

LEED for Cities: Guide to Integrating Sustainability into Planning

September 2021



CONTENTS

1. Integrating Sustainability Into Planning.....	3
2. The LEED for Cities Rating System	3
The LEED for Cities Framework	
3. Ways to Use LEED for Cities in Planning.....	5
Align with LEED for Cities	
Case Study: Las Vegas, NV	
Set Measurable Goals	
Case Studies: Sapporo, Japan and Pinellas County, FL	
Communicate and Engage the Public	
Case Studies: Durango, CO and Santa Monica, CA	
Integrate Equity into Sustainable Planning	
Case Studies: Cleveland, OH and Santa Fe, NM	
Track Implementation and Progress	
Case Studies: Baltimore, MD and Las Vegas, NV	
4. Getting Started with LEED for Cities	13

Integrating Sustainability into Planning

Commonly defined as the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs, **sustainability** is a growing priority for local governments. As today's cities set out to build healthy, prosperous communities where all residents can thrive, they must also prepare for future challenges. Addressing climate change, inequality, aging infrastructure and an increasingly globalized economy requires innovation, collaboration and careful planning.

One of the primary ways that communities prepare for the future is through **planning**. During the planning process, communities can look beyond immediate concerns to address root causes, evaluate courses of actions and chart a path toward a better future. By incorporating sustainability principles into their plans, a community can transition from talking about sustainability in the abstract to identifying best practices and designing and implementing solutions. **LEED for Cities** is an essential resource for

communities seeking to address sustainability in their planning practices.

The LEED for Cities framework includes social, economic and environmental performance indicators and data-driven measures for measuring and communicating impact. With LEED, cities, towns and counties can define sustainability on their own terms and make meaningful progress toward improving their overall sustainability and quality of life.

The metrics and guidance in the LEED for Cities rating system can also be adapted according to community specifications. From comprehensive plans to short-term or thematic plans that address climate action, urban resilience or social equity, LEED for Cities can support a range of community planning efforts. This document will highlight local governments who have aligned plans with LEED for Cities, emphasizing how and why they have used the framework to further the creation of more resilient, green, smart and inclusive cities.

The LEED for Cities Rating System

LEED for Cities is the leading global rating system and certification program for local governments committed to measuring and managing community-wide sustainability and quality of life. The current version of the rating system, [LEED v4.1 for Existing Cities](#), is preceded by the LEED for Cities pilot and the STAR Community Rating System. Hundreds of stakeholders and partners have contributed to the development and evolution of the rating systems and programs since the concept for a [Green City Index](#) emerged nearly 15 years ago at Greenbuild 2007 in Chicago.

The path to sustainability looks different for every community, and LEED for Cities is a proven tool to guide the journey. The LEED for Cities framework is often used to guide local planning efforts. It serves as a structure which plans can be built around in order to integrate sustainability goals and strategies. Local governments also use the LEED for Cities certification program to report progress on the standards and strategies in the rating system and then use the certification results as a management and decision-support tool.

Local governments of all sizes and capacities are using LEED for Cities to:

- » **Demonstrate** accountability and commitment to sustainability, resilience & social equity
- » **Benchmark** sustainability performance against national & global standards
- » **Receive** global recognition for sustainability leadership & achievement
- » **Develop** a culture of data-driven decision making, transparency and leadership
- » **Improve** the standard of living and quality of life

The LEED for Cities Framework


The LEED for Cities framework helps planners and project managers track and measure progress toward overall sustainability goals and compare with other projects across the country and around the world. By aligning their planning efforts with LEED for Cities, local governments can make use of social, environmental and economic metrics to establish clear, quantitative means of benchmarking and communicating progress.

Because sustainability looks different from city to city, the LEED for Cities framework offers a customizable, data-driven approach that can be adapted to local needs and priorities. Consistent with other LEED rating systems, LEED for Cities allows cities and communities to select the focus areas most important to key stakeholders through **credits** and **points** while establishing baseline achievements through **prerequisites**.

The rating system's standards and strategies collectively define community-scale sustainability and present a vision of how communities can become more healthy, inclusive, and prosperous. LEED for Cities provides a much-needed vocabulary that local governments and communities can use to more effectively strategize and define their sustainability planning efforts.

LEED for Cities tracks and scores performance in nine categories: Integrative Process, Natural Systems and Ecology, Transportation and Land Use, Water Efficiency, Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Materials and Resources, Quality of Life, Innovation, and Regional Priority.

