



GSTC ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

Version 1.0

30 September 2023

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

www.gstcouncil.org

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Document Control

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1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1. GSTC Accreditation Procedure outlines the general accreditation process for GSTC. It encompasses several key points, including Certification Bodies (CBs) that aim to apply for and maintain their accreditation status. The procedure primarily addresses accreditation application, maintenance, reaccreditation, scope extension and reduction, transfer, suspension, and withdrawal of accreditation status.
- 1.2. The procedure specifies the duties and responsibilities of GSTC and the CB (both accredited and applicant) throughout the accreditation cycle. These guidelines apply to all parties involved in the accreditation process.
- 1.3. Other applicable operational activities and responsibilities of GSTC and CB are described in GSTC Accreditation Manual for Accommodation/Hotel & Tour Operator v.3.1.

2. Change History

v.1.0 September 30, 2023, First publication

3. Terms and Definitions

- 3.1. All terms and definitions that are not defined below are provided in the GSTC Glossary and Accreditation Manual

Terms	Definitions
Accreditation Cycle	Begins at or after the initial Accreditation Decision date or decision after a Reaccreditation Assessment and shall not be longer than five years. Before the end of a cycle, a reaccreditation assessment shall be conducted prior to cycle expiration.

	[SOURCE: adapted from ISO/IEC 17011:2017(E)]
Accreditation Decision	Decision on Granting, Maintaining, Extending, Reducing, Suspending and Withdrawing Accreditation.
Accreditation Report	The report prepared by GSTC for the Assurance Panel used to support the recommendation for an Accreditation Decision.
Accreditation Requirements	Entirety of requirements the Certification Body has to fulfill to qualify for being Accredited to the GSTC Certification Scheme and for maintaining the accreditation.
Calendar days	All the days in a month, including weekends and holidays.
Certification Scheme	Certification System related to Management Systems or specified products to which the same specified requirements, specific rules and procedures apply (adapted from ISO 17000: 2004).
Error of Fact(EOF)	A statement by a Certification Body claiming an inaccuracy or a mistake in the content of an GSTC Assessment Finding or in the content of an Accreditation Report.
Impartiality	Free from the conflict of interest where there is no influence on the activity of the body which comes with fairness.
Management System	A set of policies, procedures and practices an organization needs to follow in order to meet its own objectives. A Management System can address a single discipline or several disciplines, e.g., quality management, financial management or environmental management. (ISO 9000:2015).
Quality Management System	part of a management System with regard to quality.
Reaccreditation Assessment	Assessment performed to renew the accreditation cycle. The Assessment shall confirm the competence of the Certification Body and shall cover all the requirements of the standard(s) for which the Certification Body is Accredited. An accreditation decision shall be made after the Reaccreditation Assessment.

Sanction	An action taken by GSTC in response to a failure by the Certification Body to meet its accreditation obligations.
Show Cause Notice	An order issued by GSTC which requires an entity about which an allegation has been made, which can be a Certification Body or a Certification Holder, to provide evidence in writing to contest allegations of fraud within a specific timeline, otherwise, Sanctions may be recommended.
Working days	Weekdays (usually Monday to Friday) when businesses operate, excluding weekends.

4. Effective Date

This Accreditation Procedure v.1.0 will be effective on 1 October 2023.

5. Associated Document

- 5.1. ISO 17065 - Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services.
- 5.2. GSTC Accreditation Manual for Accommodation/Hotel & Tour Operator v.3.1

6. General

- 6.1 GSTC Accreditation for Scheme Owners is conducted in accordance with the CB-CS program of GSTC. See Annex A of GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1.
- 6.2 GSTC Accreditation will not be dependent on matters related to the CB and other accreditation bodies.

- 6.3. GSTC may consider the result of an independent assessment of the CB conformity against GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1. and Accreditation Application Checklist but shall not be bound by the findings of the internal evaluation and approval.
- 6.4. GSTC delivers the accreditation service for Certification Bodies worldwide and operates in English. All information requested by GSTC shall be submitted in English unless it is approved by the GSTC Assurance Director (AD). This may lead to additional translation cost for the CB.
- 6.5. The results of the GSTC Accreditation are communicated through personal email and will also be made publicly available on the GSTC Accreditation webpage. Both email and the webpage will be used to update the CB. GSTC and the CB are responsible for maintaining current communication and assessment information on the GSTC webpage and via email.

7. Scope of Accreditation

- 7.1. The scope of accreditation pertains to the competence of the CB's certification activity. The scope of accreditation in GSTC includes:
 - 7.1.1. Any CB that wishes to offer the certification service against the GSTC Criteria shall be Accredited by GSTC.
 - 7.1.2. Any CB that wishes to offer certification service against GSTC-Recognized Criteria shall be Accredited by GSTC.
 - 7.1.3. Any CB that wishes to use alternative A (GSTC Criteria) or alternative B (GSTC-Recognized Criteria), or both shall be accredited by GSTC.
 - 7.1.4. Any CB that wishes to extend the scope of certification shall be accredited by GSTC.

8. Accreditation Requirements

- 8.1. Accreditation shall only be granted and maintained if the CB (both applicants and accredited) commit to continuously meeting the Accreditation Requirements outlined in GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1 and the ISO 17065 and provide evidence of their compliance with these requirements.
- 8.2. The CB shall comply with:
 - 8.2.1. GSTC Accreditation Manual for Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator v.3.1.
 - 8.2.2. ISO 17065:2012 regarding Conformity Assessment Requirements for Bodies Certifying Products, Processes, and Services.

9. Errors of Fact

- 9.1. The CB has the opportunity to address the GSTC findings through the GSTC Summary of Findings (SOF) or any report generated after the assessment or Accreditation Report prior to the Accreditation Decision.
- 9.2. The deadline for submitting Errors of Fact (EOF) is 10 calendar days. GSTC may grant an extension of the deadline if the CB sends a request that includes a valid justification explaining why they are unable to file the EOF within the original timeline.
- 9.3. If EOF are submitted within the deadline, GSTC shall review and amend the finding or Accreditation Report to the extent that EOF are considered justified by GSTC.
- 9.4. If EOF for the GSTC finding are not submitted within the deadline, EOF for that finding cannot be presented during the Accreditation Report EOF stage.

