Guide to LEED Certification: Commercial

LEED Volume Certification Supplement

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Introduction

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Interested in pursuing LEED volume certification? Great.

This supplement to the Guide to LEED Certification will explain the basic process of LEED volume certification.

Certification through LEED volume certification involves three main steps:

1. **Get started** with LEED volume certification by applying for admittance, connecting with your new account manager and attending the required orientation after submitting the volume certification admission fee.
2. **Precertify** a prototype that can be applied across your building portfolio by submitting key documentation and the prototype fee in LEED Online, and then participating in the review process.
3. **Certify** projects based on your prototype (congratulations!) and participate in ongoing, quality-assurance audits.

If you need assistance at any time, please call or email us.

Note: Are you working on projects within LEED volume certification? Check out our LEED volume certification supplement, which works in conjunction with this guide to give you a full picture of LEED volume certification.

REGISTER

First, some background...

LEED volume certification is available for the following LEED rating systems:

- LEED for New Construction (LEED NC)
- LEED for Commercial Interiors (LEED CI)
- LEED for Retail: New Construction (LEED RN)
- LEED for Retail: Commercial Interiors (LEED RI)
- LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations and Maintenance (LEED EB: O+M)
- Including projects undergoing recertification

Before we dive in to the process for participating in LEED volume certification, let's review the basics behind how volume certification works.

Since LEED volume certification is designed to streamline certification processes and costs across an organization's building portfolio (while preserving LEED's rigor), it's based around a simple concept: **the prototype**. Participants in LEED volume certification complete precertification of a prototype, which is a conceptual building or framework that can then be applied across a group of projects that have major elements in common, and can therefore pursue a common set of credits (in a single LEED rating system).

After completing precertification, you can submit **volume projects** (the group of buildings or spaces that will ultimately earn LEED certification under a given prototype) using customized LEED documentation approved in the prototype. Some of these projects will receive a full review through the LEED volume certification audit process as a way to ensure the ongoing quality of the submissions.

Getting started

Your first step to getting started with LEED volume certification is to apply for admittance. All volume certification participants are organizations that own, manage or lease real estate – however, please note that consultants, architects and contractors are not eligible. Contact the volume certification team to request an application.

The application calls for detailed information about your organization, experience with LEED, and the potential group of projects you'll eventually be submitting for volume certification, which will allow us to determine if your organization is a good fit for this type of certification, and to assess your readiness. Once you're accepted, you'll receive a letter from us: welcome to LEED volume certification!

After you submit your volume certification admission fee, you'll receive a dedicated USGBC account manager and a **portfolio** in LEED Online, the web-based resource for managing the LEED documentation process, as well as access to a variety of tools and resources, including dedicated technical support. The portfolio is a group tool that allows you to track and organize all of your LEED projects, including prototypes and volume projects, in one place.

Next up? We ask that you complete an orientation program that requires you to review helpful guidance documents and participate in webinars. Your account manager will help you schedule a visit to USGBC's headquarters at 2101 L St. NW, Suite 500 in Washington, D.C. for a one-day workshop. While we only require a single representative from your organization to attend the in-person event, your program fee covers up to three attendees. We look forward to meeting you!

Projects team roles

Individuals on your project team will be called on to fill certain roles throughout the LEED certification process. You may have one person fill multiple roles. Here's a rundown of who's who so you can select your team wisely:

Portfolio administrator: The program-level management contact who is responsible for signing legal documents related to LEED certification. This individual must be employed by you (the volume certification participant).

Prototype administrator: The day-to-day contact person responsible for managing all the prototype submittals. We definitely recommend that this individual attend the in-person orientation. This individual can be contracted.

Volume project administrator: The individual responsible for managing submittals for the volume project and for coordinating with the Prototype Administrator on the quality control and education processes. This individual can be contracted, as well.

PRECERTIFY

With orientation under your belt, you're ready to move forward with precertifying your prototype. **Prototype precertification** is the process in which prototype standards are developed and reviewed prior to the implementation of volume projects. This phase of LEED volume certification includes registering and submitting the prototype in LEED Online, at which point the Green Building Certification Institute (GBCI: the organization responsible for administering LEED certification) will conduct a comprehensive review to ensure that it meets LEED volume certification requirements.

