

States with a Green Thumb: How Illinois and Other Leading States are Growing Green Building

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Written by [Jason Hartke](#)

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In 2012, green buildings sprouted up across Illinois like wild flowers (let's say violets, since we're talking about the Land of Lincoln.)

In fact, last year the state certified 156 LEED projects, representing 25 million square feet of real estate. In total, the state now has more than 700 LEED certified projects, representing more than 140 million square feet of real estate. That's the equivalent of 30 Willis Towers.

The state's leadership in green building – from the state house to city halls – has helped propel Illinois into the 5th spot on USGBC's [Top 10 LEED states](#) – coming only behind DC, Virginia, Colorado and Massachusetts. Our annual ranking considered states based on the amount of 2012 LEED-certified space per capita.

Last week I went out to Chicago for [an event](#) to join Illinois Governor Pat Quinn and our [Illinois Chapter](#) leadership to celebrate the accomplishment.

"Since the day I took office I have been committed to making sure Illinois is the most environmentally-friendly state in the country," Governor Pat Quinn said. "I'm proud to have the U.S. Green Building Council recognize the success of our efforts to make sure sustainable practices are implemented in homes, schools and businesses throughout Illinois."

As we celebrated the public and private sector leaders who helped make Illinois a national leader in green building (Governor Quinn standing out as an absolute stalwart for green building,) I wondered more about all they did to get here.

Upon further reflection, it seems that states like Illinois and others on the Top 10 list have some common farming practices, if you will. They grow green because they nurture this burgeoning industry (see the [Booz Allen Hamilton study](#) that shows green building accounts for nearly half a trillion dollars in annual economic activity).

Kind of like those books about the 7 habits of the most highly effective people, these states stand out for having many of the same green thumb strategies that significantly help cultivate greener, healthier places to live, work and learn.

These states (and many of their cities and counties) lead by example. In Illinois, the state and 14 local governments have policies to promote and accelerate green building. In 2009, Quinn fought for and signed Illinois' first capital construction plan in more than decade. The plan requires all new state-funded building construction projects to seek a minimum LEED Silver certification, and all major renovations of existing state-owned facilities to seek LEED certification. At the event last week, Peter O'Brien, chair of the Illinois Capital Development Board, said that the state currently has nearly 50 projects slated to meet LEED certification, including projects shooting for Platinum at the University of Illinois and College of Lake County in Grayslake.

These states nurture the professional community. Like many of the other leading states, Illinois has an incredible community of building professionals. The USGBC Illinois chapter represents more than 1,400 individual members; real estate professions, architects, engineers, designers, contractors, product manufacturers, state and local government officials, homebuilders, and homeowners.

These states see green in green. Folks in these states understand the business case for green building and how LEED buildings are saving energy and saving money. Helping propagate the business case, courageous private sector leaders stepped up and were willing to be first. Now with each new green

building or retrofit, they're helping drive a local, clean energy economy. USGBC has about 600 member companies headquartered in Illinois. These companies and organizations represent more than 600,000 employees and are grossing more than \$100 billion in annual revenue.

In a state like Illinois, they've done a lot to grow green building. Ultimately, this means more jobs, more opportunity, and more savings for businesses and residents.

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