- 9.5. If EOF are not submitted within the deadline (or the extended deadline), all facts contained in the SOF or Accreditation Report will be considered true and accurate, unless it becomes evident that the information is false. In such cases, the CB shall not appeal or challenge the decision later based on the claim that the statements of facts are inaccurate.
- 9.6. The CB shall only be able to contest an Accreditation Decision on the basis of a fact contained in the SOF or Accreditation Report being untrue if an EOF has been filed against that fact within the described deadlines.

10. Accreditation Decisions

- 10.1. Accreditation Decisions (including granting, renewing, extending, reducing technical scope, suspending, and/or withdrawing accreditation for any part of the requested scope) are made by the GSTC Assurance Panel (AP) unless otherwise specified in this Accreditation Procedure. When rendering the decision, the AP acts as a representative of GSTC, and the decision is consequently attributed to GSTC. No legal or contractual relationship is established between the AP and the CB. The AP shall have access to all assessment reports and nonconformities (NCs) issued, including those from GSTC and the CB's responses to the NCs.
- 10.2. An Accreditation Decision made by the AP is based on the Accreditation Report prepared by GSTC. While the Accreditation Report may contain a recommendation on how to proceed, it's important to note that any such recommendation is non-binding for the AP. The decision-making process commences with the preparation of the Accreditation Process.
- 10.3. Before sharing the Accreditation Report with the AP, the report shall be provided to the CB, and the CB shall be given 10 calendar days to file EOF concerning the relevant factual content of the report (as outlined in Section 9).
- 10.4. If any EOF are filed in accordance with Section 5, they shall be submitted to the AP along with the Accreditation Report or any other Assessment Result.

- 10.5. The AP shall convey its decision to GSTC within 30 calendar days of receiving the Accreditation Report. GSTC shall inform the CB of this decision in writing within 5 calendar days of the AP decision, providing a copy of the final Accreditation Report.
- 10.6. Other Accreditation Decisions, which do not require an Accreditation Report, are delegated as follows;
 - 10.6.1. Decisions for Maintaining Accreditation are delegated to the AD.
 - 10.6.2. Decisions for Extending or Reducing geographical scope are delegated to the AD.
 - 10.6.3. Decisions for Extending or Reducing technical scope/technical sub-scope are delegated to the AD.
 - 10.6.4. Decisions where reduction of scope, suspension or withdrawal of accreditation are voluntarily requested by the CB are delegated to the AD.
- 10.7. Other decisions such as pausing or stopping the accreditation process can occur during the application stage and can be made by the AD.
- 10.8. For all Accreditation Decisions, GSTC may specify additional requirements and conditions for the CB to manage ongoing risks to the integrity of their accreditation.
- 10.9. The CB may appeal the Accreditation Decision in accordance with GSTC Challenge and Appeals Procedure.
- 10.10. The failure of GSTC to comply with a procedural provision does not invalidate an Accreditation Decision.

11. Initial Application

- 11.1. Information about the application process, including the application forms, is accessible on the GSTC Website and through direct email correspondence.

- 11.2. The applicant CB must be a legal entity that provides Conformity Assessment Services and is eligible for the accreditation.
- 11.3. Applications shall be submitted using the accreditation application form and sent to GSTC at accreditation@gstcouncil.org.
- 11.4. All information requested by GSTC, including the application and supporting documentation (application package), shall be completed in English.
- 11.5. GSTC shall acknowledge receipt and conduct a screening of the application and supporting documentation within 10 calendar days of its receipt
 - 11.5.1. Additional information and/or clarification may be requested from the applicant CB. An incomplete application may be rejected.
- 11.6. If the application is complete, GSTC shall evaluate the information submitted within 60 calendar days of receiving the complete application. If the application is rejected, GSTC shall provide the CB with a justification for the rejection. GSTC shall reject the application if:
 - 11.6.1. At any point during the application or initial assessment process, if evidence of fraudulent behavior is discovered.
 - 11.6.2. The applicant intentionally provides false information or conceals information.
 - 11.6.3. Any known violation of laws and regulations by the CB that could bring GSTC into disrepute.
 - 11.6.4. Lack of compliance by the CB with local regulations and legal requirements in the country or region of its operations.
 - 11.6.5. Regulatory and safety restrictions that could hinder GSTC's implementation of its oversight, accreditation, or services.

- 11.6.6. The due diligence review indicates that the risk associated with the business relationship with the applicant is unacceptably high.
- 11.7. If the CB wishes to reapply for an accreditation after rejection, they must submit a new application and pay a new application fee. GSTC may impose a cooldown period of up to 2 years before considering a new application from a rejected entity.
- 11.8. Upon acceptance of the application, the CB shall sign the GSTC Service Agreement.
- 11.9. If, during the application process, the CB decides not to pursue the accreditation process and wishes to withdraw, the CB shall inform GSTC in writing.
- 11.10. Changing the Accreditation Scope, as initially requested in the application form, is only possible if the CB submits a formal scope extension/reduction application, as detailed in Section 14 for Scope Extension.
- 11.11. GSTC may propose a reduction in the Scope of Accreditation based on the results of a relevant evaluation and assessment.
- 11.12. In the case of significant changes in any aspect of the applicant's status or operations during the application process, GSTC may require the applicant to submit a new application and pay a new application fee. Significant changes may encompass modifications to the CB's structure or procedures that necessitate new documents and processes, consequently extending the time required for the GSTC Accreditation evaluation.

12. Preliminary Visit

- 12.1. A one-day preliminary visit, at the expense of the applicant CB, may be conducted in the following situation with the agreement of the CB:
 - 12.1.1. If, at the time of the application, the applicant CB has not carried out any Conformity Assessment Activities or services whatsoever.

