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# MEMORANDUM

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**To:** USGBC Board of Directors  
**From:** LEED Steering Committee<sup>1</sup> & Staff  
**Date:** May 1, 2008  
**Subject:** LEED 2009 Introduction Memo

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## Guiding Vision and Introduction – LEED v3 and LEED 2009

### LEED v3

USGBC's evolution of the LEED Green Building Rating System is a multi-faceted initiative to streamline and create capacity for LEED project execution, documentation and certification. This initiative is referred to as LEED Version 3 (commonly referred to as LEED v3). In the spirit of the most successful LEED projects, this initiative has been undertaken in an integrated fashion, made up of 3 key pieces:

- LEED 2009 – LEED Rating System updates/revisions
- Revision and evolution of the LEED certification process
- LEED Online v3

These three pieces represent the delivery of the LEED v3 vision articulated by USGBC membership, LEED users, the LEED Steering Committee and the USGBC Board of Directors. Additional information on the certification process revisions and LEED Online v3 will be released in the coming months. LEED 2009 is described in summary detail below.

### LEED 2009

In order to remain relevant in a rapidly changing market, technology must evolve; LEED, as a market transformation instrument, is no different. The suite of LEED Green Building Rating Systems has enjoyed remarkable and unprecedented growth as the building industry has sought to engage with its concepts and technical criteria. LEED has been an incontrovertible success as a tool to promote market transformation and recognize buildings with exemplary green pedigrees. As of May 1, 2008, 3.5+ billion square feet of building projects (10,000+ individual projects) have registered intent to seek LEED certification with dozens more signing up every day. LEED's rapid success presents its stewards, the USGBC membership, with an opportunity to advance the system to ensure that future buildings certified under its criteria are even greener than the stock in the pipeline to date.

LEED has always existed and enjoyed unparalleled success, in part, due to its ability to operate in the dynamic tension between the pursuit of environmental excellence and the business realities of the building industry. While the urgency of pending environmental crises that face the coming generations weighs heavily on all of us, there is recognition that LEED cannot

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<sup>1</sup> The LEED Steering Committee is comprised of Scot Horst (Chair), Joel Ann Todd (Vice-Chair), Neal Billedeaux, John Boecker, Stu Carron, Bryna Dunn, Doug Farr, Holley Henderson, Greg Kats, Malcolm Lewis, Christine Magar, Nadav Malin, Muscoe Martin, Sara O'Mara, Kristin Shewfelt, Bob Thompson, and Lauren Yarmuth (Board Liaison).



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completely forsake market uptake for environmental priorities. Issues like global climate change may be the most urgent and dire social equity issues that we have ever faced, and they demand immediate, effective action. In spite of this knowledge, we also acknowledge that no transformation is catalyzed if the bar set by LEED is unachievable in the context of existing technological and economic boundaries.

Continuing to strike the optimal balance between market uptake and technical advancement is one of the driving forces behind the LEED 2009 work. Additionally, much has been invested in the current LEED system and, as a direct result, a concerted effort has been made to ensure that LEED 2009 capitalizes on the existing market momentum. Consequently, the LEED Steering Committee has created a LEED structure that will be familiar to those versed in the current LEED Rating Systems. Most of the structural and technical changes incorporated into LEED 2009 were designed to create a LEED Rating System that can be part of a continuous improvement cycle.

LEED 2009 is not a “tear down and rebuild” of the LEED that exists in the market but rather a reorganization of the existing LEED Rating Systems along with several key advancements. LEED 2009 is the sum of several parts:

- LEED Prerequisite/Credit Alignment and Harmonization
- Predictable Development Cycle
- Transparent Environmental/Human Impact Credit Weighting
- Regionalization

## **LEED Prerequisite/Credit Alignment and Harmonization – the LEED Bookshelf**

In a concerted and organized effort to provide a rapidly evolving green building market with tools that support a variety of building projects, USGBC has, over the past 6 years, created numerous market-specific LEED Rating Systems. While the deployment of these LEED Rating Systems has met, and in most instances continues to meet, the market demand, LEED version deployment has some undesirable side effects. Under the previous development paradigm, USGBC has been obligated to internalize 100% of the necessary rating system support infrastructure (rating system, LEED Online, submittal documents, reference guide, educational curriculum, case studies, marketing material, etc.) even when the new version of LEED is only marginally different than an existing version. Additionally, the rapidly ongoing transformation of the building industry has produced, at times, individual LEED rating systems that capture the latest industry advances but contain credits and prerequisites and may conflict with credits and prerequisites in other LEED versions.

