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Small Communities Experience Big Benefits When Governments Commit to ‘Leadership with LEED’

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In [my last blog post](#), I reported on a recent study that explores the amazing “spillover” effects of green public building policies in California. A prominent global economy in and of itself, California continues to provide a fertile test bed to see how a history of leadership on issues like green building policy lays the foundations for a transforming market. Yes, the Golden State is the [green building leader](#), but there’s something in here for all of us.

Interestingly, the authors focused their research overwhelmingly on small and midsize cities so as not to skew or devalue their findings. On average, these cities register three public buildings to pursue LEED certification per decade, or 0.3 per year. That’s on average, which means some cities commit more, but others fewer. Three green civic buildings per decade seems a worthwhile commitment to produce a [doubling effect](#) in private investment in 21st century jobs across the building sector and up and down the supply chain of products, professionals and services — not to mention greener building outcomes.

It should come as no surprise that governments invest in their real estate. They tend to hold on to real estate for a long time, and as such, find tremendous value in benchmarking tools like LEED. [Governments overwhelmingly choose LEED](#) partly as a reflection of the private sector, which has developed both the expertise in delivering it and the demand for excellence that LEED rewards. Governments also choose LEED since it is the world’s most widely used and respected framework for encouraging, rewarding and verifying healthy, efficient and low-impact building design and construction practice. That doesn’t mean LEED is perfect, but the rating system does learn and grow thanks to an amazingly vast and diverse community behind its continual improvement, guided by [USGBC’s mission](#) of truly sustainable buildings and communities. The mission matters, and ours is market transformation.

LEED is certainly not the only force that’s transforming the market toward healthier, more efficient, lower impact buildings and communities. But few dispute LEED’s important role as a primary driver that has [created space](#) for new growth potential and now [spans the globe](#) in its reach. Understandably, LEED buildings and LEED-credentialed professionals are much easier to measure than LEED’s own, possibly incalculable, positive spillover effects. On page 28 of their report, the study’s authors admit to interpreting the number of LEED-credentialed professionals “as a proxy for other inputs, such as the availability of green building materials through local distributors.”

The pursuit of market transformation is a leading justification for green government building commitments, among other motivating factors like stewardship, leadership and decreased lifecycle costs. It’s nice to know that this popular policy measure adopted by more than 100 local governments and almost half of the states can have the market-moving, spillover impacts that these governments intended.

Is your city, county or state helping move the needle toward a green building economy by its own, even modest, commitments to green? Team up with your [local USGBC chapter](#) and join our [Leadership with LEED](#) campaign. In the campaign materials you’ll even find [draft legislative text](#) that might seed your community’s first (or improved) green public buildings commitment.

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Jeremy Sigmon made 10 contributions in the last 6 months
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