

How to Become a LEED[®] Accredited Professional

Contributed by the AIA Knowledge Resources staff

June 2008

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SUMMARY

The five tips offered below were developed to help building professionals prepare for the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED[®]) accreditation test.

BACKGROUND

According to the U.S. Green Building Council over 45,000 professionals are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED[®]) accredited. LEED[®] professional accreditation is one way building professionals distinguish their knowledge of the LEED certification process.

The Green Building Certification Institute (GBCI) administers the accreditation program whereas the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) handles the development of the rating system and offers LEED-based educational programs. According to the GBCI Web site, separating the functions into two organizations brings the credentialing program closer to meeting the American National Standards Institute ISO Standard 17024. The [GBCI web site](#) explains the two organizations roles and offers exam specifications and sample questions.

The following exam tracks are offered to achieve the LEED AP credential. Candidates only need to pass one exam track of their choosing. Before you begin studying it is important to decide which rating system test you will take and familiarize yourself with it. To download the individual LEED[®] Rating Systems visit www.usgbc.org/leed

- LEED for New Construction, version 2.2
- LEED for Commercial Interiors, version 2.0
- LEED for Existing Buildings, version 2.0

TEST PREP TECHNIQUES

The following steps by John Dunn, LEED AP, are also listed on the web site, www.2dinnovations.com. Here the steps have been updated and expanded.

1. Have a timeline. Goals can slip and time can get the best of you unless you have a set schedule.

The amount of time needed to study for the test depends on your familiarity with the subject, study habits, and the amount of free time you can devote to studying. Users of the [ARE Forum](#), an online discussion about the ARE divisions and the LEED test, suggest a study range of two weeks to two months for the LEED exam. A general guide is between 15 and 25 hours of study are best.

2. Attend a LEED technical review workshop. They can be very expensive but are usually very well organized and condense a tremendous amount of information that would otherwise be self study. Once you take a class or you start to feel comfortable with the material, whichever comes first, it is time to schedule your test – no later than two months from your class.
3. Review the LEED reference guides. Studying the two-inch book is the best way to review common topics of the exam. The exam assumes you have a working knowledge of the point thresholds and instead focuses on the application of the credits. Understand the formulas and reference standards and how they are determined, don't memorize them. As seen in this sample question, the focus is comprehension not numbers: Is recycled content calculated by percentage of total project cost or project weight?
4. Make a spreadsheet with all of the credits, their intents, requirements, and reference standards. Learn all of the credit names and be able to write them from memory. Knowing the credits inside and out will help if you need to remember, for example, the difference between green power and renewable energy, or recycled content and certified wood.
5. Take practice tests. The USGBC Colorado chapter has developed a study guide for the LEED NC v2.2 test. The test can be purchased for \$50 from the [Colorado GBC chapter web site](#). Additional practice exams can be purchased on the [Professional Publications, Inc](#) Web site.

PASSING THE TEST

You need a score of 170 or higher (out of 200) to earn the LEED Accredited Professional designation. Scores are given immediately after the test.

ADDED BONUS FOR AIA MEMBERS

Members of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) can earn points studying for the LEED exam. According to the GBCI Web site, after the successful completion of the exam the organization will submit continuing education credit information to the AIA for three Health, Safety, Welfare (HSW) Learning Units. This is eligible for any candidate who has taken and passed the exam since January 1, 2006. Email your name, test date, and valid 8-digit AIA member number to exam@gbci.org.

Another option that can earn a potential of 24 HSW units is based on a common study methodology of law students preparing for the bar exam. This format relies on continuing education providers, either firms or chapters, to facilitate study groups. Study groups meet for a total of four hours of discussion and complete 20 hours of self study over the course of one month. Students share what they have learned and discuss test topics at the face to face meetings and use this time to teach others and discuss issues thoroughly. For more information about this format contact your local AIA Component or the [AIA Continuing Education Department](#).

RESOURCES

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Sustainable Design” by Henry Seigel, FAIA, Larry Strain, FAIA, LEED AP, and Nancy Malone, AIA, LEED AP, in *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 14th edition, Chapter 12, page 602. *The Handbook* can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending an e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.



More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 18.11.10 Energy Modeling and Daylighting Analysis
- 18.11.12 The Living Building Challenge
- 18.11.09 Steps Toward LEED Certification

Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact bestpractices@aia.org.

Key Terms

- Building performance
- Sustainability
- Sustainable business knowledge
- Rating systems