

GSA DRAFT Recommendations on Use of Green Building Certification Systems

The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (EISA) (42 U.S.C. 17092) requires the General Services Administration's (GSA's) Office of Federal High-Performance Green Buildings to evaluate green building certification systems every 5 years. After the review, GSA recommends to the Secretary of Energy the green building certification systems most likely to lead to a comprehensive and environmentally sound approach to certifying green federal buildings.

To better understand the ever-evolving certification system market, GSA conducted an analysis to identify those systems that are currently available in the U.S. commercial buildings market and those that address whole buildings with multiple performance and sustainable design attributes. GSA also identified those systems that award certification based on validation by an independent third-party assessor and incorporate measurable or calculated metrics to assess building performance.

Our analysis identified six systems for review:

1. BOMA BEST® 4.0 for Sustainable Buildings (<http://www.bomabest.org>), developed by the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) of Canada.
2. BREEAM® USA In-Use Commercial, version 6 (<http://www.breeamusa.com>), developed by BREEAM USA.
3. Green Globes®, version 2021 and 2023 (<http://www.thegbi.org>), developed by the Green Building Initiative.
4. LEED®, version 4.1 (<https://new.usgbc.org/leed>), developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC).
5. LBC™, version 4.0 and Core Green Building Certification (<https://living-future.org/lbc>), developed by the International Living Future Institute.
6. PHIUS, 2021 CORE and CORE REVIVE (<https://www.phius.org/>), developed by Passive House Institute US, Inc.

GSA invited the system owners to complete a survey to provide information on the technical components of their certification system as well as the processes by which the system was created and awards certification. The information collected through the survey shows that each building certification system offers a unique framework and approach to achieving building certification, and they all generally align on the aspects of building design, construction, operation, and maintenance that lead to high-performing commercial office buildings. At the same time, GSA found that no single system fully ensures compliance with all of the federal building performance requirements contained in statute and executive order. This information and additional details from GSA's review can be found in the [2024 Findings Report](#).

Draft Recommendations

Based on the information from its review, GSA recommends that agencies consider using LEED or Green Globes for new construction or major renovation projects. Both of these systems meet the basic requirements established under DOE Rule: [Green Building Certification Systems Requirement for New Federal Buildings and Major Renovations of Federal Buildings](#) by:

- Allowing assessors and auditors to independently verify the criteria and measurement metrics of the system
- Being developed by a certification organization that provides an opportunity for public comment on the system and provides an opportunity for development and revision of the system through a consensus-based process
- Being nationally recognized within the building industry
- Being subject to periodic evaluation and assessment of the environmental and energy benefits that result under the certification system, and
- Including a verification system for post-occupancy assessment of the rated buildings to demonstrate continued energy and water savings at least every four years after initial occupancy

For existing buildings, GSA recommends that agencies consider the use of BOMA Best, BREEAM In-Use, Green Globes, LEED, Living Building Challenge, Living Building Challenge CORE, or PHIUS Revive. Each of these systems contains requirements and options that align to varying degrees with green buildings performance criteria and provides a sound approach to certification of high-performance green federal buildings.

It is important for agencies to ensure that the options selected within a certification system are those that align with federal criteria in order to realize the benefits of using such a system. GSA recommends agencies use the certification system that best meets their mission, building type, and portfolio needs and certify to a level that promotes the high performance sustainable building goals referenced in Executive Orders 14008 and 14057.

In addition, while not part of the scope of this statutorily-required review, there are other building certification system modules available in the marketplace that focus on net-zero carbon, energy, waste, and water. GSA's Green Building Advisory Committee noted many of these systems in Exhibit B of its [Advice Letter on Recommendations for achieving EO 14057 Green Leasing Targets](#). GSA believes agencies should become familiar with these systems as they may also support the net zero goals contained in Executive Orders 14008 and 14057.

The use of third-party certification systems, when properly aligned with building performance requirements, saves resources by eliminating the cost to the government of developing its own duplicative building certification system while drawing on the expertise of the private sector.