http://plus.usgbc.org/extra-credit/

The latest LEED points drive creativity in the way we approach new projects.
WRITTEN BY **Willona M. Sloan**

Cover: The University of Colorado Colorado Springs' (UCCS) Summit Village project included the construction of new residence halls which achieved LEED Gold.

Green building is a dynamic industry that continually evolves. As new technology emerges, as more architects and builders push the boundaries, and more companies invest the time and effort required to build green, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is at the forefront of industry innovation.

USGBC continually gathers data, feedback, and research to improve and refine Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification and takes advantage of the latest technology and most efficient strategies—always staying abreast of market trends and retiring outdated ideas.

To spur innovation and reward project teams for going above and beyond requirements, in addition to the 100 points of LEED, teams can earn up to six bonus points for innovation. However, oftentimes teams overlook these opportunities, leaving valuable points unclaimed.

“It’s in a project’s best interest to use all of the innovation points because they’re essentially bonus points; they’re like extra credit. It could put you over the line between Certified and Silver and between Gold and Platinum,” says Batya Metalitz, technical director of LEED at USGBC.

Rewarding Innovation

Of the six available points for innovation, the first point is the easiest to achieve. When projects work with a LEED Accredited Professional (AP), they earn one point. The other five innovation points are a bit more challenging.

To get started, teams can search through USGBC’s Innovation Catalog, where successful strategies have been compiled. The catalog is available in the LEED Credit Library, and it provides guidance on what USGBC hopes to see with each strategy.

Even if a team has an idea that’s not in the Innovation Catalog and not part of LEED, they can submit it anyway. The more innovative the better. It might be worth a point.

Teams can also earn innovation points by demonstrating exemplary performance in meeting the requirements of existing LEED credits. For example, if the requirement was a 50 percent reduction in the use of potable water consumption for irrigation and the team achieved a 75 percent reduction, that extra effort could be submitted for consideration as exemplary performance.

Piloting New Credits

USGBC’s pilot credits offer one more way for teams to gain innovation points, while also providing USGBC with a way to field-test new ideas. Project teams can register to attempt any of USGBC’s 50 available pilot credits. In some cases, where defined, teams are allowed to substitute requirements from the 100-point rating system with pilot language instead, which can prove highly beneficial on a team’s scorecard. This comes into play when USGBC wants to test a new path for a LEED requirement.

An essential feature of the pilot credit program is the feedback survey, which asks teams to discuss how difficult the credit was to achieve and what holes existed in the marketplace. “These are innovative ideas so some of them are pushing the market forward, “says Metalitz.

Pilot credits stay open for a minimum of one year, but can stay open even longer, until USGBC has collected enough data about what works and what doesn’t work. “The idea is that nothing goes into the next version of LEED that hasn’t been tested by projects for at least a few years already,” says Metalitz.

Putting Pilots into Practice

Erica Weeks, a self-professed “enthusiastic pilot credit attempter,” says that going after pilot credits makes good business sense. “A lot of the pilot credits that we have attempted have been in anticipation of them being credits on LEED v4 projects. It helps us to understand what we need to be looking for and to start building our database so that we can help our clients,” says Weeks.

Weeks is a project manager with greenSTUDIO, which does sustainability consulting as a division of Hastings Architecture Associates in Nashville. Weeks says that she registers for several pilot credits with every project. While the team may only end up attempting one of the credits, they have gone through the process of evaluating the various opportunities to find a good fit.

For example, greenSTUDIO worked with AMSURG, an ambulatory surgery center management company, to renovate its corporate headquarters space in Nashville.

“Their mantra was ‘wellness for employees.’ We attempted the Design for Active Occupants pilot credit for that project because it worked so well with their mantra to have all of their staff and people move through the building via open, beautiful stairways that were naturally lit versus taking the elevator all of the time,” says Weeks.

By purchasing furniture that is low-emitting by LEED requirements, and by going above the required 50 percent threshold, the project achieved an extra point for innovation for Environmentally Preferable Interior Finishes and Furnishings. “[AMSURG] liked the idea of attempting this as a pilot credit because it shows that they were transforming their company and wanting to do more sustainable things, which included three floors of all new furniture being from more sustainably minded sources,” says Weeks.

For Weeks, having the opportunity to help improve USGBC’s pilot credits provides another benefit of using them. “With each revision that is published, they do make some tweaks and changes according to the comments that make some things a little bit easier,” she says.

There’s one more benefit. In addition to gaining the points, achieving pilot credits offers companies like greenSTUDIO bragging rights. “When you can say that you’ve earned one of these pilot credits that go above and beyond the standard criteria that everyone is used to,

that gives you a marketable statement; a statement showing your commitment to doing things better," says Weeks.

Top: Erica Weeks is the project manager at Green Studio. Bottom/Large Image: By purchasing furniture that is low-emitting by LEED requirements, and by going above the required 50 percent threshold, AMSURG achieved an extra point for innovation for Environmentally Preferable Interior Finishes and Furnishings.

North Hills Wellness Center in the Los Angles area achieved innovation pilot points for its green education efforts, green cleaning program, and reduction of mercury lamps, among others.

Top: Drew Shula is Verdical Group's founder and principal. Above: Susan Dion, VP and director of Community and School Services at North Hills Wellness Center.

