

# Is LEED EBOM economically feasible? Michigan business owners say "yes!"

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Despite one of the toughest economic periods in Michigan's history, many business owners have demonstrated persistence in their quest toward reducing the impact building operations have on occupants' health and productivity, the environment and their bottom lines. LEED for Existing Buildings-Operations and Maintenance (EBOM) has been the tool of choice among visionary leaders for achieving high performance existing buildings and operations teams.

Various sized Michigan-based organizations, including manufacturing, defense, nonprofits, healthcare, education, services and governments agree that the structure and third-party validation characteristic of EBOM provides a valuable roadmap for continuous improvement. How do organizations make the business case that certification is feasible? Although the successful outcomes are often similar, the rationale and approach can be as unique as the organization itself.

Recent business research across many industries has concluded that alignment of sustainability and business strategies is being rationalized by issues including:

- Desirable products and services, branding and market reputation
- Favorable position to participate in commercial and government contracts
- Smart risk management
- Current and pending regulatory issues

Creating a marriage of sustainability with business objectives and image is the fun part. Effectively communicating it has a tremendously motivating effect within the company and instills a sense of partnership with the community.

The LEED EBOM certification process follows 5 phases:

1. Audit
2. Plan
3. Program Development
4. Performance Period, and
5. Certification

It is important to gather and monitor cost information through each phase and effectively demonstrate it to senior management. An organized facilities team that maintains good records is well equipped for this task.

It all starts with a gap analysis - assessing building and operations information and performing a feasibility and cost-benefits analysis for each of the LEED prerequisites and best practices. Many agree that aiming for improvements in one quantum leap is not practical for the average building owner. Commitment toward staying the course on a master plan over several years is the best solution. Since re-certification is required a minimum of every five years, a life-cycle cost mindset is best for preserving their valuable real estate assets.

A common misconception is that EBOM is achievable only by elite companies with deep pockets and stellar new buildings. Recent studies illustrate, however, that even newly certified LEED buildings haven't performed as designed when they lack an informed operations team ready to adjust to changes. EBOM is designed to be a natural extension of new construction, verifying that "buildings cannot run themselves." Without cohesive operations in place, owners of new high-performance buildings are missing the point.

A recurring theme proves that "whatever can be measured can be managed." Certainly an uptick in energy audits and building commissioning confirms these steps alone produce impressive ROIs in short order. The benefits an owner reaps by following EBOM requires looking beyond energy efficiency - to comprehensive operational improvements. EBOM includes over 104 best practices to also manage the site, water, purchasing, waste, renovations, cleaning and indoor environments, which collectively affect the occupants, the environment and operational budgets.

Seemingly daunting, Michigan companies have asserted that EBOM is a worthwhile venture in acquiring an intimate knowledge of how their buildings work and implementing a predictable vs. reactive operations plan. The fact is, most teams considering certification of average-sized buildings realize that common sense practices followed intuitively only need tweaking to meet the criteria. Managers soliciting advice of LEED consultants to supplement internal capacity benefit by working quickly toward self-sufficiency. Since consistent behavior change is a key component, focused leaders cultivate an educated, multi-disciplinary workforce in the process.

ISO-certified organizations know the drill and can modify existing policies to comply with EBOM. Developed for one location, these policies' impacts can be leveraged across the larger enterprise. As ISO has transformed the supply chain, adoption of EBOM has continued to build a savvy service provider base, equipped to meet the demand for higher standards in Michigan and beyond.

Fortunately, owners of Michigan existing building stock have a growing number of Fortune 500 companies to model in setting sustainable goals. EBOM certification challenges owners to capitalize on the strengths of their stakeholders and opportunities for innovation and collaboration.

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