POLICY BRIEF U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL

# LEED and Green Building Codes

*Distinct & Complementary Policy Tools*

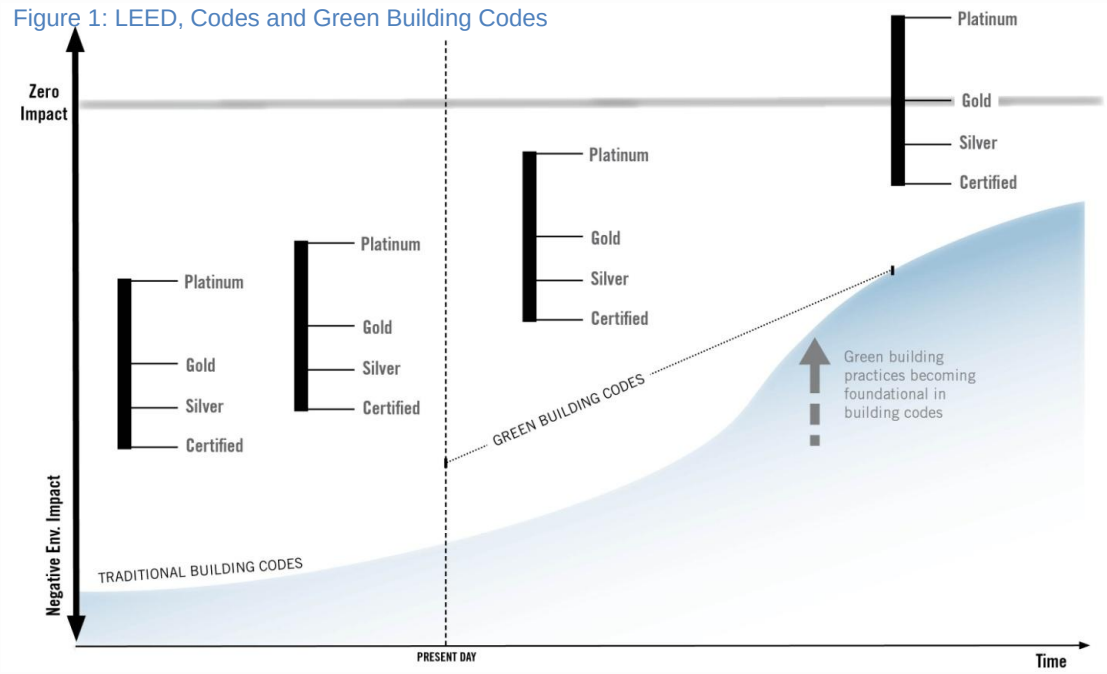
The LEED® Green Building Rating Systems are voluntary systems that assess the environmental performance of built projects across a spectrum of key criteria. From water and energy use efficiency to location, the impact of materials used, and more, LEED is intentionally designed to recognize buildings that go beyond minimum code compliance. While these minimums will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, they should at the very least include the most current version of the model energy code as a mandatory minimum for all buildings.[1]

With the release of the first public versions of the International Green Construction Code (and ASHRAE Standard 189.1 as a jurisdictional compliance option), there is now a code baseline that is available for jurisdictions to consider. When adopted and implemented as mandatory, these green building codes can provide regulatory oversight over a spectrum of measures that can lessen the impact of our buildings on human and environmental health, while also taking advantage of energy, water and resource efficiency.

The advent of green building codes and standards is a direct result of the wide-sweeping impacts of green building rating systems like LEED demonstrating that buildings really can be designed and built to lower operating costs, increase value, and reduce their overall impacts. And while adopting and implementing these codes – in whole or in part – will be a landmark achievement in USGBC's mission to transform the market, there is so much more work to do.

Even in today's greenest buildings, our impact is still net negative. On the road to sustainability, it's not a choice between rating systems or codes. **We need both, and more.**

Figure 1: LEED, Codes and Green Building Codes




In public policy making, there is a long history of experience pointing to how government commitments to build beyond code to LEED begets an interest and desire for more green building in the state or community. This interest ultimately paves the way for adoption of the IGCC as a new regulatory minimum for all buildings, alongside policy measures that continue to promote leadership with LEED.

[1] The building energy efficiency community recognizes the most recent version of ASHRAE Standard 90.1 and the International Energy Conservation Code as the national model code documents for commercial building energy efficiency and for residential building energy efficiency, respectively. For more information on the current model codes, see: www.energycodes.gov.

