC</i>	<i>NC or Homes</i>	<i>Homes</i>
	4-6 stories	<i>NC</i>	<i>NC or Mid-rise</i>	<i>NC or Mid-rise</i>
	7+ stories	<i>NC</i>	<i>NC</i>	<i>NC*</i>
Multi-family with individual unit HVAC systems	1-3 stories	<i>NC</i>	<i>NC or Homes</i>	<i>Homes</i>
	4-5 stories	<i>NC</i>	<i>NC, Homes, or Mid-rise</i>	<i>NC, Homes or Mid-rise</i>
	6 stories	<i>NC</i>	<i>NC or Mid-rise</i>	<i>NC or Mid-rise</i>
	7+ stories	<i>NC</i>	<i>NC</i>	<i>NC*</i>

**if the building is more than 6 stories, it may use Mid-Rise in exceptional situations. Please contact Kelsey Mullen at USGBC (kmullen@usgbc.org) for further information.*

Glossary

Alteration: 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 mechanical, electrical and plumbing (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.

Complete Interior Space: At a minimum, all the *gross floor area* within the exterior walls of a building that is within a single occupant's control and contains all building components altered as part of the LEED-certifying construction scope. For more information, see the MPR Supplemental Guidance, found on all LEED 2009 rating system pages at usgbc.org.

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.

Entirety: The sum of the constructed components that make up a building which is *physically distinct* from another building. For more information, see the MPR Supplemental Guidance, found on all 2009 rating system pages at usgbc.org.

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

Fit-out: See '*interior fit-out*'.

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. Measurements must be taken 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. Excludes floor area dedicated to the parking and circulation of motor vehicles. *Note: while excluded features may not be part of the gross floor area, and therefore technically not part of the LEED project building, they may still be required to be part of the overall LEED project and subject to MPRs, prerequisites, and credits.*

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: The installation or application of interior finishes, floor and ceiling systems, non-bearing partitions, furniture, interior doors and windows, and other components that make a space fully usable for the purpose it is intended. A complete interior fit-out is such that no further construction work is needed or intended for occupancy.

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 unit or series of units that each includes a cooking area (comprised of sink(s), cooking appliance(s), preparation space(s)) a bathroom, and a sleeping area. Communal, circulation, storage, and other support areas such as living rooms, hallways, and closets that primarily serve residential occupants also fall under this definition. For buildings such as dormitories and assisted living facilities that have common areas (central kitchens and lounges) it is at the project team's discretion to define the common areas and the living units as residential.