Inside the categories, requirements called prerequisites allow local governments to target and achieve essential sustainability goals. Each credit is itself optional, but points earned for credits contribute to a city or community's overall score. This flexible approach allows cities and communities to set customized sustainability goals that reflect both local priorities and maintain high standards of accountability and transparency.


LEED for Cities and Communities: Existing
 Project Checklist

Project Name
 Project ID
 Date

Y	?	N		Cities	Communities		
0	0	0	INTEGRATIVE PROCESS	POSSIBLE: 5	POSSIBLE: 5		
			Credit Integrative Planning and Leadership	1	1		
			Credit Green Building Policy and Incentives	4	4		
0	0	0	NATURAL SYSTEMS AND ECOLOGY	POSSIBLE: 9	POSSIBLE: 9		
			Prereq Ecosystem Assessment	REQUIRED	REQUIRED		
			Credit Green Spaces	2	2		
			Credit Natural Resources Conservation and Restoration	2	2		
			Credit Light Pollution Reduction	1	1		
			Credit Resilience Planning	4	4		
0	0	0	TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE	POSSIBLE: 15	POSSIBLE: 15		
			Prereq Transportation Performance	6	6		
			Credit Compact, Mixed Use and Transit Oriented Development	2	2		
			Credit Access to Quality Transit	1	1		
			Credit Alternative Fuel Vehicles	2	2		
			Credit Smart Mobility and Transportation Policy	2	2		
			Credit High-Priority Site	2	2		
0	0	0	WATER EFFICIENCY	POSSIBLE: 11	POSSIBLE: 11		
			Prereq Water Access and Quality	REQUIRED	REQUIRED		
			Prereq Water Performance	6	6		
			Credit Integrated Water Management	1	1		
			Credit Stormwater Management	2	2		
			Credit Smart Water Systems	2	2		
0	0	0	ENERGY AND GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS	POSSIBLE: 30	POSSIBLE: 30		
			Prereq Power Access, Reliability and Resiliency	REQUIRED	REQUIRED		
			Prereq Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Performance	14	18		
			Credit Energy Efficiency	4	4		
			Credit Renewable Energy	6	6		
			Credit Low Carbon Economy	4	-		
			Credit Grid Harmonization	2	2		
0	0	0	MATERIALS AND RESOURCES	POSSIBLE: 10	POSSIBLE: 10		
			Prereq Solid Waste Management	REQUIRED	REQUIRED		
			Prereq Waste Performance	4	5		
			Credit Special Waste Streams Management	1	1		
			Credit Responsible Sourcing for Infrastructure	2	2		
			Credit Material Recovery	1	-		
			Credit Smart Waste Management Systems	2	2		
0	0	0	QUALITY OF LIFE	POSSIBLE: 20	POSSIBLE: 20		
			Prereq Demographic Assessment	REQUIRED	REQUIRED		
			Prereq Quality of Life Performance	6	6		
			Credit Trend Improvements	4	4		
			Credit Distributional Equity	4	4		
			Credit Environmental Justice	1	1		
			Credit Housing and Transportation Affordability	2	2		
			Credit Civic and Community Engagement	2	2		
			Credit Civil and Human Rights	1	1		
0	0	0	INNOVATION	POSSIBLE: 6	POSSIBLE: 6		
			Credit Innovation	6	6		
0	0	0	REGIONAL PRIORITY	POSSIBLE: 4	POSSIBLE: 4		
			Credit Regional Priority	4	4		
0	0	0	TOTAL	110	110		
				40-49	50-59	60-79	80+ Points
				CERTIFIED	SILVER	GOLD	PLATINUM

Figure 1: LEED for Cities Scorecard

Ways to Use LEED for Cities in Planning

1) Align with LEED for Cities

LEED for Cities is a proven tool to support local governments as they make plans and guide the allocation of resources and the patterns for future development. The LEED for Cities framework mirrors the structure of a community plan and includes policy mechanisms, programs and strategies that a local government can use to effect change within a topic area.

Community plans tend to share a common structure whether they are comprehensive, strategic or sustainability-focused. A plan typically begins with a big-picture assessment of current community conditions and puts forth a vision for future community development. Then the plan is divided into thematic chapters, such as land use or economy, which serve as the plan's organizational structure. The thematic chapters may be broken down further into topical areas such as housing, transportation and economic development. The chapters detail the specific policies and actions that will address targeted community needs and set benchmarks for measuring progress.

The LEED for Cities framework can provide the structure of a community plan and can also help users understand the relationships between different sustainability themes. For cities and communities just beginning their sustainability journey, the LEED for Cities framework can be an easy and logical structure to build around. Quantitative outcomes can become targets and benchmarks, while strategies can provide ideas for policies, programs and other tools.