Ready to begin? To register for this phase, you'll need to submit the prototype fee and enter basic prototype information into LEED Online. After completing registration, you may begin to assign team members in LEED Online.

Informal feedback

In order to assist you in the prototype development process and give you an idea of what review teams look for, GBCI requests that you submit one to two prototype credits for informal feedback (not including complex credits) prior to submitting for full review. You'll send these credits directly to your account manager, who will then coordinate with your dedicated review team. GBCI targets returning informal feedback within ten business days of receiving the credit documentation.

Review process

Once you have incorporated the informal feedback and finalized your prototype documentation, you can submit your full prototype in LEED Online. The review process follows the "standard review" process outlined in the Guide to LEED Certification and also includes the option for appeals, inquiries, and other aspects outlined in the Guide to LEED Certification (please note that expedited reviews are unfortunately not available for Volume projects). GBCI targets the delivery of the preliminary prototype review within 30 business days and the final prototype review within 20 business days.

To be eligible for precertification, your prototype must include all LEED prerequisites and enough credits to achieve certification at the LEED CertifiedTM level or higher. We'll refer to the prerequisites and credits included in a particular prototype as **prototype credits** throughout this document. Prototype credits must be earned using the same techniques, methods and management strategies across all volume projects.

A few clarifications about prototypes:

- You may choose to have more than one prototype, depending on the diversity of your building portfolio.
- It's up to you how much variance occurs among the group of volume projects under a given prototype, but there must be enough uniformity to share a common set of prototype credits. Note that not all prototype credits need to be used by all volume projects.
- Some of the projects that you own or manage may not be suitable for a given prototype. These one-off projects may lack the uniformity needed to meet the prototype's criteria. In such cases, these projects are best suited for the standard one-off LEED review process.
- Projects submitted under a prototype should begin construction or renovations only after the prototype has earned precertification. For projects under a LEED EB: O+M prototype, the performance period for volume projects must include at least three months after precertification is achieved and at least three months after a property has been acquired and/or brought under the participant's management.

Submitting your prototype precertification application

In order to complete your application, you'll need to provide documentation that addresses both the prototype credit strategies that you will pursue as well as the education, quality control and audit documentation that you will have in place to support these strategies. The format for these submittals is flexible to allow you to leverage your own organizational processes, tools and technology platforms as you facilitate LEED volume certification. For additional details regarding submittals, see the LEED Volume Program: Submittal Guidance, which your account manager will provide you.

Your precertification application consists of general and credit-level documentation. The general submittals include a high-level overview of your organization as well as a quality control (QC) Plan and education plan, which must show that you have the processes, tools, and education program necessary to deliver projects that consistently meet the LEED credit requirements.

A closer look at credit submittals documentation

The documentation that you submit for each credit must include the following four components:

- Technical documentation demonstrates that the prototype meets the LEED credit requirements.
- The quality control (QC) process demonstrates the specific steps and tools that are in place to ensure that the LEED credit requirements are consistently met in the volume projects.
- The education process demonstrates that everyone involved in the process is properly educated on the required implementation steps for each credit.
- Finally, the audit documentation should identify sample deliverables that will be collected during a potential future audit to demonstrate that processes and procedures were followed.

Which prototype credits to include

Prototypes are designed to be applied across a large number of buildings that, although very similar, may have specific nuances. For this reason, we offer you the flexibility to prototype as many credits that you believe are suitable for the group of volume projects under the prototype. We encourage you to consider the protoype

credits as a catalog of offerings to utilize for your volume projects. Once you achieve precertification for your prototype, you can draw from this "catalog" and apply credits in various combinations to achieve LEED certification success in your volume project.

Which prototype credits not to include

There are no requirements for how frequently a given prototype credit must be used on volume projects. Rather, we encourage you to consider the frequency that you anticipate applying each credit when deciding whether or not to include a credit in the prototype precertification. For credits that you anticipate using less frequently, you may opt to leave them out of your prototype precertification and instead, supplement the prototype by using them as **individual credits** in unique circumstances. Individual credits incur an additional fee – you can learn more about them in the "Certify" section below.

