LEED-NC v4 Explained in Two Pages

LEED v4 is here. The deadline to register for LEED 2009 passed in October 2016. Already-registered LEED 2009 projects have till June 30, 2021 to submit for certification or upgrade to LEED v4.

The most noteworthy changes in LEED v4 are as follows:

- New **Integrative Process** (IP) credit encourages teams to convene early and take a multidisciplinary look at key design decisions. This process is documented by simple narratives and is critical to the success of LEED certification.
- **Location & Transportation** (LT) section reorganizes a set of credits around site selection. Projects in dense areas with access to mass transit continue to get a bit of a boost here. Locating a project in a LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) location is even better.
- There are additions to the **Water Efficiency (WE)** category, including a new prerequisite and a credit for water metering. Reduced irrigation is now a prerequisite as well as a credit, and massive water use from cooling towers is now addressed.
- **Energy and Atmosphere (EA)** requirements raise the bar from ASHRAE 90.1-2007 to 90.1-2010. Some projects will be challenged by the new automatic shut-off requirements for 50% of receptacles in offices and computer classrooms.
- Perhaps the largest documentation protocol change is to the **Materials & Resources (MR)** credits. Single-attribute materials selection criteria like recycled content and forestry certification now play second fiddle to product selection factoring in **disclosure, transparency, and optimization**. You'll be looking for products with Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs), Health Product Declarations (HPDs), Cradle to Cradle certification (C2C), and other documentation formats. Also in MR, there is a new prerequisite for a construction waste management plan.

How this will shift your project's approach:

- **Integrative Design = Process Reboot:** The requirements in energy and materials will make this standard practice for LEED teams. This means more team workshop sessions, integrating input from consultants, and nurturing feedback loops referencing project goals and metrics.
- **Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) = New Software Acumen:** There is more emphasis on the impact that products and design choices have across their life cycle, from extraction to use to disposal—not just single-attribute measures like recycled content. Teams may be asked to apply LCA to structural and massing decisions and will need to understand and deploy LCA tools like Athena and Tally.
- **Disclosure and Transparency = Pre- and Post-Occupancy Engagement:** LEED v4 has credits for specifying products with various kinds of disclosures, and new prerequisites for energy and water metering. This will expand

both the project scope and timeline, warranting the embrace of both pre-and post-occupancy engagement.

- **Higher Standards and \$\$ = Learning Curves Ahead:** LEED v4 raises the bar. It's likely that without added design and construction effort and expense, projects will drop down a certification level from what they would have achieved under LEED 2009. As with previous versions of LEED, though, expect the market to catch up and prices to level out, particularly as energy codes advance and product manufacturers invest in new documentation.

- **Documentation Streamlining = Potential Efficiencies:** LEED v4 is still a checklist, but USGBC continues to focus on how a building actually performs on key benchmarks like climate impact and occupant experience. While it has a long way to go, USGBC is taking steps to make it less burdensome to certify a project by standardizing documentation and streamlining the most important performance measures. It's not standard operating procedure yet, but USGBC is investing heavily in its LEED Dynamic Plaque and the Arc platform as more automated digital dashboards for measuring and tracking performance.

- **Materials Perspective Shifts = New Project Tools:** Expect more time in materials documentation. Your project team will need to develop new tools for: early material discussions, project specification, material submittal protocols, and record keeping during construction.

Did anything stay the same? Yes—most of it!

- There's a familiar selection of rating systems, most prominently LEED for New Construction (LEED-NC) and LEED for Existing Buildings Operations + Maintenance (LEED-EBOM). But there are now more specific systems available with key credits fine-tuned for schools, retail, warehouses, hospitality, and data centers.
- It's still a 100-point rating scale, plus 10 "bonus" points attainable through innovation, pilot credits, and regional priorities.
- The certification levels have stayed the same: Certified (40 pts), Silver (50), Gold (60), Platinum (80+).
- There's a familiar structure of prerequisites (but now 12 in LEED-NC, up from eight) and credits (down to 43 from 49 in a more consolidated structure that packs in more options).

For full review of LEED v4, including more detail on other LEED rating systems, see LEEDuser's full credit-by-credit guidance.

Check the NC-v4 scorecard to see a list of specific requirements, and read up on what they mean on LEEDuser. LEED 2009 projects (sometimes referred to as LEED v3) can upgrade to LEED v4 anytime and can also substitute v4 for 2009 credits on a selective basis.