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Observations from within

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A building owner gets the green light to move ahead with a project. The project needs to be green. Now what? Who do they hire? How do they know they are getting a team capable of delivering the best, most sustainable project, at the best cost? Will registering the project with LEED guarantee them that? Every firm they interview will claim that they are green building experts, so how do they find out what's real?

NEXUS has launched a Green Firm Certification program to answer that question. The program evaluates the capability of A/E/C companies to deliver consistent, high quality sustainability services and is the only program in the industry that addresses organizational ability.

Drawing on the experience of working with firms in the certification pilot and its predecessor of 9 years, our boot camp program, it is clear that the industry has a ways to go and there is still a wide gap between marketing claims and reality. Many firms have quantifiable success in two areas of the program: Projects and outcomes. However, it is fairly common to have less success in the other areas such as leadership, partnering and Infrastructure.

In some cases, the company's leadership is committed to sustainability and incorporating best practices, but this may not transmit very effectively to all levels of staff - as a clear expectation for professional practice. Or they may not have effective means to achieve those goals, such as distributing the responsibility for those activities into job descriptions or time sheets. In some cases, the commitment is lacking altogether. I have heard comments such as, "Over my dead body will I let an engineer touch this project until I have it figured out" - or variations of this sentiment that mean they are not collaborating with team members in such a way that integrative design (key to green design) is even possible.

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