GSA DRAFT Recommendations on High-Performance Building Certification Systems

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 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 five systems for review:

1. BOMA BEST ® Sustainable Buildings, version 3.0
2. Building Research Establishment’s Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM ®)
3. In-Use USA, version 2016
4. Green Globes ®, version 2013
5. Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED ®), version 4.0
6. Living Building Challenge (LBC™), version 3.1

GSA invited the system owners to complete a survey to provide information on the technical components of the 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. This information and additional details from GSA’s review can be found in the Findings Report.

Based on the information from its review, GSA recommends that agencies continue to use 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 or LBC. Each of these systems contains requirements and options that align to varying degrees with the federal criteria and provides a sound approach to certification of high-performance 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 and portfolio needs and certify to a level that promotes the high performance sustainable building goals referenced in Executive Order 13834 “Efficient Federal Operations.”

The use of third-party certification systems, when properly aligned with government 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.