- 12.1.2. If it is deemed necessary by GSTC following the identification of issues or significant deficiencies in the submitted information that raise doubts about the CB's ability to meet Accreditation Requirements.
- 12.1.3. Upon applicant request
- 12.2. The purposes of a preliminary visit are as follows:
 - a. To evaluate the suitability of the applicant's Quality Management System (QMS).
 - b. To confirm the Scope of Accreditation.
 - c. To assess the readiness of the CB for the accreditation process.
 - d. To verify the submitted documentation.
 - e. To provide the applicant with a better understanding of GSTC Accreditation process.
- 12.3. After the visit, a report shall be prepared by GSTC summarizing the purpose and conclusions of the visit. Any issues identified will be communicated as Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs). Throughout this process, GSTC will not provide consultancy services at any time.

13. General Assessment Requirements

- 13.1. GSTC shall appoint the assessor or a team of assessors for each assessment. An assessment team may comprise a team leader, co-assessor, trainees, technical experts, and translators (if required). Observers may participate in an assessment if previously agreed upon by the CB, but they are not considered part of the decision-making team.
- 13.2. Before the assessment, GSTC shall provide the CB with information about the composition of the assessment team and any observers, if applicable.
 - 13.2.1. The CB may submit a written objection against an observer within 5 calendar days of receiving notification from GSTC about the team composition and the presence of an observer.

- 13.2.2. The CB may submit a written objection against team member(s) in the case of an existing or perceived Conflict of Interest (COI) within 5 calendar days of receiving notification from GSTC about the team composition. The objection shall include objective evidence to support any claims made.
- 13.2.3. GSTC shall review any objection(s) and may alter the team composition if it is deemed justifiable in order to mitigate or eliminate any existing or perceived Conflict of Interest (COI).
- 13.2.4. Due to time constraints, CB objections against assessment teams used on Short Notice and Unannounced assessments may not be feasible.
- 13.2.5. Notification of the GSTC team and Witness Assessment is dependent on the CB promptly informing GSTC about the CB Audit dates.
- 13.3. GSTC shall provide an Assessment Agenda and Budget (when applicable) to the CB at least 7 calendar days before any assessment, except for short notice or unannounced assessments. In the case of a witness assessment, the CB shall notify GSTC of its audit dates and team members at least 30 calendar days before the assessment and provide its Audit agenda at least 14 calendar days before the Audit.
- 13.4. All Head Office (HO), Affiliate Office (AO), witness, and compliance assessments shall commence with an opening meeting. In the case of a Desk Review, the CB shall have the opportunity to request an opening meeting. For more information, please refer to Opening and Closing Meeting Procedure.
- 13.5. All Assessments, including Desk Reviews, shall conclude with a closing meeting. In case of any disagreements concerning the findings, they should be discussed and, if possible, resolved during the closing meeting. If not resolved, the disagreement shall be documented in the SOF and the final Assessment Report. The CB is encouraged to include their senior management in both the opening and closing meetings.
- 13.6. Opening and closing meetings may be conducted remotely if necessary with prior agreement from both parties.

- 13.7. The timeline for the GSTC Assessment Report for all types of assessments is provided in calendar days and commences from the closing meeting (refer to Figure 1).
- 13.7.1. GSTC shall provide the SOF within 7 calendar days of the closing meeting, and the CB shall have 10 days from the date of receiving the SOF to file the Errors of Fact (EOF).
- 13.7.2. All reports undergo a Technical review (TR) and a sign-off process, and due to these, the grading and wording of findings may change between the SOF and the final report. Any changes shall be clearly indicated in the final Assessment Report.
- 13.7.3. GSTC shall provide the final Assessment Report to the CB within 46 calendar days of the Assessment closing meeting.
- 13.8. The CB shall conduct a Root Cause Analysis (RCA) to determine the cause and extent of the NC and must provide evidence of effective implementation of Corrections and Corrective Actions (CA) for each NC. Additional information can be found in the GSTC Findings Procedures.
- 13.9. The CB shall facilitate and cooperate in all GSTC assessments to ensure a constructive and professional assessment environment.
- 13.9.1. The CB shall grant unrestricted access to premises and documentation related to the certification process, their operations, and Scope of Accreditation.
- 13.9.2. Access to premises and documentation shall be granted to GSTC, including the Affiliate Office (AOs), if necessary.
- 13.9.3. The CB shall establish enforceable arrangements with their clients to guarantee the GSTC's access to witness the CB Audit or to conduct a Compliance Assessment on-site, and to ensure that GSTC has access to relevant documents.

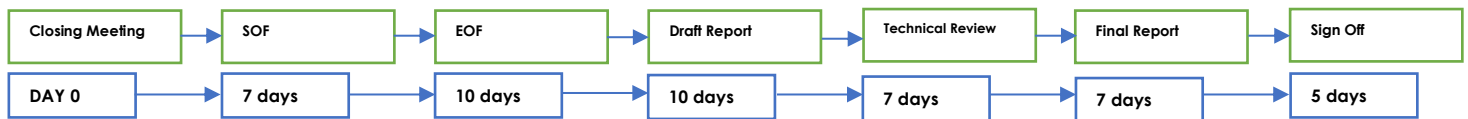


Figure 1 GSTC Assessment Report Timelines (in Calendar days)

14. Initial Assessment

14.1. Upon the acceptance of the application, GSTC shall provide Accreditation Application Checklist to the CB. The CB shall return it with the required supporting documents to demonstrate compliance.

14.2. After the completion of the Accreditation Application Checklist and document application, GSTC shall carry out three types of Assessments in the specified sequence below:

14.2.1. **Desk Assessment** of the CB Application and Documentation

14.2.1.1. The Desk Assessment is the process of reviewing and evaluating application documentation to determine the following:

- a. Compliance of the CB application and documents required
- b. Requirements are suitably integrated into the CB Management system and operating procedures.