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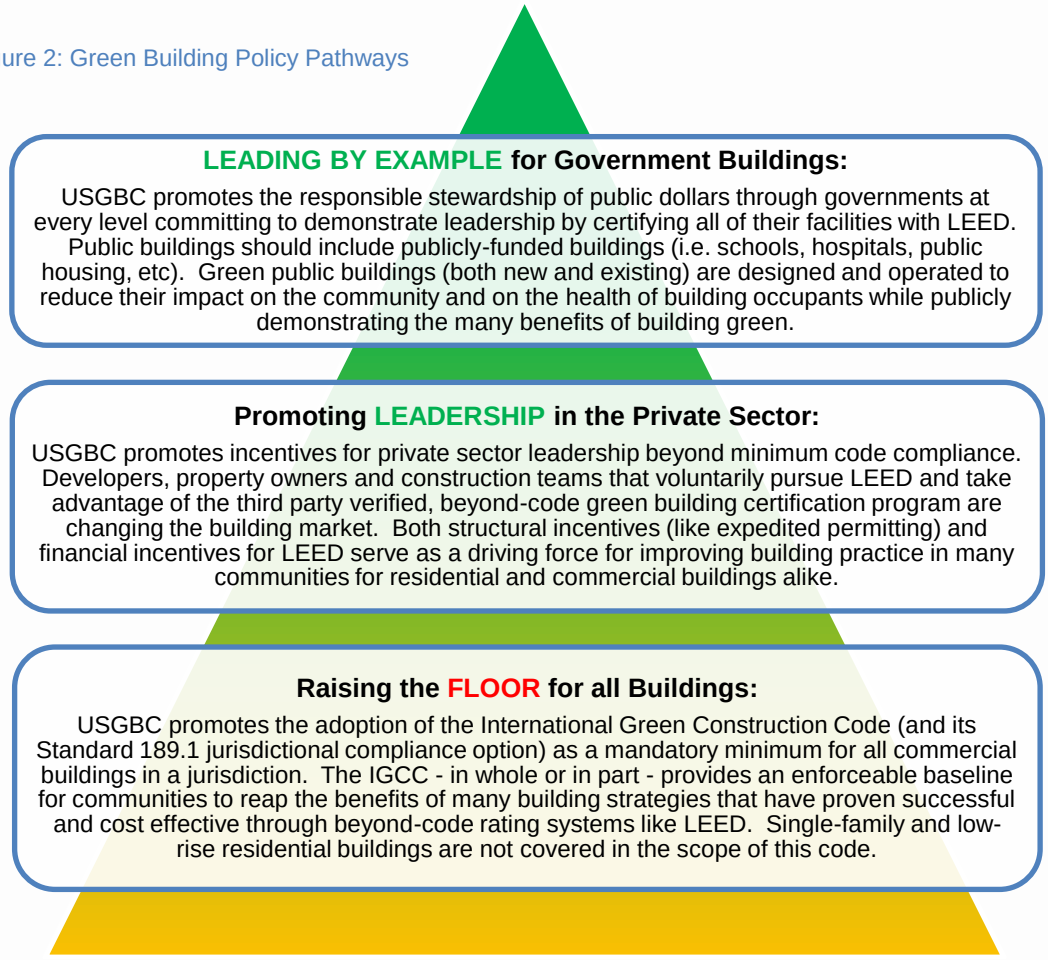
## Codes and Rating Systems: Carrots or Sticks?

As policy levers, green building rating systems play important, distinct and complementary roles to green building codes and standards:

Figure 2: Green Building Policy Pathways




## Green Building Codes: Enforcement and Compliance

U.S. Green Building Council and the Green Building Certification Institute have developed one of the world's most rigorous and robust third-party verification systems for demonstrating compliance with intended green building goals. For more than ten years, LEED certification has provided meaningful verification that a building's design was implemented as specified. These buildings – both new and existing – are designed with driving priorities among energy savings, water efficiency, location efficiency, improved indoor environmental quality, and stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts.

Building departments have been hit hard by the recession that has wreaked havoc on state and local government budgets. The resulting need to do more with less impacts code enforcement, yet the need for healthier, more efficient code-compliant buildings remains. Funding for both code enforcement and also for educating the entire building industry on green building codes remains a priority.

Education will be extremely important if we've learned anything from the success rate of other codes that extend beyond the reach of the typical life-safety scope of work for code officials. Building energy codes, while ever more widely adopted, have had significant challenges in implementation because building energy efficiency has – historically – not been a priority or core competency for health and life safety professionals. With the nation's first statewide green building code, California serves as an important test-case for green building code compliance. Provided adequate enforcement authority, we should expect fairly promising results from a state that already far exceeds the national average in implementation, enforcement and compliance rates with building energy codes.

For more information, see USGBC's white paper, *Greening the Codes*.