



Top 10 Things to Do on Every Sustainable Design Project

Following our **Top 10 Things to Do on Every Historic Tax Credit Project**, here's a list of the **Top 10 things to do** when you are planning your next adaptive use project:

- 1. Remember that LEED Projects are complex — but not difficult.** As there are with historic preservation tax credit projects, there are very specific regulations and requirements that one must follow when working on an LEED project. While these may seem byzantine at first, the process becomes much clearer with just a bit of experience.
- 2. Build a team with the Development, Design and Construction experience to understand the challenges ahead.** When building your team, be sure to surround yourself with experienced professionals, especially if this is your first LEED project. A lot of this stuff becomes second nature after a while, but LEED Projects can be a very painful experience if key stakeholders are inexperienced.
- 3. Recognize the limits and unique opportunities of specific sites and structures.** Play to your strengths — Each project is the summation of a distinct set of forces (natural, cultural and economic). LEED Projects have from time to time been tagged as “too expensive” or “too difficult to achieve credits.” This is frequently due to teams ‘chasing credits’ and spending lots of money on securing inappropriate credits instead of focusing on the strengths of an individual site and reinforcing those strengths.
- 4. Look where others have overlooked.** The greatest chance to make an impact, while staying on budget, is found in the properties on the margins. Infill parcels, transitional neighborhoods, and sites where the original use is now obsolete are areas to look for that frequently have other green assets, such as a robust public transit system, existing infrastructure, and underutilized building stock. Spend time driving around, getting to know the unique attributes and opportunities of a community.
- 5. Ask “Can I eat it?”** While this might cause some curious looks from time to time, consider asking sales representatives from building products companies you are contemplating including in your project, “Can I eat your product?” If the answer is, “Yes, but why would you? It doesn't taste very good,” then you know the product is relatively benign. If the answer is “No way — that stuff will kill you!” then you need to look further into the toxicity profile of that product. All things being equal, which would you rather put in your building?
- 6. Work with what you have — don't fight the building.** Rather than imposing a design solution on an existing structure, start by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the building to see if there are opportunities to take advantage of existing conditions. Designing something that runs counter to the underlying logic with which the building was originally constructed can be extremely expensive and ultimately futile.
- 7. Look holistically at issues of sustainability — don't chase points.** There are certain elements of sustainability that are inherent in urban revitalization projects — reuse of existing infrastructure, avoided impact of new construction, and good indoor environmental quality, for example. Focus on these credits and consider de-emphasizing the importance of elements that are not inherent in the basic design. Don't chase points for higher levels of LEED Certification unless analysis indicates there is the potential for a reasonable payback.
- 8. Reinforce weaknesses in projects — make sure that the building will not become functionally obsolete before it is structurally obsolete.** Take stock of the existing building. Are there areas that can be improved upon? Do all of the underlying systems (structural, MEP communications, circulation for multitenant layouts, etc.) function properly and with enough flexibility to adapt to future changes in use and need? If not, consider focusing renovation efforts on elements that could become obsolete and render the building non-functional in the future.
- 9. Look beyond the property line to engage the neighborhood.** The best projects have the capacity to transform communities. In the long run this benefits the broader community as well as the specific project you are working with. Community members can also offer very nuanced insights into the particular strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and needs of a community — take advantage of that knowledge.
- 10. Keep a sense of humor.** And as with historic preservation tax credits, despite everyone's best efforts, sometimes challenges pop up. Try not to get too tied up in how things got to where they are, and focus on generating the best solution. Otherwise, you can go crazy...