14.2.1.2. The desk assessment schedule should be planned to occur within 30 calendar days of receiving the outlined documents.

14.2.2. **Office Assessment(s)** : Head Office (HO) and Affiliate Office (AO)

14.2.2.1. Office Assessment entails the review and evaluation of the CB's implementation of the Quality Management System (QMS) and documented procedures. The objective is to ascertain the competence of the CB in conducting the Conformity Assessment

Activity for GSTC in compliance with all accreditation requirements.

14.2.2.2. AOs are also subject to the Initial Assessment as determined necessary by GSTC. This determination depends on the nature of activities conducted by the AO and the degree of control exercised by the CB.

14.2.2.3. A CB's key personnel shall be available to the GSTC Assessment Team during the Office Assessment, unless an alternative arrangement has been agreed with GSTC.

14.2.3. **Witness Assessment(s)** for each Scope of Accreditation

14.2.3.1. GSTC shall conduct at least one Witness Assessment per Technical Scope to ensure the CB's competency to carry out the GSTC Certification.

14.2.3.2. For applicant CB, a Witness Assessment shall be conducted after the final CB Audit report and relevant CB records of TR and decision-making are sent to GSTC. This implies a postponement in the deadline for report finalization.

14.2.3.3. For accredited CB, Witness Assessments normally end after the CB's closing meeting with its client unless GSTC requests to review the final Audit Report. Further details can be found in GSTC Witness and Compliance Assessment Procedure.

14.2.3.4. Certain types of CB audits may not be suitable for Initial Witness Assessments, and GSTC may reject witnessing such audits in cases of;

- a. Audit scope does not cover the full technical scope; or
- b. Transfer certificate among the CBs.

- 14.2.3.5. GSTC reserves the right to conduct additional Assessments or alter the sequence of Assessments. In such cases, a justification shall be provided.

- 14.3. To proceed to the next assessment in the sequence, all Major Non-Conformities (NCs) from the preceding assessment shall be closed. Minor NCs are not required to be closed to proceed but shall have a plan approved by GSTC, including an Action Plan or Root Cause Analysis (RCA) and an indication of how and when these will be addressed.

NOTE: Deviations from this rule may be approved by GSTC, subject to clear justification. For instance, major NCs may be closed at the HO or during the Witness Assessment if onsite verification is feasible. Additionally, a CB's request to conduct the Witness Assessment immediately after the HO Assessment may be approved. However, in such cases, the CB must acknowledge that a second Witness Assessment may be necessary if the findings raised at the HO need to be verified in another Witness Assessment.

- 14.4. The applicant CB shall respond to any requests for clarification, additional documents, and/or information related to any Non-Conformities (NCs) within the deadlines indicated by GSTC.
- 14.5. GSTC adds the applicant CB's name to the GSTC database and the GSTC website after the closure of all Major Non-Conformities (NCs) resulting from the Head Office (HO) Assessment. Once the certificate is issued, GSTC will retain the database for market access, and clients will be permitted to use the logos on their website and in their organizational operations in accordance with Logo Usage Procedure.
- 14.6. If the applicant CB is unable to achieve the accreditation within 2 years of GSTC receiving the application, GSTC shall halt and cancel the accreditation process. A complete reapplication may be necessary in such cases.

15. Initial Assessment Decision Process

- 15.1. If, after completing the Initial Accreditation Assessment, GSTC determines that the CB Certification System complies with all accreditation requirements, including the resolution of all Major Non-Conformities, GSTC shall prepare the Accreditation Report for the AP, recommending the Initial accreditation.
- 15.2. Before the Accreditation Report is sent to the AP, the report shall be shared with the CB, and the CB will have 10 calendar days for providing the EOF.
- 15.3. EOF will be reviewed by GSTC within 7 calendar days.
- 15.4. The AP shall communicate its decision to GSTC within 30 calendar days of receipt of the Accreditation Report.
- 15.5. If the AP decides in favor of the initial accreditation, GSTC shall inform the CB of this decision in writing within 5 calendar days of the AP's decision, providing a copy of the final Accreditation Report.
- 15.6. If the AP decides against the initial accreditation, GSTC shall inform the CB within 5 calendar days of the AP's decision. The CB has the option to appeal the decision following the procedure outlined in GSTC Challenge and Appeals Procedure.

16. Notification of Accreditation

- 16.1. Accreditation is granted in the form of an Accreditation Certification and annex, signed by the GSTC CEO.
- 16.2. Accreditation cycles are renewed every 5 years following a Reaccreditation Assessment and Accreditation Certification Decision, which must occur before the current cycle expires.

- 16.3. A new certificate is only issued if there is a change in the CB name or address. In the case of geographical or technical scope changes, only the certificate annex will be updated accordingly.
- 16.4. The certificate includes:
- a. The GSTC logo
 - b. Name and address of the CB
 - c. Scope of Accreditation granted
 - d. Criteria used for the Certification
 - e. Start date and expiry date of the certificate
- 16.5. The certificate belongs to GSTC. A digital version of the certificate is shared with each Accredited CB via email and published on the GSTC website.
- 16.6. The Accredited CB shall ensure that all accreditation-related claims are within the scope of GSTC Accreditation Certificates.
- 16.7. The CB shall only use the GSTC logo and the GSTC Accreditation Symbol as outlined in the policy of GSTC Licensing Agreement.

17. Maintaining Accreditation

- 17.1. To ensure that the Accredited CB continues to operate in compliance with the GSTC Accreditation requirements, GSTC monitors and evaluates the CB's competence and conformity throughout the 5 years accreditation cycle through Surveillance Assessments. Further details can be found in GSTC Surveillance and Sampling Procedure.
- 17.2. The first HO Surveillance Assessment should be carried out within 6 months after the Initial accreditation.