Want to use more than one credit strategy for your projects?

For each prototype credit, you'll (typically) submit only one **credit approach**: a complete package of credit documentation to support one of the cases, options, or paths outlined in the LEED credit requirements. Up to five additional credit approaches per prototype are included in the standard review of the prototype, but volume certification includes the flexibility to submit as many as you need during the initial review, for an additional review fee.

Additional credits or changed credits

You may experience unanticipated changes in the volume projects that you are certifying under a particular prototype – changes that affect the prototype credits and the path you pursue (changes of materials, construction methods, policy updates, etc.). If this occurs, please reach out to your account manager as soon as possible. If the changes affect the QC process, audit documentation, credit options or paths, or the performance levels of the credits (in design and construction), then they are considered substantive changes that will require you to submit relevant documentation for a further round of precertification review for those credits. **Additional credits** or **changed credits** can be submitted for a prototype after the initial prototype is precertified, for a fee.

Applicability of project credit interpretation rulings (CIRs)

Unlike the standard certification program, under volume certification, there are two forms of CIRs. A formal inquiry pertaining to a prototype is referred to as a **prototype CIR**, which is applicable to the particular prototype for which it was submitted and all buildings in the participant's portfolio where the technical approach is similar for the given prerequisite or credit. However, a **volume project CIR** is applicable only to the specific volume project for which it was submitted. Both types of CIRs may be submitted for a fee.

Deadlines for prototypes and volume projects

For each version of the rating system, registration closes one year after the subsequent rating system version launches. You must register your volume prototype under a rating system within this window of time. You must also achieve prototype precertification before the rating system version under which the prototype is registered is closed out. Beginning with LEED v4, each rating system will be open for 10 years. Further, your volume projects must be certified within three years from the date you purchase them. Since you can purchase volume projects up until the close of the 10-year window for any rating system, this gives you three additional years past the closing of a rating system to certify your volume projects under it - a benefit unique to volume certification.

CERTIFY

Once your prototype has achieved precertification (congratulations!), you're ready to enter the certification phase, at which point your volume projects can be certified using the prototype standards. During the certification phase, you can register and begin construction on your volume projects, and pursue certification for them using the prototyped standards and credits. For LEED EB: O+M prototypes, you may begin the performance period for your volume projects.

Review process

The review process for this phase is slightly different than the review process outlined in the Guide to LEED Certification, since it relies on audits for quality control. Volume project reviews occur in two parts: the preliminary review, and a final review, in which the full audit documentation is reviewed (for select projects only). The audit process ensures that your volume projects are in compliance with LEED standards and verify that your quality control and education processes are working effectively.

Part 1: Preliminary Review

- Note: please be sure to verify the accuracy of the volume project scorecard that you submit. This is a critical step in your QC process. The scorecard must reflect accurate credit achievement and a certification level that you have verified prior to submission.
- You submit the project's basic information, LEED volume project scorecard and key metrics for a preliminary review in LEED Online. Your application will be checked for completeness and compliance.
- GBCI will respond with its preliminary review and offer of certification or notification of audit within five business days.
- We ask that you accept the certification within 25 business days.

Part 2: Final review of audit documentation (select projects only)

- For volume projects that are selected for audit (including the first three volume projects that you submit, and randomly selected projects after that based on the amount of volume projects purchased), you'll need to provide the full audit documentation (identified during precertification) within 15 business days.
- GBCI will respond with its audit review within 20 business days.
- Your team can either accept the review as final, if you are satisfied, or choose to appeal the results of the review, if GBCI has found that you have failed certain credits or prerequisites. We ask that you do not submit any additional volume projects until the audit review results are accepted.

Maintaining quality across volume projects

Audits are a key element of quality control throughout the volume process, helping to ensure that volume projects achieve the same rigorous standards as one-off projects that go through the traditional LEED certification process.

We want your volume projects to succeed and we will provide you with the guidance and expertise that will set you up for success. However, in certain instances, if a project has not successfully achieved a prototype credit

that is submitted on a volume project scorecard, GBCI may deny these credits. You may pursue the standard appeals process, detailed above in the “Prototype precertification” section, for any denied credits. If GBCI determines through the appeals process that the volume project did indeed fail to achieve the credits in question, GBCI will remove the denied prototype credit from the prototype scorecard, and you are not eligible to apply the prototype credit to a volume project until you have precertified it again. You may precertify a denied prototype credit again using the process to add or revise credits noted in the “Additional or changed credits” paragraph in the “Precertify” section.