1	Best Practices in Planning: Alignment with LEED for Cities Framework		
2	Background: The framework of LEED for Cities is comprehensive, addressing topics as diverse as access to green spaces, energy efficiency and civil and human rights. The system is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and is rooted in the triple bottom line. Issues like social equity, resilience, and climate change weave throughout the content areas. Local governments can use this checklist to assess whether or not certain topics or issues are being addressed at the local level. The Status column is a place where you can type in responses to the questions for tracking purposes. Add columns to the right that will help you in your local decision-making.		
3	CATEGORY: PREREQUISITE OR CREDIT	QUESTION TO CONSIDER	STATUS
4	INTEGRATIVE PROCESS		
5	Integrative Planning and Leadership	Do you have a diverse LEED for Cities or Communities team in place? Have you adopted a systems-based comp plan? Do you follow an integrative process for planning and policy making?	
6	Green Building Policy and Incentives	Does the local government have green building incentives or policies in place?	
7			
8	NATURAL SYSTEMS AND ECOLOGY		
9	Ecosystem Assessment	Has the local government evaluated its natural/ecological assets and liabilities?	
10	Green Spaces	Are green spaces protected in your jurisdiction and do all residents have access?	
11	Natural Resources Conservation and Restoration	Do you have priority natural resource and conservation areas or assets? Are plans in place to protect and restore them?	
12	Light Pollution Reduction	Are you addressing pollution from street lighting and reducing its impact on ecosystems?	
13	Resilience Planning	Have you completed a Vulnerability Assessment and/or Resilience Plan?	
14			
15	TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE		
16	Transportation Performance	Are you or a partner tracking vehicle miles traveled data for the jurisdiction?	
17	Compact, Mixed Use and Transit Oriented Development	Does the local government prioritize development that is compact, mixed use and transit oriented? Do these areas have access to transit and diverse uses?	
18	Access to Quality Transit	Does the local government collect and disclose modal split data? Do you have data on transit, transit stops, connections between modes and frequency of trips?	
19	Alternative Fuel Vehicles	Does the local government support and invest in alternative fuel vehicles and associated infrastructure?	
20	Smart Mobility and Transportation Policy	Has the local government adopted policies or implemented solutions to support smart and efficient transportation systems?	
21	High-Priority Site	Do you have historic structures and/or sites in your jurisdiction? Do you inventory brownfields, previously developed or infill sites? Have you adopted policies, regulations or provided incentives to prioritize growth in these areas?	
22			
23	WATER EFFICIENCY		
24	Water Access and Quality	Do all residents have access to public water supply and wastewater collection systems? Are you in compliance with stormwater regulations?	
25	Water Performance	Are you collecting data on domestic water consumption within the jurisdiction?	

Figure 2: LEED for Cities Planning Tool for Local Governments

Case Study: Las Vegas, NV

City officials in **Las Vegas, Nevada**, used the LEED for Cities rating system as a framework for designing their [2050 Master Plan](#), a thirty-year comprehensive plan intended to foster community-driven implementation and improve quality of life for all residents. With guidance from LEED for Cities, Las Vegas aims to be a “leader in resilient, healthy cities - leveraging the pioneering innovative spirit of its residents to provide equitable access to services, education and jobs in the new economy.”

The 2050 Master Plan is guided by five key principles, which together envision a more equitable, resilient, healthy, livable and innovative future for Las Vegas. “We were in one of the fastest-growing cities in the country,” says City of Las Vegas Planner Marco Velotta about outlining a new comprehensive plan. “It was just time to do this.” To guide the city’s plan development, Velotta and his colleagues decided to align their efforts with LEED for Cities. Las Vegas is a city at a crossroads — by 2050, its population is expected to grow by 300,000 people as water and other limited resources come under increasing stress due to climate change and drought. In the face of these new challenges, Velotta explains, “Our 2020 Master Plan was starting to get a bit outdated.” LEED for Cities offered a comprehensive and standardized framework to proactively plan for the future while improving Las Vegas residents’ quality of life.



“The angle at that point was mostly for something that was recognizable,” Velotta says, “to show that there was a commitment to sustainability” in the city’s planning process. As the leading global rating system and certification program for evaluating the sustainability and quality of life in a city or community, LEED for Cities offers an evaluative framework that is both comprehensive and approachable. Stakeholders who may be unfamiliar with the planning process can easily recognize the sustainability metrics and goals outlined by LEED for Cities, creating opportunities for communication and community buy-in.