- 17.3. For each Surveillance Assessment, GSTC shall provide a conclusion in the final Assessment Report regarding whether the evidence from the Assessment supports maintaining, suspending, or reducing accreditation.
- 17.4. Annual Surveillance includes;
- a. Assessment of HO and a sample of AOs;
 - b. Witness and/or Compliance Assessment(s); and
 - c. Any other assessment such as Desk Assessment, incident follow-up, and NC verification as considered necessary by GSTC to confirm that CB is operating in accordance with Accreditation Procedure and GSTC Accreditation Manual.

Note: Surveillance Office Assessments are normally less extensive than initial and Reaccreditation assessment as they only cover a subset of all accreditation requirements. In the five-year cycle, all requirements shall be covered.

- 17.5. Once accredited or at the commencement of a new accreditation cycle, the CB will receive a provisional surveillance program for the accreditation cycle. This program will include an estimate of the total duration for Office Assessments and a projected number of Witness or Compliance Assessments to be conducted for each program. These estimates do not encompass expenses, travel time, or technical expert days.
- 17.6. Each year, GSTC shall provide the accredited CB with a revised 12-month Assessment plan for either HO, AO, and Witness/Compliance Assessments for the upcoming surveillance year. This plan may be modified in line with GSTC Surveillance and Sampling Procedure.
- 17.7. GSTC publishes announcements of Surveillance Assessments for Accredited CBs via email and conducts Stakeholder Consultations for certain Assessment types. If Stakeholder comments are received, GSTC considers them during the Assessment and provides responses in the Assessment Report, ensuring the confidentiality of Stakeholders.
- 17.8. GSTC may conduct an extra assessment in addition to the GSTC Surveillance Assessment Program to investigate incidents and/or complaints or the outcomes of

consecutive assessments or under other circumstances as deemed necessary by GSTC.

- 17.9. GSTC may conduct unannounced assessments outside of its Surveillance Assessment program in order to address heightened risk or allegations of serious violations or negligence of GSTC Accreditation Requirements.
- 17.10 The CB shall ensure that GSTC can conduct Witness and Compliance Assessments of a sample of the CB clients selected by GSTC. Further details regarding the selection criteria and scope can be found in GSTC Witness and Compliance Assessment Procedure.
- 17.11. In justified cases, intervals for Head Office Assessments may be extended. In the intervening year where no Head Office Assessment takes place, the CB shall, at a minimum, submit its Internal Audit Report(s) and management review minutes and inform GSTC of any changes to the organization's QMS. GSTC reserves the right to request additional information at any time.

18. Reaccreditation Assessment

- 18.1. The objective of the reaccreditation assessment is to renew the accreditation cycle, confirm the competence of the CB, and evaluate the CB's management and Certification System comprehensively, considering all assessment knowledge and information gathered during the 5 years cycle.
- 18.2. A Reaccreditation Assessment of the CB's full management and certification systems, covering all requirements of the criteria for which the CB is accredited, should be conducted approximately 9 months before the end of the accreditation cycle.
- 18.3. The date of the Reaccreditation HO Assessment closing meeting serves as the cut-off date for non-conformities (NCs) that require a response from the CB before the accreditation cycle can be renewed.

- 18.3.1. All Major NCs raised in the assessment up to and including this date shall be closed;
- 18.3.2. Other open NCs shall not delay the Reaccreditation process unless they raise serious questions about the CB's competence to conduct Certification Activities or pose a risk to the validity of Certification decision-making.
- 18.4. Once all major NCs are closed, GSTC shall prepare the Accreditation Report for the AP.
- 18.5. The CB shall have the opportunity to provide the EOF to the Accreditation Report within 10 calendar days of receipt as per Section 9 above.
- 18.6. The AP shall communicate its decision to GSTC within 30 calendar days of receipt of the report.
- 18.7. If the AP decides in favor of reaccreditation, GSTC shall notify the CB within 5 calendar days of the decision of the AP.
- 18.8. If the accreditation cycle expires before the decision-making process can be completed due to the CB's failure to demonstrate conformance, the CB shall be suspended. GSTC may lift the suspension without the AP's involvement once the CB demonstrates conformance with the NCs, allowing the reaccreditation process to continue.
- 18.9. If the accreditation cycle expires before the decision-making process can be completed for reasons beyond the CB's control, the CB's accreditation will remain valid.
- 18.10. If a major NC raised during the Reaccreditation Assessment is challenged or is under the challenge investigation during an accreditation cycle renewal process, the AP review shall be postponed until the challenge is closed. The CB's accreditation will remain valid during this period.
- 18.11. If the AP decides against reaccreditation, GSTC shall notify the CB within 5 calendar days of the decision, providing the basis of the decision and outlining any steps on

behalf of the CB and GSTC. The CB may appeal the decision in accordance with GSTC Challenge and Appeals Procedure.

19. Scope Extension

- 19.1. Technical and geographical scope extensions shall only occur upon the CB's request.
- 19.2. Applications shall be submitted directly to GSTC at accreditation@gstcouncil.org.
- 19.3. A scope extension application may be evaluated:
 - 19.3.1. During a regular Surveillance Office Assessment, if the request is submitted to GSTC at least 90 calendar days before the scheduled Assessment; or
 - 19.3.2. At a different time, if the 90 calendar days' notification cannot be met.
- 19.4. After the application has been reviewed, GSTC shall determine the duration and type of Assessment that will be needed. For a technical scope extension, a Witness Assessment shall always be required.
- 19.5. Scope extension will require the following decision-making:
 - 19.5.1. For a technical scope extension, Accreditation Report shall be prepared for the AP as per Section 10.
 - 19.5.2. For a Technical sub-scope extension, the AD shall take the decision without the AP's involvement.
 - 19.5.3. For a geographical scope extension, the AD shall take the decision without the AP's involvement.
- 19.6. For geographical scope extensions, the following process shall be applied:

- 19.6.1. The CB is required to provide evidence that it has access to sufficient resources to manage the geographical scope(s), including personnel, language, management system, Affiliate Office or subcontractor, arrangement to cover potential liabilities from Conformity Assessment Activities in the newly proposed countries, etc.
- 19.6.2. GSTC may specify additional conditions during the geographical scope extension to monitor the CB expansion activities and provide sufficient access to resources to ensure there are no risks to the integrity of the issued accreditation.
- 19.6.3. GSTC may decide not to conduct the additional assessment if:
 - a. country or region where the CB already operated;
 - b. there is an upcoming Office Assessment at which this can be evaluated.
- 19.7. Upon a favorable scope extension decision, GSTC uploads a revised certificate annex to the webpage and directly provides the CB with the new technical and/or geographical scope, sharing the revised version with the CB.

