Applying LEED to multifamily projects

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What are the advantages of using LEED for multifamily facilities?

LEED-certified multifamily facilities are the triple bottom line in action, benefiting people, planet, and profit. LEED certification leads to healthier, more productive places, reduced stress on the environment, impressive savings through reduced utility costs, and enhanced building value.

LEED-certified homes enhance the health and well-being of their occupants by providing clean indoor air and incorporating safe building materials to ensure comfort and safety. They are designed to save critical resources and use less energy and water, and therefore, they can lower utility bills each month and provide other financial benefits.

What issues are unique to multifamily projects?

Unlike buildings that are not residential in nature, multifamily projects have occupants 24-7. Having full-time residents in a building introduces different demands on energy and water and unique health impacts. Since most occupants of multifamily buildings pay their own utility bills, achieving LEED certification for these buildings can help reduce the cost of living for occupants. The average certified LEED home uses 30% to 40% less electricity and saves more than 100 metric tons of CO2 emissions over its lifetime. Modest investments in energy-saving and other climate-friendly technologies can make homes and communities more healthful, comfortable, durable, energy-efficient, and environmentally responsible places to live.

Homeowners are just beginning to realize the link between their health and their homes. Hazardous household pollutants include carbon monoxide, radon, formaldehyde, mold, dirt and dust, pet dander, and residue from tobacco smoke and candles. Many homeowners also store various chemicals inside their homes, including pesticides, fertilizers, solvents, grease, oils, degreasers, gasoline, antifreeze, strong detergents, thinners, and oil-based paints. Preventing indoor air quality problems is generally less expensive than identifying and solving them after they occur. The residential LEED rating systems take a proactive approach to indoor air quality and promote health for multifamily residents and occupants.

How many multifamily projects are registered and certified under LEED?

As of March 2025, there are 16,239 LEED-certified and registered multifamily projects representing approximately 2.1 million residential units and 2.7 billion square feet of built spaces. This includes projects certified as individual stand-alone buildings and those certified through multiple building applications such as bulk registration and batch certification.

How do multifamily facilities earn LEED certification?

Whether you are pursuing v4 or v4.1, there are several different pathways to choosing the rating system that is the right fit for your multifamily project. Use the summary table below to help select the best rating system for your project. The LEED Residential Guide to Certification also includes more detailed rating system selection guidance for residential projects. Please note that some rating systems under v4.1 are not yet approved for use in the US and Canada.

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Table 1: ***LEED v4 Certification Pathways*** *for Residential Projects*

LEED BD+C: Multifamily Midrise	LEED BD+C: New Construction	LEED BD+C: Homes	LEED O+M: Multifamily	LEED BD+C: Core & Shell
• 4+ Stories • Specific to residential • Onsite verification	• 4+ Stories • Documentation approaches may be better for non-US based projects • No onsite verification	• 1-3 stories mulifamily • Single family attached and detached • Onsite verification	• 20+ units • Specific adaptation for multifamily • Community level energy and water meter	• Projects that do not include fitout • Not specific to multifamily

Table 2: ***LEED v4.1 Certification Pathways*** *for Residential Projects*

Residential: Multifamily	Residential: Multifamily Core & Shell	Residential: Single Family	LEED v4.1 O+M
• New construction and major renovation multifamily projects • Any number of stories • Not available for projects in US & CA • Onsite verification	• New construction and major renovation multifamily • Projects that do not include fitout • Not available for projects in US & CA • Onsite verification	• Single family attached and detached • Onsite verification	• Certify with prerequisites and performance data • Not specific to multifamily projects

Green Rater requirements for LEED Residential projects

The LEED for Homes program requires a –LEED Green Rater- to provide the required on-site verification and complete the LEED application for GBCI review. Your Green Rater will work with the project team to ensure your project is registered correctly, complete a Preliminary Rating for your project to ensure that all prerequisites can be met and identify which credits will be pursued, determine the targeted LEED award level, and perform a mid-construction and final site verification visit. They will also help coordinate and review documentation and submit the project for certification review to GBCI.

All LEED Green Raters work under the oversight of a LEED Residential Provider organization.

Your first step is to reach out to a Green Rater for your project.

Find a LEED Green Rater in your region

Review the Residential Guide to Certification for more information

Review the residential registration and certification fees

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How does the latest version of LEED address the unique challenges of multifamily projects?

LEED v4.1 presents a new approach to residential projects, that pulls the most relevant language from BD+C and all residential focused rating systems and merges it with the priorities of the residential market. With the release of the new multifamily options in LEED v4.1, Residential BD+C becomes the required rating system for all single family and multifamily projects. Residential projects using LEED v4.1 may not use the commercial LEED BD+C rating systems.