The following audit review outcomes will result in a failed volume project, requiring you to submit a corrective action report:

- "Three or more denied prototype credits
- The failure of a prerequisite
- If the denial of one or more prototype credits reduces the total number of points awarded such that the project cannot achieve the level of LEED certification indicated on the volume project scorecard

In the subsequent corrective action report, you should identify the cause of the failure in the QC process and the steps you’ve taken to correct the failure before submitting any additional volume projects for certification. The corrective action report receives one review, for which GBCI targets delivery within 15 business days. Once your corrective action report has been reviewed and approved, for the next three volume projects that you submit for certification, GBCI will review the full audit documentation for all three projects. There is a fee associated with the corrective action report, which covers the report review as well as the review of the full audit documentation for those three projects.

In the event that the full audit documentation review of one of these three projects results in an additional failed volume project, the entire prototype will be suspended and you’ll need to complete the precertification phase again. Your volume project purchases are not forfeited when a prototype is suspended, however, you will not be allowed to submit a volume project for certification until the re-precertification process is complete, including payment of the prototype fee again. To re-precertify a prototype, you’ll need to provide full precertification submittals, including information on all prototype prerequisites and credits. It is up to you to determine what aspects of the prototype’s precertification submittals must change in order for you to correct the failure. Some components of the prototype’s technical documentation and management processes may not have contributed to the failure, so the information that you submit for re-precertification of these components can be the same documentation as you originally submitted.

Please note that if one of the aforementioned audit documentation review outcomes occurs in the first three projects submitted under a prototype, a corrective action report and fee is not required as long as you’re able to correct the failure in the QC process for future volume projects.

Individual Credits

For a specific volume project, you may wish to submit additional credits not included in the prototype precertification, which we refer to as **individual credits**. Typically, these individual credits represent a small portion of the overall credits submitted with any volume project, since you’ll include the majority of credits pursued as prototype credits. You should document individual credits using the standard LEED credit forms and supporting documentation, and indicate the individual credits you’ve pursued on the scorecard for preliminary review in LEED Online. If the project is not selected for audit, the project will be returned to you to provide the individual credit documentation with an invoice. You may then submit for final review and GBCI will respond within 20 business days. If the project is also selected for audit, the individual credit review will occur concurrently with the audit review.

Project information

Please check out the Guide to LEED Certification for a full rundown of how USGBC utilizes project data. In addition to the project directory and other information we collect for all LEED projects, for volume certification participants, we also collect:

- Name of Volume participant
- Number of projects pursuing LEED volume certification
- Square footage associated with a participant’s projects pursuing LEED volume certification
- Prototype registration date
- Prototype precertification date
- Prototype precertification level
- Prototype points earned
- Prototype scorecard
- Prototype rating system and version

FEES

LEED volume certification provides an exceptional value for your money. So, how much does it cost to participate?

Program admission fee: The program admission fee is a one-time fee due once you’ve been accepted into LEED volume certification. Payment is due before your team participates in the orientation workshop. Once you’ve submitted payment, the program admission fee unlocks access to your USGBC account manager, a portfolio account in LEED Online, the orientation program (covers up to three attendees; please note that travel and lodging costs are not covered) and public recognition of your participation in LEED volume certification. The invoice for this fee will be issued by your account manager.

Prototype fee: The prototype fee is issued once you register your prototype in LEED Online, and payment is due before you submit your prototype for preliminary review. Your payment covers one credit approach per prototype credit, plus five additional credit approaches that can be applied across any of the credits in the prototype.

Volume projects fee: Volume projects may be purchased in LEED Online – these are non-refundable and are not transferable between prototypes. The fee is due prior to the submission of the volume projects for preliminary review.

Other fees: Other fees related to expedited reviews, appeals, and other optional aspects of the LEED certification process may apply, should you pursue these avenues.

View all of the fee charts »