

The Five Ways Harvard Reached Its Green Building Milestone

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Earlier today USGBC announced that Harvard University had reached a first for any higher education institution in the world – 50 LEED certified projects. It's an exciting green building milestone for us and one that entire Harvard community can celebrate.

The renovation of the 46 Blackstone complex, a former industrial site, was the University's first LEED Platinum-certified project and one of its most ambitious undertakings to date. The brownfield project includes several on-site strategies to minimize pollution runoff to the Charles River, including a bioswale system that naturally filters stormwater runoff from an adjacent parking lot. Kris Snibbe/Harvard Staff Photographer.

Like many large private corporations, one of the primary challenges Harvard faces is our structure comprised of many separate operating units (in our case multiple schools and administrative units), each with its own culture and organizational structure. So how did we get this decentralized institution to reach our LEED milestone? Here are five lessons we've learned along the way:

- **Set Clear, Aggressive Goals.** Harvard's [goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions](#) 30 percent by 2016, including growth unified our schools and units, requiring us to focus on very specific energy reduction targets. Our comprehensive [Green Building Standards set clear energy reduction, resource conservation and LEED targets for all construction and renovation projects](#).
- **Engage the Entire Community.** Our [strategic planning process](#) engaged over 200 faculty, students and staff from every level of our organization. Every major policy or initiative is reviewed and approved by representatives from all our schools and units, giving everyone a say in the ultimate outcome. Likewise, our Green Building Standards require that occupants are included earlier in project development so that future design considerations and decisions include their concerns, feedback and ideas.
- **Develop Tools and Resources.** We've focused on developing tools, like a Life Cycle Costing calculator that allows schools to prioritize projects that are economically viable and environmentally beneficial. Our Green Building Services team also posts LEED case studies for all our projects so the community can learn from the work we have already done.
- **Provide Forums for Change.** The Harvard Office for Sustainability acts as a catalyst for change, facilitating opportunities for students, faculty and staff to come together and learn from each other, while sharing best practices that make us all stronger.
- **Celebrate Success and Recognize Green Champions.** Harvard's annual [Green Carpet Awards ceremony](#) is an opportunity for our entire community to nominate and recognize students, staff and faculty who play an exemplary role in helping Harvard achieve its sustainability goals.

LEED green building projects not only help reduce energy use — they also create healthier, more welcoming places to work, live, and learn. The 2009 renovation of Holyoke Center's fourth floor created conference room space and maximized daylight. Only low- or zero-VOC materials were used during construction. Kris Snibbe/Harvard Staff Photographer

While we work hard to create foundations in order to achieve our goals, what really counts the most are the people – from Harvard's leaders, President Faust and the deans, to the facility directors, building managers and project managers at all of our schools and on to the faculty, students and staff who work, live and learn in our new greener, healthier buildings. Without action and involvement from everyone in our community, our progress would not be possible. And that is perhaps the most important lesson for us all to remember – we are only as strong as our people and our success depends on the level to which we empower and engage our community.

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