The updated Residential rating system is designed to address this and make the decision to implement LEED much easier for the residential market.

USGBC believes that all buildings should be green buildings—especially homes—because LEED-certified homes are built to be healthier, more efficient, and more cost-effective. LEED-certified homes enhance the health and well-being of their occupants by providing clean indoor air and incorporating safe building materials to ensure comfort and safety. They are designed to save critical resources and use less energy and water, and therefore, they can lower utility bills each month and provide other financial benefits. LEED v4.1 Residential is designed to revitalize our approach to the housing market.

Through a streamlined and simple approach, LEED credits such as health and well-being, improved comfort, energy and water savings, and green and healthy materials, which have a higher value to homeowners and residents, are also prioritized. For example, the following credits hold more weight in residential rating systems:

- EQ credit Enhanced Indoor Air Quality Strategies
- MR credit Environmentally Preferable Products
- EQ credit Low Emitting Products
- EA credit Annual Energy Use (energy savings over a baseline)
- WE credit Indoor Water Use

Options have also been added to existing LEED credits to lower both hard and soft costs to achieve certification. By recognizing the unique circumstances of international projects, LEED v4.1 Residential is also now more applicable in this key market which continues to grow. We have further localized the rating system to meet the unique needs of different markets. For example, v4.1 Multifamily includes approaches for both natural and mechanical ventilation strategies.

How can multiple buildings and structures in a campus setting earn LEED certification?

Multifamily projects often operate on a larger scale with multiple buildings spread across a single site. All these buildings, people, and processes are interconnected with each other.

Projects using LEED for Homes v4, including Multifamily Lowrise and Multifamily Midrise, and LEED v4.1 Single Family, can use the bulk registration and batch certification approach for projects with multiple buildings. This allows multifamily projects using the same rating system to submit for certification using one workbook with the worst-case set of credits. The Residential Verification and Submittal Guidelines also include specific guidelines for group projects.

- **Bulk registration:** Bulk registration allows you to register a group of buildings in a single registration, given that all buildings in the bulk registration are:
    - Under the responsibility of one builder/developer

  - Located in a single country
  - Pursuing certification under the same rating system

- **Batch certification**: Within a bulk registration group, you may submit multiple projects in one batch for certification, given that all buildings in the batch:

  - Meet bulk registration requirements
  - Are part of a single metropolitan area and within the same country
  - Are in the same climate zone
  - Are of the same construction type, using the same envelope systems
  - Earn the same certification level under the same LEED rating system. Projects must utilize the "worst-case" set of LEED credits: this means if some units earn more credits than others, the batch is reviewed at the lower level of credits achieved
  - Have the same designer and builder/developer

If you have a group project pursuing LEED v4.1 Multifamily in the meantime, please reach out to homes@gbci.org for guidance from our team of residential experts on how to best pursue certification for your project.

How does the Arc platform relate to multifamily?

The LEED v4.1 O+M rating system offers a unique performance-based pathway to certify your existing buildings and interior spaces. This rating system uses Arc, a state-of-the-art platform designed to collect, manage and benchmark your building across five performance categories: energy, water, waste, transportation, and human experience.

And what does this mean for multifamily? LEED v4.1 O+M can be used to compare multifamily projects to other similar facilities pursuing high-performance measures from around the world. Facility managers and owners can continuously monitor the data and make informed decisions to optimize the building performance based on real-time data and analytics. This performance pathway can then be used to certify and recertify the project every 3 years. Learn more.

We recommend that Lowrise multifamily projects (especially those with less than 20 units/building) first create a free test project to learn more about the Arc platform and see how your project may score. For more details see the FAQ "How should a project team decide between using v4 or v4.1 O+M?"

What are the various LEED resources available for multifamily projects?

- Overview of LEED v4.1 Residential
- Overview of LEEDv4
- LEED in Motion: Residential
- Residential: Guide to Certification

Where can I find more owner profiles and case studies on multifamily projects?

- Ascent MKE
- Caldwell
- Frasier Meadows Independent Living
- Palazzo Novecento

- Reed College New Residence Hall
- 2821 El Camino Real
- Las Flores

Does USGBC offer any education for project teams wanting to learn more about multifamily facilities pursuing green building measures?

USGBC education courses that focus on multifamily:

- Roadmap Multifamily Decarbonization
- Multifamily Green Building Incentives: ENERGY STAR, Zero Energy Ready Homes LEED, and Section 45L
- LEED v4.1 Residential Multifamily Overview
- Zero Energy Multifamily Housing
- Global Living 2020
- Inflation Reduction Act & Housing - Benefits - Concerns?
- Strategies for Community Residential Climate Resilience

Who can I contact for more information?

For more information about LEED and multifamily, contact us or reach out to our team of residential experts directly at homes@gbci.org.