Throughout the planning process, city officials relied on the LEED for Cities framework as they strategized about how to implement the comprehensive plan’s five guiding principles. By aligning with LEED for Cities, local governments can build out credible strategies and measurable indicators of progress toward a plan’s overarching goals. “Tools like STAR and LEED for Cities and Communities have been helpful in making those determinations,” Velotta says. To work toward the guiding principle of health, for example, Las Vegas adapted strategies from the Environmental Justice credit outlined by LEED for Cities. “It made it easy to assemble requirements per outcome.”

For Velotta, aligning with the LEED for Cities framework was especially valuable for assessing the current state of sustainability in Las Vegas. “It was really comprehensive in nature,” he says. “Going through the evaluation, we knew how well we were doing and — in some cases — what we really needed to focus on.” Guided by LEED for Cities criteria, Velotta and his colleagues were able to design a comprehensive plan for Las Vegas’ long-term sustainability featuring proactive, targeted strategies intended to improve residents’ quality of life in the decades to come.

2) Set Measurable Goals



Figure 3: Green and blue spaces, Pinellas County, FL

One common criticism of community plans is that they can be too visionary, with few measurable ways to track progress toward their lofty goals. This shortcoming can diminish plans’ usefulness and undermine the importance of creating plans in the first place. The metrics in the LEED for Cities rating system can help to integrate targets and benchmarks into community plans and set measurable goals for community or citywide sustainability.

LEED for Cities helps local leaders to measure and communicate sustainability goals and performance in a consistent manner. Required prerequisites are clearly defined for non-specialists, and each prerequisite has a corresponding metric and unit of measurement to track progress. For example, to gauge performance in the Transportation category, planners measure daily vehicle miles traveled per person.

Optional credits that contribute to a community's overall score also contain data-driven strategies and recommendations. For example, if access to green spaces emerges as a priority for a new plan, the community can consult the Green Spaces credit in the Ecosystems and Natural Systems category. The purpose of this credit is to “provide accessible green spaces that positively impact physical, mental and psychological health and well-being of the community while also enhancing the environmental quality of the city or community.” A community can earn or work toward this credit by providing at least 121 square feet of green space per person and ensuring that a minimum of 70 percent of homes are within a walkable half mile of green space.

The metrics used in the LEED for Cities rating system were established by area experts with input from community staff. These metrics are also widely accepted as national standards and benchmarks for community sustainability that all local governments should strive to achieve.

By integrating LEED for Cities metrics into local plans, a community can more efficiently allocate time and resources in order to concentrate their efforts on implementing new programs and policies.

Case Studies: Sapporo, Japan & Pinellas County, FL

An international destination with a strong history of environmentally conscious decision-making, the city of **Sapporo, Japan**, is committed to pursuing the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#). To evaluate the city's progress and set goals for future planning, Tokyo-based sustainability consultant Hiroki Hiramatsu suggested the city pursue certification with LEED for Cities.

“There was commitment from top leaders like the mayor and the vice mayor,” Hiramatsu says, in addition to support from local academics, nonprofit organizations, and students. “Across the city, I think there was a decent amount of enthusiasm.”

Given the city's existing commitment to long-range sustainable planning, local leaders in Sapporo were poised to score highly in the LEED for Cities certification process. After collecting and documenting the necessary information, Sapporo achieved a Platinum certification in January of 2020. The city performed highly in categories like Transportation and Water Efficiency and identified room for growth within the Quality of Life category.



Figure 4: UN Sustainable Development Goals

Since receiving the final breakdown of the city's score, Hiramatsu and his colleagues at [Woonerf, Inc.](#) has worked with local leaders to set measurable goals for improving quality of life in Sapporo. Specifically, feedback from LEED for Cities has motivated the city to focus on educational outcomes and gender equity — goals 4 and 5 of the UN SDGs, respectively — in their future sustainable planning efforts.

Certifying with LEED for Cities was especially valuable to Hiramatsu for the ways that it highlighted the importance of intergenerational equity and participation in sustainable planning. Across Japan, the LEED for Cities rating system is growing in popularity in part because of the environmental activism of high school and university students. For Hiramatsu, building up young voices is key to setting goals for a sustainable future. “I think the key to motivating them to participate is the key to future success,” he says. “Education is my keyword now.”

On the other side of the world, sustainability and resilience coordinator Hank Hodde and sustainability and resiliency specialist Arnaldo Perez-Negron are engaged in similar educational work in **Pinellas County, Florida**. Their team in the county’s Sustainability and Resiliency Office is set to publish a [Sustainability and Resiliency Action Plan](#) next year that lays out a unified sustainability vision and framework across all government operations and programs.