20. Scope Reduction

- 20.1. Technical and geographical scope reduction can occur upon the GSTC recommendation or at the CB's voluntary request.
- 20.2. GSTC may recommend a scope reduction to the CB based on evidence from one or more surveillance assessments, from a reaccreditation assessment, or due to a lack of compliance with local regulations in the country of its operations.
- 20.3. Scope reductions based on the GSTC recommendation required the following decision-making:

- 20.3.1. For technical scope reduction, an Accreditation Report shall be prepared for the AP.
- 20.3.2. For geographical scope reduction, the AD shall make a decision without the AP's involvement.
- 20.4. The CB may voluntarily reduce its accreditation for all or parts of its technical and/or geographical scope by notifying GSTC at least 3 months in advance of the desired effective date of the scope reduction. The consequences of a scope reduction are the same as those of a withdrawal, as outlined in Section 18.
- 20.5. A CB that has voluntarily reduced its scope of accreditation may reapply to extend the scope again at any time by following the process outlined in Section 19 for Scope Extension.

21. Sanctions

- 21.1. If a CB fails to comply with the GSTC Accreditation requirements or is/has been in breach of the terms of the GSTC Service Agreement, GSTC can impose sanctions on the CB. Furthermore, GSTC reserves the right to exercise any rights provided by the law or by the Service Agreement or any other agreement concluded with the CB.
- 21.2. Sanctions are, in order of least to most severity:
 - 21.2.1. Formal warning;
 - 21.2.2. Intensification of surveillance of the CB activity (frequency or duration) at the expense of the CB;
 - 21.2.3. Suspension of Accreditation;
 - 21.2.4. Withdrawal of Accreditation.

- 21.3. If a sanction is imposed, the CB is obligated to provide an analysis of the cause(s) that led to the sanction. This analysis may serve as a basis for addressing and eliminating the imposed sanction. If the CB fails to comply with this obligation, GSTC shall impose another, more severe sanction than the last one. For example, after a formal warning, an intensification of surveillance or suspension may be imposed.
- 21.4. GSTC shall share the Cause Notes prior to the sanction being imposed when there are allegations of fraud. This allows the alleged entity to provide evidence to refute the allegations within 10 days of receiving the notice.
- 21.5. The CB shall take actions to preserve the integrity of the Scheme by withdrawing or limiting certification where appropriate or when requested by GSTC if evidence of fraud is detected or if fraud allegations cannot be refuted at the Certificate Holder level. Failure to comply with this may result in a sanction from GSTC.
- 21.6. The following table is an example of the situation and sanctions.

Situation leading to Sanctions	Minimal Sanction and Typical Progression
1. Lack of collaboration in providing information, as defined in Section 20 regarding Information Disclosure Requirements,	a. Formal warning b. Intensification of Surveillance c. Suspension
2. Lack of collaboration with scheduling or undergoing the GSTC Assessment.	a. Formal warning b. Intensification of Surveillance c. Suspension
3. Improper use of the GSTC Accreditation Logo and the GSTC Accreditation Symbol (against the GSTC Logo Usage Procedure), or incorrect reference to the certification scheme, or misleading use of licenses,	a. Formal warning b. Suspension

certificates, logos, or claims found in documentation or other publicity may lead to consequences or sanctions as defined in the applicable usage guidelines or agreements with GSTC.	
4. Non-payment of the GSTC fees.	a. Formal warning b. Financial probation c. Suspension due to non-payment of fees
5. Discrediting or damaging the GSTC's reputation, such as making or supporting incorrect public negative or criticizing statements about the GSTC system, process, and teams.	a. Suspension b. Withdrawal
6. Recommendations from assessments (beyond non-conformities) or from the accreditation or reaccreditation process are based on the evaluation of the CB's performance and their compliance with accreditation requirements. For example: a. An assessment may recommend suspension. b. The AD may recommend suspension in Accreditation Report. c. The AP may recommend suspension within their review.	a. Intensification of Surveillance b. Suspension
7. Failure to submit the Root Cause Analysis, Correction, and planned Corrective Actions for NCs within the	a. Formal writing b. Suspension

specified deadline, following the GSTC Root Cause Analysis Procedure.	
8. Failure to implement effective Corrections and Corrective Actions, thereby not allowing the CB to close all major NCs within the specified deadlines.	a. Formal writing b. Suspension
9. Failure to comply with Clause 18.3.1. which requires the CB to close all NCs.	a. Suspension
10. Serious breach of accreditation Requirements, for example, but not limited to: a. Offering certification activity outside the scope of accreditation; b. Impartiality issues on the Certification Activities; c. Providing consultancy (paid or unpaid) during the certification process; d. Violation of restriction imposed during a suspension (e.g., issuing a new certification).	a. Suspension b. Withdrawal
11. Performing certification activities/service in a region without satisfying the necessary legal requirements such as local laws, permit, and etc.	a. Scope reduction b. Suspension c. Withdrawal
12. Negligent provision of false information or non-disclosure of information by the CB relevant to the	a. Suspension b. Withdrawal

accreditation decision concerning the CB words.	
13. Wilful deceit of GSTC by intentional submission of false and/or concealment of information needed for GSTC to implement its accreditation process.	a. Show cause notice b. Withdrawal
14. Evident of fraudulent behaviour, such as fraudulent audits or certification decisions.	a. Show cause notice b. Withdrawal
15. Breach of obligation in the GSTC Service Agreement	a. Formal warning b. Suspension c. Withdrawal
16. Failure to correct the condition that led to the Suspension within the deadline establishment.	a. Withdrawal

22. Suspension of Accreditation

22.1. Suspension places a temporary restriction on the services the CB may provide within the scope of accreditation. Suspension can apply to all or part of the scope of accreditation. The details of the temporary restriction shall be specified in the notice of suspension from GSTC.

