

Becoming a LEED-Accredited Professional

A valuable credential that is likely to grow harder to earn

By Peter C. D'Antonio, PE, LEED AP

While there has been some criticism of the LEED Accredited Professional (LEED AP) credentialing process, it remains a valuable professional designation and one that is likely to grow more valuable in the future. That's because the LEED governing body, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), has done a good job marketing itself and the LEED process. Interest in green design continues to grow, as does the demand for LEED AP participation in sustainable projects.

However, there's one criticism that I share with many others who have taken this exam: the USGBC needs to be more selective. All one needs to do to become a LEED Accredited Professional is to pay \$350 to take the test and pass it.

If you can do this, you can become one of the more than 5,000 people who have earned LEED AP status. Anyone can go out and get it, which means it may not be a true representation of that person's reputation and ability to perform sustainable-design projects. There is no minimum level of training, schooling, or credentials required.

As of this writing, the USGBC just released a new test for the latest LEED standard, LEED 2.1, which I have been told is much more rigorous. A beta test of the new 2.1 LEED AP exam was given to a study population that included both those who are new to green design and experts. Reportedly, the test was difficult, even for the experts.

PREPARING FOR THE TEST

The LEED AP exam tests your knowledge of the principles of sustainable design and the LEED process. The USGBC relies on third-party testing facilities—some 300 across the country, including Sylvan Learning Centers—to organize and administer the 100-point, multiple-choice test. The best place to start your preparation for the test is on the USGBC's website (www.usgbc.org). There you can purchase LEED publications, including the LEED Reference Guide, which is the main manual for implementing the LEED process.

It makes financial sense to join the USGBC be-

cause membership gives you a reduced rate for LEED publications and the test.

Membership also gives you access to the members-only portions of the USGBC Website, which includes LEED credit interpretation rulings (CIRs). These rulings help to clarify the intent of each LEED credit. The CIRs are valuable to both the LEED AP test and for earning LEED certification points for your first, or next, LEED green-building application.

In addition to joining the USGBC and studying the Reference Guide and CIRs, talk to your peers who have already earned LEED AP status. They can give you a lot of advice on the process and the test itself. Sustainable-design workshops sponsored by the USGBC are available, but are not required to take the test.

BENEFITS

One benefit to earning your LEED AP is that it provides an automatic point toward the certification of a LEED building under the Innovation and Design category within the LEED rating system. This is pointless and the USGBC should consider eliminating this credit.

It is becoming more and more common for LEED APs to be required members of sustainable-project design teams in government and private RFPs. This a real plus for the credential.

CONCLUSION

LEED AP should mean that you are an experienced building practitioner with demonstrated knowledge of integrated design, as well as the capacity to facilitate the LEED certification process. The USGBC is working toward moving its accreditation in that direction.

The USGBC should go one step further and require a minimum amount of demonstrated experience before one can even take the test—something similar to the professional-engineer internship, in which an engineer is required to work under a professional for a number of years before he or she can sit for the exam. Also, it would be good to require a minimum level of education.

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