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Shades of Green: Sustainability's Changing Landscape

Recent developments in green building are redefining certification trends – no longer is LEED the only choice for certifying a building or tenant improvement project. As building owners, landlords, tenants, developers, architects/designers and project managers continue to place a priority on stewardship to the environment, with that comes the ability to utilize a variety of strategies and tools to certify projects.

While all certification metrics are based on the roots and principles of sustainability, each has its own nuances and unique identifiers. It is important to identify the defining characteristics of each certification to determine its suitability for the specific project type under consideration.

Considered the pioneer of green building certification, **LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design)** is a program that promotes renewable energy, supports healthy buildings and recognizes innovative thinking regarding how buildings and interior spaces are designed, constructed and maintained. To achieve a LEED certification via GBCI/Green Building Certification Institute, projects must meet defined prerequisites and earn the necessary points toward the desired level of certification. Rating systems include multiple project types, such as Building Design & Construction, Interior Design & Construction, Building Operations & Maintenance, Neighborhood Development and Homes.

Beyond building-centric design, **The Living Building Challenge™**, an alternative to LEED, is a certification tool + advocacy tool that supports an ideology of solution-based green design. Based on seven performance categories



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known as **Petals (Place, Water, Energy, Health & Happiness, Materials, Equity and Beauty)** with each Petal being subdivided into 20 Imperatives, a new approach to project performance is being defined – whether as new construction or as an existing building.

Place strengthening benefits are effectively managed through the certification process known as **Energy Star** and the use of its EPA created Portfolio Manager measuring EPA mandated standards. This online tool allows for building owners and landlords to measure and track water, energy and greenhouse gas emissions. Known as the mark of efficiency, Energy Star certification is annual and is verified by a third party, thereby creating a credible and measurable tool for multiple project types across multiple geographies.

With an evidence-based approach, the **WELL Building Standard®** is in its pilot phase. Researched by architects, scientists and doctors who promote that green building/health/wellness

go hand in hand, this certification sets performance categories utilizing seven category contents (Air, Water, Nourishment, Light, Fitness, Comfort and Mind) with commercial, institutional and residential developments being eligible for certification. This certification process encourages design professionals to focus on the integration of architecture and wellness and defines a series of technology enhancements and systemized performance-based measures. Like LEED, it also is certified by GBCI/Green Building Institute via a formal collaboration.

As another alternative to LEED, **Green Globes** uses an online questionnaire via an interactive process that also includes a third-party assessment and site visit. Green Globes has emerged as a viable option to LEED with automated reporting that can potentially expedite a sustainability designation if all metrics are met and memorialized. Utilizing data from actual buildings, versus modeled structures, the Green Globes certification process directly encompasses ideas such as geographic design considerations, space optimization, energy-efficient technologies, operational aspects and the impact of the building occupants.

A multisensory environment approach and innovative design principal known as **Biophillic Design** offers the opportunity to connect people + nature and utilizes design strategies to provide the ability for nature to inspire architecture. Often called a “paradigm shift,” **Biophillic Design** is a design philosophy (rather than an actual certification process) that challenges nature to not be an afterthought in design. As quoted by Rick Fedrizzi, President, CEO and Founding Chairman of the USGBC/U.S. Green Building Council: “When nature inspires

our architecture – not just how it looks, but how buildings and communities actually function, we will have made great strides as a society. **Biophillic Design** provides us with tremendous insight into the ‘why,’ then builds us a roadmap for what is sure to be the next great design journey of our times.”

Another certification process, although less popular to the commercial real estate industry, is **Greenroads** with specificity to roadway design and bridge construction. A proponent of sustainable transportation infrastructure, the Greenroads Rating System is a collection of best practices that earn credits/points with four different certification levels available.

In addition to the sustainability trend in the U.S., certification processes are making their way to Europe via a metric known as **BREEAM** – an acronym for Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology. Encouraging designers, landlords, developers, tenants, project managers and building owners to think about low-impact design by measuring a wide range of standards from energy to ecology, BREEAM has case studies spanning the globe showcasing their environmental assessment methodology.

Whether it be reducing the energy use of buildings, improving the conditions in which people work, incorporating natural daylight and ventilation, providing renewable energy sources or connecting people with nature – most certification processes and methodologies have similar criteria. As sustainability metrics evolve and because multiple credible certification alternatives exist, the sustainability community can now choose the certification strategy that best meets their project's needs.