22.1.1. The CB shall continue to conduct surveillance audits necessary to maintain existing certifications during a suspension.

22.1.2. The CB may continue to conduct audits required for initial and recertification. However, it shall not issue any new Accredited Certification or scope

extension within the scope of the suspension unless the certification process began prior to the date of the suspension and the CB has obtained prior written approval from GSTC.

22.1.4. The CB shall not conduct the GSTC Certificate

- 22.2. GSTC shall continue to conduct surveillance assessments for the CB and its clients throughout the period of the CB suspension
- 22.3. Annual fees must be paid normally during the period of the suspension.
- 22.4. For assessment-related suspensions, the CB shall not be informed about the possible suspension upon receipt of the final assessment report at the latest.
- 22.5. For non-Assessment-related suspensions (e.g., not responding to the Major NC(s), the CB shall be informed by receiving formal notification specifying the intent to suspend and the beginning of the suspension process.
- 22.6. For each suspension decision, GSTC will prepare the Accreditation Report for the AP. This report should explain the reasons leading to suspension, provide a justification of the proposed scope for suspension, outline the conditions for lifting the suspension, and include any other relevant information and materials necessary for the recommendation.
- 22.7. Prior to the report being sent to the AP, the CB will have opportunity to file the EOF within 10 calendar days (Section 9)
- 22.8. The AP shall communicate its decision to GSTC within 10 calendar days of receipt of the report.
- 22.9. Within 5 calendar days after the decision made by the AP, GSTC shall notify the CB regarding the suspension in writing. This should include:
 - a. effective date of suspension;
 - b. duration;
 - c. reason;

- d. scope and condition;
 - e. any other additional information or action; and
 - f. deadline for conformance required by the CB.
- 22.10. The CB may appeal the Suspension decision in accordance with GSTC Challenge and Appeals Procedure.
- 22.11. GSTC shall update the record of the accredited CB on the website and publish a news item and short summary of the grounds for suspension. The CB will be given an opportunity to review the wording of the news item.
- 22.12. Suspension shall be effective for a maximum period of 6 months. The suspended CB may request for an extension of this period with a clear justification to GSTC. The extension shall be approved by the AD if the justification is accepted.
- 22.13. Failure to satisfactorily address the causes that lead to the suspension within the specified deadline is grounds for initiating the Withdrawal of Accreditation.
- 22.15. Suspension shall be lifted after GSTC has verified (e.g., via Assessment) that the conditions specified in the notice of Suspension have been adequately met.
- 22.16. For lifting suspensions, an Accreditation Report shall be prepared and submitted to the AP to issue a decision within 10 calendar days of receipt of the report. This report will not be shared with the CB to file the EOF.
- 22.17. Within 5 calendar days of the decision of the AP, GSTC shall notify the CB in writing once the suspension is lifted. GSTC shall update the record on the Accredited CB on the GSTC website.

23. Withdrawal of Accreditation

- 23.1. A CB shall be subject to Withdrawal of Accreditation based on the situation set in Section 21.

- 23.2. GSTC shall prepare the Accreditation Report for the AP explaining the reason leading to the withdrawal and any other relevant information considered material for the recommendation.
- 23.3. Before the Accreditation Report is sent to the AP, the CB will have the opportunity to file the EOF to GSTC regarding the Accreditation Report within 10 calendar days.
- 23.4. Within 10 calendar days of receipt of the Accreditation Report, the AP shall communicate the decision to GSTC.
- 23.5. Within 5 calendar days, the decision will be notified to the CB regarding the withdrawal in writing. The notice shall include the
- a. effective date of the withdrawal;
 - b. clear statement of the reason for the decision; and
 - c. the Accreditation Report.
- 23.6. The CB may appeal the withdrawal decision using GSTC Challenge and Appeals Procedure.
- 23.7. GSTC shall make public notice of the withdrawal decision on the GSTC website.
- 23.8. Upon confirmation of the withdrawal of accreditation or termination of the GSTC service agreement, the CB shall:
- 23.8.1. immediately cease all the GSTC certification activities.
 - 23.8.2. provide a list of all clients affected, including their contact information for each client, to GSTC within 5 calendar days.
 - 23.8.3. informing all subcontractors, affiliates, partners, and clients in writing of the Withdrawal of Accreditation and its related implications (e.g., requirements for clients to return certificates, process of transferring to another CB, etc.) within 15 calendar days.
 - 23.8.4. provide evidence to GSTC of having contacted all of the above within 5 calendar days of the contact.

- 23.8.5. cease making any reference to its accredited status and discontinue the use of the GSTC logo.
- 23.8.6. return the Accreditation Certificate to GSTC, if a printed copy was obtained.
- 23.8.7. CB certificates existing at the time of the withdrawal may remain valid for a period of 90 days, subject to confirmation by GSTC, to permit CHs to enter into an agreement with another accredited CB. The AD may grant an extension of this transition period.
- 23.9. A withdrawn GSTC Accreditation cannot be reinstated. If the CB wishes to be accredited again, it shall start from the initial accreditation process.
- 23.10. For a period of 24 months, GSTC may choose not to accept applications from a CB whose accreditation has been withdrawn or from new entities that are substantially staffed with personnel associated with the withdrawn accreditation CB. This period of non-acceptance is typically imposed to allow for a cooling-off period and to ensure that the accreditation process remains independent and unbiased.