North Hills Wellness Center

In the Los Angeles area, the North Hills Wellness Center provides medical, dentistry, vision, and mental health services. The center is operated by Valley Community Healthcare, and serves the entire community, including the uninsured and residents who qualify for Medi-Cal.

Drew Shula, Verdical Group's founder and principal, led LEED consulting for the project team. "Typically, with the projects we work on we go after innovation points to try to get from one level to the next level," says Shula. In this case, gaining valuable innovation points pushed the project to the Silver level. The project maxed out the available points in the innovation category by receiving points for its green education efforts, its green cleaning program, for reduced mercury in lamps, and for exemplary performance in the Energy and Atmosphere category.

For the final innovation point, Shula suggested achieving the Local Food Production pilot credit, which promotes “the environmental and economic benefits of community-based food production and improves nutrition through better access to fresh produce.”

Shula felt the credit would resonate well with the purpose of the building. Working with the general contractor, Pankow, they made it happen. The team installed five 8’x10’ areas with orange mint, oregano, and lemon thyme in spaces that would have otherwise have been nonedible landscaping. The center offers education on obesity prevention, management of diabetes and nutrition, and they use the fresh herbs from the garden to drive the message home.

“We will sometimes discuss recipes that involve more local and fresh food sources and the use of herbs to enhance dishes as opposed to using salt, fat, and things that are more harmful,” says Susan Dion, VP and director of Community and School Services, North Hills Wellness Center.

For some of the center’s clients this is their first experience in seeing, smelling, or tasting fresh herbs. “It opens a door for them,” says Dion.

The center also holds health fairs with the high school next door and encourages students to share the wonders of fresh fruits and vegetables with their families.

“If all you know is what little availability there is at the local market or you grew up on chips and soda, it’s very different to think of putting something green on your table,” says Dion.

LEED-certified buildings help improve the health of communities. Even something as small as an herb garden can achieve that goal. What if every green building had an edible garden? That would be truly innovative.

The wellness center also achieved a Local Food Production pilot credit, which promotes the environmental and economic benefits of community-based food production.

The Interiors of the North Hills Wellness Center.

UCCS Summit Village

The University of Colorado Colorado Springs' (UCCS) Summit Village project made sustainability a top priority. Completed in 2014, the project included the construction of new residence halls. Group14 Engineering in Denver served as the LEED consultants for the project, which achieved LEED Gold.

Josh Marceau, a Sustainability Project Manager at Group14, explains that the team went after several innovation points. One of those was the pilot credit for Construction and Demolition Waste Management, which required the project to divert at least 50 percent of the total construction and demolition material from at least three material streams.

The team established a master site between the two buildings; consolidated the construction waste; and then diverted wood, metal, and concrete to be recycled. The challenge Marceau notes with this pilot credit was that often projects may be achieving 50 percent diversion, but it might be only coming from two material streams. Fulfilling this credit required going the extra mile to divert a third stream. It was worth the effort.

"Construction waste makes up like 60 percent of landfill waste. That's why there's a push to keep that waste out of the traditional waste stream," says Marceau.

The UCCS Summit Village project team, which included Whiting-Turner, also earned innovation points for exemplary performance in investing in green power; exemplary performance in water use reduction, which included installing water-conserving fixtures that exceeded LEED's performance requirements; exemplary performance in the use of open space; and the inclusion of a LEED AP on the project. The team also achieved the pilot credit for creating a Walkable Project Site by incorporating sidewalks and pathways around the building.

With a LEED rating of 60, each innovation point counted as the team strove for Gold. More than that, the overall project looked for ways to push innovation through technology to create an exciting project that reduces energy use.

When a client values sustainability there's room for new ways of thinking. "UCCS has basic sustainability requirements for all of their new construction. Everything they're building is LEED certified," says Marceau. Sustainability matters. UCCS installed real-time energy-use kiosks in the Summit Village dorms to track the energy used in each building. The data can be compared month to month, year to year, and building to building.

For teams seeking to be more innovative, Marceau offers some advice: "Think about the innovation credits early on. Don't put them off toward the end," he says.

Marceau recommends informing the project team of the exemplary performance, pilot credits, or regional credits that could align with the project early on to get buy-in. "A lot of times those points get put off until the end and you try to squeeze them in if you need them but then it doesn't work out," says Marceau.

Forward Thinking

Plan ahead. It can't be said too many times. There may be extra costs (and extra effort) associated with certain innovation points. Start by doing your research.

"Take a couple of hours to peruse the Pilot Credit Library and try to find some opportunities that are applicable to your project," says Shula. "You're likely to find a couple of credits where you could pick up some points on your scorecard and increase the sustainability of the project, which is the real goal."

"Be creative," says Marceau. "Sometimes you can submit things to USGBC that they may not have thought of and they will accept it as exemplary performance or an innovation in design point."

Creativity, sustainability, and innovation. Isn't that the point?

New pilot credits are announced in the quarterly addenda update. The newest credits include:

- Assessment and Planning for Resilience
- Design for Enhanced Resilience
- Passive Survivability and Functionality During Emergencies
- Integrative Process

- Legal Wood (ACP)
- Integrative Analysis of Building Materials

- Building Performance Pilot ACP to LEED Certification
- Lead Risk Reduction

Learn more at www.usgbc.org.