



Mainstream Benchmarking

Benchmarking: present participle of *bench-mark* (verb)

1. Evaluate or check (something) by comparison with a standard: "we are benchmarking our performance against external criteria."
2. Evaluate or check something in this way: "we continue to benchmark against the competition."

Why Benchmarking?

The green building movement has accomplished much in a short amount of time, but the mission will not be fulfilled until every building is efficient and green. In order for any commercial building to begin improving, the building owner must both collect critical information on an ongoing basis – namely energy and water consumption – and also compare it against a rational, agreed-upon standard to derive useful conclusions.

USGBC supports mandatory benchmarking of all public and private sector commercial buildings because an increased awareness catalyzes action to improve building performance. USGBC's community has a critical role to play in supporting the advancement of benchmarking policy discussions at the state and local government levels. Through bringing building owners and policy makers together, USGBC can help advance the conversation on a state-by-state, city-by-city basis [see [2011 report](#) of state policy activity, featuring benchmarking].

Benchmarking policies may be crafted in a variety of ways to arrive at an appropriately tailored policy that makes building benchmarking part of the mainstream. For example, some cover buildings of different sizes and types while others include a public disclosure requirement that has been demonstrated to increase the policy's effectiveness. USGBC does not take a position on these additional requirements but recommends localities decide for themselves using the resources available at BuildingRating.org for further information.

Currently, two states and five municipal governments are enabling improved building decision making around energy use through benchmarking.

Benchmarking Policies by Location

| City | Legislation | Effective Dates | Disclosure Requirements |
|------------------|--|-----------------|-------------------------|
| San Francisco | Buildings Energy Performance Ordinance | 2011-2013 | Yes |
| New York | LL No. 476-A | 2010-2013 | Yes |
| Seattle | CB 116731 | 2011-2013 | Yes |
| Austin | Energy Conservation Audit and Disclosure Ordinance | 2011 | Yes |
| Washington D.C. | Clean and Affordable Energy Act of 2008 | 2010-2014 | Yes |
| State | | | |
| Washington State | Efficiency First SB 5854 | 2011-2013 | Yes |
| California | AB 1103 | 2012-2014 | Yes |

- **Local Ordinances:** 1) [San Francisco: Building Energy Performance](#); 2) [New York: LL No. 476-A](#); 3) [Seattle: CB 116731](#); 4) [Austin: Energy Conservation Audit and Disclosure Ordinance](#); 5) [Washington D.C.: Clean and Affordable Energy Act of 2008](#)
- **State Laws:** 1) [California](#) and [AB 1103](#); 2) [Washington: Efficiency First: SB 5854](#)



Supporting Solutions that Work

USGBC's role in advancing benchmarking is to focus on the solutions that will work for the leading building owners and operators. Before pursuing a legislative solution, convening organizations central to the issue to discuss barriers facing commercial owners seeking to benchmark properties is an effective approach to encouraging private sector leadership. Most large commercial real estate owners and operators are familiar with the benchmarking process as a result of the laws in New York City and California, but the details matter when creating a benchmarking policy for a locality.

USGBC supports the broad industry consensus around the use of the EPA's [Energy Star Portfolio Manager](#) tool for benchmarking. Portfolio Manager is free to use, and utilizes building characteristics and energy and water consumption information to produce an energy consumption per square foot figure that is normalized for space use and climate. [Learn how it works](#). This tool is the heart of the LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance rating system.

Energy and water performance are not the only green building metrics that can benefit from regular building benchmarking. Understanding material and resource use, indoor environmental quality, and transportation energy use in a building can illuminate many opportunities for improvement.

Campaign Goals and Priorities

The goals of the Mainstream Benchmarking campaign will differ based on locality. Every city, state, or level of government has different goals, processes, and political climates and it can be detrimental to move too aggressively on any policy. It is important to do the proper policy research, outreach, and volunteer training before implementing a campaign.

When building out this campaign, the overall priorities should be:

- **Start the dialogue.** Identify the important players that need to be part of the discussion (commercial building owners and operators, utilities, business owners, and other allied groups). Organize and inspire a dialogue around the power of information to enable informed decision making that is unlocking the potential of efficiency, cost savings and more through building benchmarking.
- **Build relationships and spread the message.** Host seminars and events to educate decision makers, building owners, and core groups about why benchmarking makes good business sense. Create materials, share resources, and connect with key groups. Build a solid foundation of educated advocates to connect with decision makers, influential organizations and critical stakeholders.
- **Advance policy that taps the potential of benchmarking.** The best way to move benchmarking into the market normal is for city and state governments to tailor commercial building benchmarking requirements that suit local preferences and mirror national models. [Note: [draft legislative text](#)]

Resources

- [The Urban Green Council](#), the New York City chapter of USGBC, was instrumental in the development and implementation of [PlaNYC](#) and the [Greener, Greater Buildings Plan](#).
- The **Institute for Market Transformation (IMT)** maintains a wealth of information on benchmarking policies and best practices including in-depth material like:
 - [Building Energy Transparency: A Framework for Implementing U.S. Commercial Energy Rating and Disclosure Policy](#)
 - [Business and economic benefits of benchmarking](#)
- The **Natural Resources Defense Council** and IMT administer [BuildingRating.org](#), an excellent resource for information on benchmarking policies, case studies, and [benchmarking policy maps and policy comparison matrixes](#).
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's **ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager** allows building owners and managers to track energy and water usage in buildings to make strategic improvements to increase efficiency.
 - [Overview: ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager](#)
- USGBC's [draft legislative text](#) for developing a state or local building benchmarking policy.