To craft a plan that contains measurable strategies and best practices for achieving long-term sustainability goals, Pinellas County is aligning its Sustainability and Resiliency Action Plan with the LEED for Cities framework. According to Hodde, the process promises to educate sustainability and planning staff — and the community at large — about sustainability challenges and paths forward.

“This action plan will help propel how we’re organized moving forward as well as what needs to take place within our existing institutional drivers,” he says. “Things like our strategic plan, our comprehensive plan, our departmental work plans and performance measures, budget, all that nitty gritty stuff that doesn’t usually take the spotlight but is important to move and transcend an organization.”

For Perez-Negron, the data-driven metrics included in the LEED for Cities framework can enhance community understanding and buy-in as it relates to the Sustainability and Resiliency Action Plan. When sustainability and planning staff can demonstrate the measurable value of sustainable planning to other stakeholders, it becomes easier to arrive at shared goals.

“Data is always there to help justify and prove,” Perez-Negron says. “Some people aren’t educated on the different projects that we work on, or they have personal agendas that are different from the green building projects, but numbers don’t lie.”

3) Communicate and Engage the Public

An integral part of all planning processes is engagement of key stakeholders, including the public, planning committees, and other areas of local government. Effectively engaging stakeholders requires clear communication about the goals of the plan and topical areas to be explored. The LEED for Cities rating system provides a framework that can be used to guide those discussions.

Using the LEED for Cities categories — Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Quality of Life, Innovation, etc. — can be an effective way to frame public meetings that attract people interested in specific topics. Credits and prerequisites can be used to create subcommittees and develop outreach and marketing materials. Since the LEED for Cities rating system is broad and encompasses many themes, bringing the LEED for Cities framework chart to meetings can show stakeholders where and how their work fits into the community’s sustainability goals. Finally, using the leading global framework for citywide or community sustainability can lend credibility to local planning efforts.

Local leaders often find that a uniform, recognizable framework like LEED for Cities can ground conversations with stakeholders in a shared understanding of sustainability. In addition to empowering communities to set specific goals, LEED for Cities makes it easy for local officials to communicate progress to the public and key decision makers.

Case Studies: Durango, CO & Santa Monica, CA

In **Santa Monica, California**, sustainability and planning staff collect data based on LEED for Cities metrics to share with local stakeholders. Since updating its Sustainable City Plan in 2014, the city has published annual reports that communicate progress made towards the sustainability goals outlined in the plan.

According to Amanda Grossman, sustainability analyst for the city of Santa Monica, public-facing reports and readily available data help to engage city residents in ongoing initiatives. “I think it’s helpful to have that quantitative data because we’re able to see trends,” she says. “Our community is supportive and also really engaged, so it’s helpful for them to see, as a city, how we’re doing.”

On the [Santa Monica Sustainable City Plan website](#), community members can check in on progress made in a variety of areas consistent with LEED for Cities categories, including Resource Conservation, Transportation, and Open Space and Land Use. Powered by a data collaboration platform called Socrata, the site publishes quantitative measurements of progress toward local sustainability goals. Residents interested in learning about water use, for example, can see that the city has met its 2020 goal of reducing municipal water use to less than 10.3 million gallons per day.

Local sustainability leaders in **Durango, Colorado**, find that the LEED for Cities framework is also useful for communicating with decision makers in other areas of city government. Sustainability and resilience officer Imogen Ainsworth describes the value of a data-driven framework like LEED for Cities as “demonstrating some transparency for elected officials to show there’s progress being made and show something that’s easier to talk about in terms of sustainability.”



Figure 5: Santa Monica dashboard

For stakeholders who are new to sustainability, the defined metrics and themes of the LEED for Cities framework can offer an entry point to local planning efforts. “I think what I and a lot of sustainability programs do is not easily measurable,” Ainsworth adds. But by integrating LEED for Cities’ data-driven best practices and measures of success into community plans, sustainability staff can translate their work in accessible ways that bring the entire community along.

Ainsworth and her colleagues in Durango are currently in the process of updating a [Community Sustainability Plan](#) with wide-ranging goals for greenhouse gas reduction, climate resilience, and social, economic, and environmental sustainability. “A lot of the actions in there are not just city actions, but community-wide shifts,” Ainsworth says of the early draft. “Trying to have the stakeholders involved from the beginning has been helpful in hopefully creating a plan that has community buy-in.”

After the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted plans for public engagement and delayed the plan’s completion date, Ainsworth says aligning with LEED for Cities criteria is all the more important. Redoubling efforts to assess and set goals for community sustainability means communicating with stakeholders across Durango about local priorities, strengths, and opportunities. “My hope is that we have all these key performance indicators for every sector in the plan, and having them align with something related to the LEED for Cities process will make it easier to track them and talk about them and what it means for high-level community sustainability.”