In an effort to synchronize the development and deployment of LEED rating systems while creating capacity to respond to previously underserved markets, the LEED Steering Committee, in collaboration with LEED committee/TAG volunteers and USGBC staff, undertook a reorganization of the existing LEED Rating Systems. The resultant prerequisite/credit structure is a consolidation, alignment and updating of



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all existing LEED Rating Systems into their “most effective common denominator”. Prerequisite/credit alignment across applicable rating systems now provides a pool of prerequisites/credits for all LEED Rating Systems, and multiple versions of prerequisites/credits have been retained where needed to address different market situations. In this process, credit “fixes” were introduced. In addition, a scrub of the existing Credit Interpretation Rulings (CIRs) was conducted and necessary precedent-setting and clarifying language has been incorporated into the prerequisites/credits.

## **Predictable Development Cycle**

LEED alignment provides a continuous improvement structure that will enable USGBC to develop LEED in a predictable way. Using a cycle that is principally based on the familiar method by which building codes are developed, LEED will evolve on a set schedule. However, LEED is not a building code, and in so, policy mechanisms will be retained to allow for LEED to react to the rapidly changing green building industry including, but not limited to, administrative credit interpretations and the establishment of performance/intent equivalent alternative compliance paths to existing LEED prerequisites/credits.

## **Transparent Environmental/Human Impact Credit Weighting**

Arguably the biggest change to LEED 2009 proposed in this public comment is the re-weighting/point re-allocation of LEED credits. The process used to evaluate the environmental and human benefit of each LEED credit is complex due to the sophisticated level of research and analysis involved, but the general philosophy, explained below, is relatively simple.

The term ‘weightings,’ as it is used herein, refers to the process of redistributing the available points in LEED so that a given credit’s point value more accurately reflects its potential to either mitigate the negative or promote positive environmental impacts of a building. Until now, the LEED Green Building Rating System has not used an overarching, consistent framework for allotting point values to credits. Though ample anecdotal explanation for those choices is available – i.e., consensus of a large pool of talented and experienced individuals in the buildings industry – LEED 2009 goes a step further by weighting LEED according to a logical, transparent framework that incorporates the best available science.

The explicit weightings in the revised LEED Rating System scorecards represent the culmination of a weightings exercise that utilized two existing tools (modified for use by USGBC) in conjunction with exhaustive research, policy guidance from the LEED Steering Committee, and a new tool developed to synthesize large quantities of relevant information.

## **Regionalization**



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The ability to recognize regional environmental priorities in LEED has been a clear priority of LEED users. In response to this market desire, the LEED Steering Committee created a structure that allows for regional bonus credits in LEED.

As a first step, incentives will be provided through LEED Innovation & Design style bonus points that will add value to those credits that are considered most important for defined regions. These points will be counted in the same way as LEED ID points and are not included in the certification threshold calculations (ID and regional points count towards a project's certification tally but they are not 'base' points on which certified, silver, gold and platinum thresholds are established).

Project teams may select bonus points from a list of eligible credits based on the project's location. The LEED Steering Committee is currently collaborating with Regional Councils and Chapters to create the list of eligible credits. As defined by these Regional Councils and Chapters, select credits from the available list will be eligible for bonus points in appropriate sub-regions.

## **Exemplary Performance**

Currently in LEED, projects can earn up to 4 points for exemplary performance under IDc1: Innovation in Design. Exemplary Performance points are granted to projects that can demonstrate a doubling and/or attainment of the next incremental percentage threshold beyond the requirements of a LEED credit. Credit can also be earned under IDc1 for employing innovative strategies in building design, construction or operation. In an effort to encourage more innovation in LEED projects, the LEED Steering Committee voted to grant a maximum of 3 points for exemplary performance. This step was taken in order to return to the original intent of the credit, to encourage projects to pursue innovation in green building.

## **Beyond LEED 2009**

As mentioned previously, one of the goals of the LEED 2009 update is to move LEED in to a continuous improvement cycle. With this goal in mind, framework and organizational changes were made to LEED for the 2009 update. Planning steps are underway to create a process that yields a predictable development cycle for LEED. Although USGBC has no intention of treating LEED as a building code, in the past, market feedback argues that LEED move in to a development cycle that more closely mirrors that of the traditional building code's continuous improvement cycle.

In addition to the creation of a continuous improvement cycle, individual elements of LEED (credits, prerequisites, calculation methodologies, etc) as well as macro level issues (weightings, market sectors served, etc.) will be scrutinized to ensure that LEED maintains its leadership position in the market. The LEED Steering Committee has already planned to revisit the issues surrounding the, only recently completed, weightings exercise. The proposed changes to LEED set the stage for comprehensive but incremental evolution and



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advancement. Through this structure, USGBC is committed to using LEED as a tool to promote and steward market transformation towards sustainability in the built environment.