

Sustainable Building Career Options

Would you like to transform the built environment to a sustainable environment?

Look for the scenario that fits you best, and you are on your way to joining the ranks of change agents working for a greener planet!

1. You are an experienced design and construction professional:

- a. **Take a short workshop.** If you just want to get your feet wet, there are plenty of workshops and seminars available through local USGBC and NAHB chapters. If your local jurisdiction has a green building initiative, they will often offer introductory workshop series as well. Other educational programs are available through the Cascadia Sustainability Academy, Green Builder Media (residential), and USGBC Education Providers. For a list of the latter, check out www.usgbc.org
- b. **Take an in-depth course.** Experienced professionals will benefit from the comprehensive Sustainable Building Advisor class. This 9-month professional certification program covers a broad range of sustainability topics and is also a great way to network with others. Check out www.sbainstitute.org.
- c. **Get credentialed.** This will show you are committed. The US Green Building Council offers several levels of professional LEED designations, the LEED Green Associate and LEED AP. The SBA Institute offers the Certified Sustainable Building Advisor (CBSA) designation, which means you have a good understanding of the principles of sustainable building and its environmental elements. Both designations are earned by passing an exam.

2. You have green design or construction education but you have no work experience:

- a. **Look for an entry-level position** in a firm that has a “green” practice and be open about your desire (and patient). Many design firms now have “green teams” and they are looking for leaders. Some forward-looking firms have “sustainability coordinators” to lead their corporate initiatives. This booklet is aimed at Sustainability Coordinators and gives advice about how to green a business.
<http://www.obrienandco.com/portfolio/greening-your-business-booklet>
- b. **Get connected.** Check out activities of your local USGBC chapter, such as the Emerging Professionals program and membership events. Annual and regional green building conferences are also opportunities to get connected. Regional organizations, such as the Northwest EcoBuilding Guild, also hold conferences and retreats for like-minded individuals. The monthly event called Seattle Green Drinks is a good way to start networking and learn more about what other professionals are doing.



3. You don't want to design or build, but you want to promote sustainable development in your current job, or a new career:

- a. You can promote sustainable development as an employee of a non-profit focused on green building, or some aspect of sustainable development. Examples include staff of local chapters of the USGBC, staff of a local green building program (such as Built Green) as well as groups that promote sustainable transportation, forestry, healthy building, low impact development or other sustainable issues.
- b. You can promote sustainable development as a staff member of a municipal building or planning department. As more jurisdictions sign on to environmental initiatives, such as the Mayors Climate Agreement, or instigate green building requirements, it will become important to have a staff that can facilitate or enforce these initiatives.
- c. You can conduct educational initiatives for public agencies. Solid waste, natural resource, stormwater management and similar agencies with environmental agencies find that sustainable development is a comprehensive solution to their missions. You will need training in the specific environmental topic area and/or public education methods to provide credible support.
- d. You can work for (or start!) a consulting firm that promotes green building through outreach to the public or design and construction professionals, or provides assistance on LEED projects. (If the latter, you are more likely to be successful if you have a background in the basics of design and construction.)

What do Sustainable Building Advisors do?

Here are examples of real graduate experiences:

- A lighting engineer takes the course, and ends up inventing a sustainable building product. Now she runs a firm that focuses on innovation.
- An entry-level engineer takes the course, and is so respected by the engineering community that within a year she ends up representing them when she testifies to the Washington State legislature to support green building legislation.
- A veteran architect who runs a one-person shop offers his own project for a team project, and it ends up being LEED Platinum.
- An administrative assistant signs up for the course, and so impresses a well-respected Chicago firm known for energy efficiency analysis that she gets a job as an administrative assistant with the promise she'll help out on some of their projects.
- A housing authority sends its newly hired sustainability coordinator to take the course. She ends up on a statewide committee to shape Washington's policy regarding affordable housing; her projects win recognition for being green.
- As part of addressing climate change, a suburban city creates a green building program. The staff member in charge of getting the program going is sent to take the course.
- Architects taking the course have started green teams in larger firms, or created their own green firms. Students even collaborate with SBA instructors!