4) Integrate Equity into Sustainable Planning

Quality of life and a higher living standard for residents is key to success and livability in a city or community. Cities must equitably address the needs of all people, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, and socio-cultural and economic status. The LEED for Cities framework offers detailed guidance for ensuring that the benefits of local sustainability — and decision-making power in the sustainable planning process — are distributed equitably throughout the community.

LEED for Cities specifically addresses these concerns in the Quality of Life category. Prerequisites and credits in this category encourage leaders to assess their socio-economic and demographic conditions and make improvements to their communities that support social equity, public health, affordability, education, prosperity, and community engagement.

Foundational to the guidance in this category are two prerequisites. The first is a demographic assessment that covers the community’s population demographics and housing characteristics. Because every community has different needs and spatialized areas of concern, a comprehensive demographic assessment is useful for identifying place-specific best practices that can effectively address local priorities.

The second prerequisite is related to performance in nine key quality of life metrics. To achieve this prerequisite, cities collect data in such areas as educational attainment, median air quality, household income, and rates of violent

crime and track them on project performance platform Arc to see how they compare to others. After meeting baseline standards in each area, local leaders will have identified areas of strength and improvement related to residents' quality of life.



Figure 6: City of Cleveland

After surveying a number of frameworks that could support their planning, Cleveland chose to align with LEED for Cities for its focus on tangibly improving community well-being.

“Programmatic efficiency? Great, super important, but if we’re not making things better for the people that we’re serving, is it really worth it?” Wood asked. “How do we tackle whether or not people are better off because of the actions that we’re taking? That was baked into LEED for Cities, which was super, super important to us.”

Over the past two years, the Cleveland Office of Sustainability has been pursuing LEED for Cities certification while reviewing its [Climate Action Plan](#) for alignment with the LEED for Cities rating system. Of particular interest was the Quality of Life category, which Wood and his colleagues have utilized to measure the city’s recent progress toward distributional equity and environmental justice.

Upon submitting their final application, sustainability and planning staff in Cleveland expect to perform well in the Quality of Life category, as well as earn an Innovation credit for economic and environmental justice. Wood attributes Cleveland’s strength in this category in part to the [racial equity tool](#) he and his colleagues have built into the Climate Action Plan.

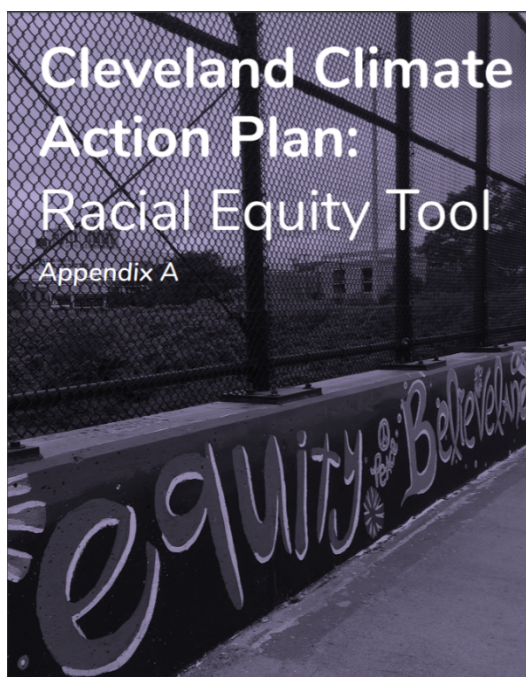
The tool asks a series of questions about neighborhood engagement, data and accountability, disproportionate impact, economic opportunity, and accessible language to ensure climate action items also contribute to Cleveland’s goals of racial and economic equity. For Wood, LEED for Cities has offered a valuable, data-driven framework that complements his team’s qualitative assessments of the equity impacts of their planning processes. “It’s just such a valuable, valuable tool for setting a very consistent frame of discussion around what we’re trying to do and trying to accomplish here,” he says.

The City of **Santa Fe, New Mexico** has also found the LEED for Cities framework to be a valuable tool in their pursuit of social equity and other sustainability goals. In 2018, the City of Santa Fe published the [Sustainable Santa Fe 25-Year Plan](#), which envisions “a thriving community where climate impacts are neutralized, natural resources are abundant and clean, and

LEED for Cities’ focus on quality of life empowers communities to demonstrate and deepen their commitment to social sustainability, public health, and distributional equity. By integrating equity into their planning efforts, local leaders can define sustainability in a holistic manner that accounts for the needs of all community members. The LEED for Cities framework offers communities the language, strategies, and metrics for translating this definition into meaningful local action.

