



# RATING SYSTEMS: *Which One Is for You?*

Every year, Structure Tone surveys clients and partners on the state of sustainability, wellness and resilience. So far, the data shows people are a bit overwhelmed by the number of third-party rating systems on the market. With that in mind, Structure Tone's director of sustainability, Jennifer Taranto, spoke with the leaders of four prominent rating systems to discuss the aims of their system, how these systems differ from and complement each other and what trends and challenges they see ahead.

## Jennifer Taranto: Why was your rating system initiated?

**Niall Trafford, COO, BRE Group & President, BRE America:** Back in the 1980s, there was much talk of "low energy" buildings but no credible way of independently measuring the claims. By the end of that decade, leading professionals at the BRE Trust came together to change that. This culminated in the launch of BREEAM in 1990 as the first holistic green building rating system in the world. Since then, BREEAM has become an established global metric for green building standards worldwide that assesses the environmental performance of all commercial buildings. Nearly all other major green building standards have used BREEAM as the foundation for new rating systems.

**Mahesh Ramanujam, President & CEO, US Green Building Council:** USGBC created the LEED green building rating system as a way to measure and

define what green building means and to provide a roadmap for sustainable development. Before the introduction of LEED, there was no universally agreed upon definition for green building, and LEED created a common language for this by establishing a simple, metrics-based system.

**Rick Fedrizzi, Chairman & CEO, International WELL Building Institute:** The WELL Building Standard was the natural evolution from the established green building certifications, igniting what I call the "second wave of sustainability." It builds on the tremendous work established by these leading green building systems, all of which have incorporated human health.

**Amanda Sturgeon, CEO of the International Living Future Institute:** Our mission is to lead the transformation toward a civilization that is socially just, culturally rich and ecologically restorative. In order to do that we must have a world full of living build-

ings, living products and living communities. We saw a void in the market from doing less bad to doing more good, meaning elevating the sustainable design movement to a regenerative movement.

## Taranto: What makes your rating system different from others?

**Ramanujam:** LEED has become the industry standard for green building—no program has greater global reach or credibility or is as trusted in the marketplace. What sets it apart is that it works for all building types—from homes, to corporate headquarters, to neighborhood developments and even entire cities—at all phases of development.

**Trafford:** BREEAM is a series of schemes covering all lifecycle stages, including infrastructure, communities, new construction, in use and refurbishment. All of the schemes use worldwide best prac-

tise and science to underpin the credits, adapted for each country it is operated in.

**Fedrizzi:** WELL is an evidence-based and performance-verified certification program, meaning that projects must prove that a space is not only designed for health, but that it performs for health. For companies, this could mean increased productivity and reduced sick days. For residences, this could mean healthier families and an improved quality of life.

**Sturgeon:** The Living Building Challenge is based on actual performance rather than modeled performance. Prior to certification, third-party auditors verify that each project is meeting the highest sustainability metrics based on a 12-month performance period, showcasing that the LBC is not a checklist of best practices. Instead, it encourages people to think more holistically about the design of a building and what the solutions are to the greatest threat of our time—climate change.

## Taranto: What is the impact you are seeing on the built environment as a result of rating systems like yours?

**Ramanujam:** Green building rating systems are crucial to addressing the impacts of climate change and, collectively, these rating systems are working together to continue to raise the bar on our built environment. In partnership with Booz Allen, our 2015 Green Building Economic Impact Study found that, to date, green building has created millions of jobs and contributed hundreds of billions of dollars to the US economy, and that LEED was a pivotal contributor to this total impact.

**Fedrizzi:** The first projects to achieve certification are now releasing results based on pre- and post-occupancy surveys. This research brings to light the measurable impact and benefits of WELL Certification, such as enhanced air quality and improved employee collaboration.

**Sturgeon:** That the built environment sector understands how buildings must perform in order to actually make a difference to global climate change.

**Trafford:** In the various countries which BREEAM operates, we often see the best practise that BREEAM promotes to become the norm. This is not only rewarding to improve their buildings, communities and infrastructure, but it drives local jobs, knowledge and opportunities. All the rating tools drive change, not just in the built environment, but wider transformation. All of those in this article should be proud of the combined impact we have; BRE also have a series of innovation parks that are a collection of Exemplar buildings and technologies being shown and trialled live.

## Taranto: With so many rating systems on the market, do you foresee greater collaboration across these systems?

**Fedrizzi:** Absolutely. Last year we released "crosswalks" with several green rating systems, includ-

ing LEED, BREEAM and Living Building Challenge, as well as Green Star in Australia. These crosswalk documents identify opportunities to streamline the process of achieving dual certifications. Higher performing buildings are fundamental to high performing people.

**Sturgeon:** Yes, as Rick mentioned, we have developed crosswalks with other leading programs and are creating more so that people can choose what works best for their situation. I think an ecosystem of choices is a healthy place for the market to be in.

**Trafford:** This question often comes up. We are both competitors and allies. Competition is good for the market, ensuring we give the best service, best schemes. But as Rick and Mahesh have said, initiatives like the crosswalks and some of the research we are doing don't happen by chance, but active and positive conversations between all. The real question is how can we all together certify more buildings and, in turn, help them improve.

**Ramanujam:** Over the last few years, Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI), the global certification body for LEED, has actually expanded to administer several other complementary rating systems to LEED. The next phase of this integration is bringing all of our available rating systems into one platform so projects can seamlessly attempt multiple rating systems at once.

## Taranto: What emerging industry sustainability trends excite you the most?

**Sturgeon:** It excites me how quickly the building product manufacturing sector is embracing healthy, transparent materials and moving towards Living Products. I also see more companies committed to zero energy across their entire building portfolios.

**Fedrizzi:** We're just now starting to see the emergence of continuous monitoring and sensor technology, and the impact is going to be immense. Our environments are constantly changing, and these new innovations can help us identify gaps and optimize our buildings and communities in real time to best support our health and wellness.

**Ramanujam:** The emergence of data and performance as a driving force in sustainability really excites me. I like to say that data is the new natural resource. Data and technology have transformed the market and changed literally every aspect of life. Those who fail to adopt these advances will be left behind.

**Trafford:** There are so many emerging trends that we need to be aware of...data, use of sensors in certifying buildings, beyond shareholder value, net-energy-positive buildings, ultra-transparency, circular economy, Internet of Things, collaboration recognised as accelerators. All of which are articles in their own right. But all are driving change at a pace we haven't seen before and creating an exciting time for us all in the industry. ◀



Above ▲  
Jennifer Taranto, Director of Sustainability, STO



Above ▲  
Rick Fedrizzi, Chairman & CEO, IWBI



Above ▲  
Mahesh Ramanujam, President & CEO, USGBC



Above ▲  
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Spring STO Insights 2018 | 29