Case Studies: Cleveland, OH & Santa Fe, NM

When Jason Wood joined the local government of **Cleveland, Ohio**, as its chief of sustainability in 2020, the city was at a critical juncture in its sustainable planning processes. The previous ten-year planning cycle had just ended, and Wood and his team were looking to the future of Cleveland’s long-term sustainability journey.



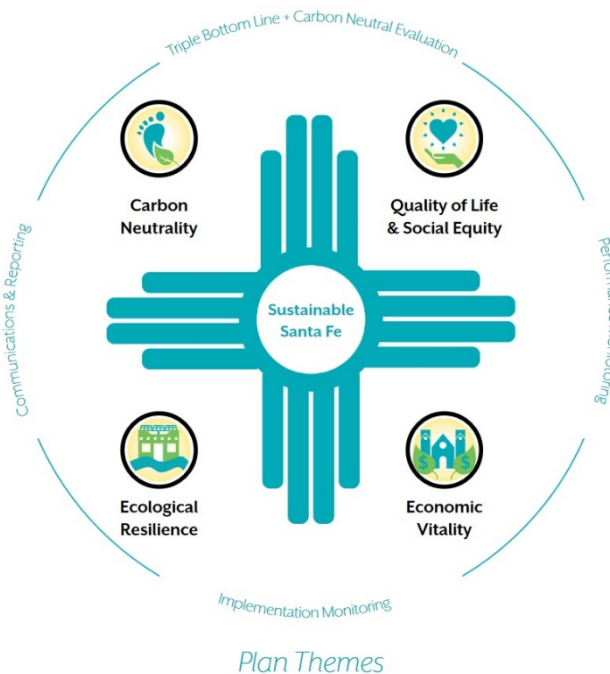


Figure 7: Santa Fe's Sustainability Plan Themes

commitment to improving current and future residents' quality of life, certifying with LEED for Cities was a natural next step in Santa Fe's sustainability journey. Local leaders found that certification provides transparent ways for community members to measure the city's progress in quality of life or water efficiency.

In May 2020, Santa Fe was awarded LEED Gold Certification under LEED v4.1 for Existing Cities. Since certifying, sustainability and planning staff have taken steps to continually improve quality of life, progress that will be reflected when the city seeks recertification in 2025.

5) Track Implementation and Progress

Metrics and targets alone do not guarantee the successful implementation of a plan. Local governments must report back to stakeholders and community members and demonstrate progress over time. The LEED for Cities framework can help communities to demonstrate a clear commitment to transparent and accountable sustainability reporting.

LEED for Cities offers clear and accessible performance measures, allowing staff, officials, businesses, and residents to easily track progress over time. LEED for Cities compares local efforts against performance standards and strategies based on best practices used in places across the world. The quantitative targets outlined by LEED for Cities provide standards that are globally recognized and supported by topical area experts.

Securing a LEED for Cities certification provides a baseline from which to measure the success of community plans over time. Recertifications down the line will help to ensure progress is being made and measured.

Local governments can also use LEED for Cities to track performance against other places with similar demographic profiles, resources, and sustainability goals. The rating system's performance prerequisites are reported on the visualization platform called [Arc](#). Arc provides a place for performance indicators such as Greenhouse Gas Emissions per capita to be tracked and scored based on performance relative to peers. This platform is used in the certification process but can also be used to track annual performance and trends over time.

sustainable economic activity is generated through enhancing social equity and the regenerative capacity of the environment."

The Sustainable Santa Fe Commission built out this mission statement into four core themes that align strongly with the LEED for Cities framework: carbon neutrality, ecological resilience, economic vitality, and quality of life and social equity. "This plan sets forth the ambition mission of the people of Santa Fe to ensure our quality of life we're all so lucky to have in Santa Fe is sustained for generations to come," said the city's sustainability planner, Neal Denton.

The Sustainable Santa Fe plan is also guided by a triple bottom line framework and aspires toward carbon neutrality. This holistic and comprehensive approach is designed to secure a sustainable future and high quality of life for generations of Santa Fe residents. In addition to carbon neutrality and resource conservation, the plan also prioritizes forward-looking investments such as community health and education.

"This is not just a climate action plan. It's a true sustainability plan standing on the pillars of social equity, a clean environment, and a thriving economy," Denton explains. Given the city's

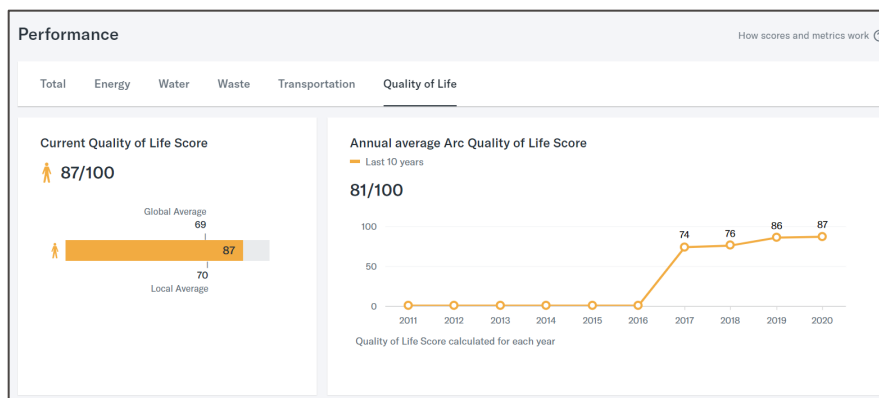


Figure 8: Arc Performance Platform, Quality of Life category

Case Studies: Baltimore, MD & Las Vegas, NV

Since the launch of its updated sustainability plan in 2019, the city of Baltimore has been collecting lots of data. On top of monitoring the implementation of the [2019 Baltimore Sustainability Plan](#), the city is preparing to submit its application for LEED certification. In both evaluation and monitoring processes, sustainability and planning staff have found that the LEED for Cities framework offers opportunities to maintain a robust commitment to sustainability.

For environmental planner Amy Gilder-Busatti, monitoring the implementation of the 2019 Sustainability Plan has highlighted areas to strengthen data collection before submitting the city's LEED for Cities application. The plan contains 23 different topics encompassing a wide definition of sustainability, and each involves at least three different metrics for measuring success. Not all metrics have been previously tracked by the local government, and compiling the necessary data requires lots of collaboration.

"It's made me more aware and connected to some of the different agencies within the city that are doing the work," Gilder-Busatti says. These new connections are coming in handy as Baltimore resumes work on its LEED for Cities certification submission after the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's been helpful working through this as far as getting connected to the different people and resources related to those topics," she says. "Then getting a better understanding of what we are doing in those areas and what we might be able to do in the future but aren't quite yet at the point of necessarily being able to get credit for."

Tracking and implementation are also especially important to sustainability and planning staff in Las Vegas. "That's often one of the overlooked parts of the planning process," says. "A lot of effort goes into planning, but a lot of times things fall off on the post-implementation side."

To ensure that Las Vegas remains committed and accountable to the goals of its [2050 Master Plan](#), Velotta and his colleagues have aligned the plan's measures of success with LEED for Cities and intend to track them according to LEED metrics. "We'll have an online dashboard and something to track all of our metrics on, something to track all our outcomes," Velotta explains. "Those metrics are derived from LEED and STAR, and those were done deliberately because it comes with something that's uniform and can be assessed with other cities across the country."

With the 2050 Master Plan, Las Vegas is playing the long game. Velotta hopes that the LEED for Cities evaluation metrics will continue to guide progress toward its ambitious economic and environmental goals for decades to come. "We'll have something to go back to consistently," Velotta says, a reference he believes is particularly useful for cities and communities just starting out on their sustainability journey. "I think having a template, just something to start from is really helpful to have going into a planning process."



Figure 9: Baltimore's 23 sustainability topics

Getting Started with LEED for Cities

We hope that this guide has provided you with lots of ideas on how LEED for Cities can support and enhance your local community planning efforts. Whether you want to align your plan with the LEED for Cities framework, integrate equity, or set benchmarks and measure progress, LEED for Cities can help you get there. The standards and strategies in the rating system can be adapted to support all types of plans.

LEED for Cities provides a robust, data-driven framework that allows local governments to define sustainability then evaluate and improve economic, environmental and social performance.

To learn more about the rating system and certification program, visit <https://www.usgbc.org/leed/rating-systems/leed-for-cities>. Explore LEED for Cities tools and resources including: the rating system, scorecard, and guide; free, on-demand education; case studies; the LEED for Cities Crosswalk Tool; and links to our latest articles and advocacy resources.

For more information and to get started reach us at cities@usgbc.org. We look forward to working with you and your team!

LEED for Cities
U.S. Green Building Council
2101 L Street, NW Suite 500
Washington, DC 20037
Web: www.usgbc.org
Email: cities@usgbc.org