24. Cost of Accreditation

- 24.1. Accredited and applicant CB shall pay fees as shown in the current Fee Schedule.
- 24.2. Payment of any invoice is due within 30 days of the issue date.
- 24.3. If a payment has not been received within 10 days of the original due date, a notification will be sent to the CB informing them that they are on "financial probation". A CB on financial probation may not:
 - 24.3.1. apply for or continue with the scope of accreditation extension;
 - 24.3.2. continue with the accreditation application process;
 - 24.3.3. receive a GSTC Certificate for initial accreditation; or

24.3.4. apply for additional GSTC Programs.

Note: While on financial probation, a CB can continue to operate GSTC-accredited programs.

24.4. Suspension due to non-payment of fees

24.4.1. GSTC can directly suspend a CB's accreditation without the involvement of the AP if an invoice and the related interest accumulated remain unpaid for 120 calendar days after the invoice date (90 calendar days past the due date). For applicant CB, this will result in the Suspension of the application process.

24.4.2. GSTC will send the CB written notice of the suspension decision, and information will be placed on the GSTC website.

24.4.3. Suspension will be lifted promptly upon receipt of payment. For this type of decision, Section 21 on Sanctions does not apply nor does the preparation of an Accreditation Report for the AP.

25. Information Disclosure Requirements

25.1. Copies of all material and information relating to the CB's Certification Activity shall be made available to GSTC upon request within the timelines specified in the request. This requirement ensures transparency and the ability to conduct assessments and reviews effectively.

25.2. The CB shall make the requested documentation available to GSTC prior to the assessment. This should be done using an online platform for sharing with GSTC, such as Dropbox, WeShare, or email, to ensure that the necessary documents are readily accessible for review before the assessment takes place.

- 25.3. The minimum documents required for each assessment type and their delivery deadlines are listed below. Additional documents may be requested on a case-by-case basis:
- 25.3.1. Office assessment: no later than 30 days prior to the assessment, the following documents are required:
- a. organogram;
 - b. list of approved auditors, and personnel involved in the GSTC program;
 - c. quality requirements, GSTC requirements, auditor requirements and other related information as required by the accreditation requirements; and
 - d. list of certificates issued.
- 25.3.2. Witness Assessment : no later than 2 weeks prior to the assessment:
- a. audit plan/agenda;
 - b. audit report from the consecutive audit;
 - c. the CB procedures for planning and conducting audit; and
 - d. complaints file relevant to the sampled audit..
- 25.4. In the case of a Witness Assessment, the CB shall provide confirmed and complete information regarding the audit date(s), audit team, and the sites to be visited as a sample selected by GSTC for witnessing. This information should be sent no later than 30 calendar days prior to the audit date.
- 25.5. The CB shall provide all required information fields related to their Affiliate Office to GSTC. Any relevant changes, including the establishment of new offices or changes in the types of activities carried out by the offices, shall be reported within 30 calendar days from the date the information has been changed. Additionally, other information, such as the number of certificate holders from each office, shall be updated annually prior to the Head Office Assessment.
- 25.6. The CB shall inform GSTC about changes that can have a significant impact on how the CB is organized and how it fulfills the necessary requirements and other terms and conditions associated with the accreditation. Such information should be disclosed to

GSTC before the changes take place. Failure to notify GSTC in a timely manner may result in sanctions. Significant changes may include, but are not limited to:

25.6.1. Ownership changes (legal entities) name, email address, website address, visiting or mailing address, telephone number, etc.

25.6.2. Organizational changes or restructuring of key management personnel such as administrative, e.g, billing or any technical or program management.

25.7. GSTC shall evaluate each case and determine whether an additional on-site assessment is needed to evaluate conformity with the Accreditation Requirements, or if the documentation submitted is sufficient.

26. Revision of Accreditation Requirements

26.1. The CB shall comply with the current Accreditation Requirements at all times, including new requirements or changes to them, within the deadlines stipulated by GSTC.

26.2. GSTC shall inform the CB of any changes to its Accreditation Requirements and the effective date of the changes.

26.3. GSTC shall conduct, at its discretion, public consultations on proposed major modifications to Accreditation Requirements to request comments from interested parties. Public consultation periods for new or revised procedures shall be 30 calendar days. In some cases, GSTC may extend this deadline.

26.3.1. A review is considered major when it significantly affects the working routines of a CB.

26.3.2. Minor changes shall not be preceded by a public consultation.

26.4. Depending on the transition period, GSTC may give CBs the option to decide if a) they are directly assessed against the new/revised Manual in the upcoming planned Regular GSTC HO Assessment, or b) to defer to the following scheduled HO Assessment.

However, CBs shall be in conformance with the new/revised Manual once it becomes effective.

- 26.5. All major NCs shall be closed before a revised Accreditation Certificate annex can be issued.
- 26.6. Once the transition to the new/revised Manual has been successfully evaluated and major NCs are closed, the Certificate annex will be amended with a reference to the new/revised Manual.

27. Disputes (Challenge, Appeal, Complaints, and Incident)

- 27.1. If the applicant or the Accredited CB disagree with the GSTC NCs or decision at any point in this Accreditation Procedure Manual, they may submit the challenge or an appeal respectively. As guidance and details, you can access the GSTC Challenge & Appeals Procedure.
- 27.2. If any person or organization wishes to express dissatisfaction towards the GSTC Accreditation activities or any other Accredited CB.
- 27.3. Incidents concerning any reported activity, observation, stakeholder comment, or concern that threatens the reputation and/or integrity of the GSTC Accreditation program and/or its associated Certification Schemes, and that are not already considered under the relevant GSTC Challenge & Appeals Procedure, can be reported either with the reporter's identity or anonymously to GSTC throughout the reporting process in GSTC Grievance Procedure.

28. Public Notice and Information

- 28.1. GSTC maintains the list of applicants and accreditation in our internal database. The list includes information such as:
1. The CB names;
 2. Address;
 3. Accreditation status;
 4. Technical/geographical scope;
 5. Date of the Initial accreditation assessments and Assessment report and a history of Suspension, as well as contact data as specified by the CB (main contact name, address, email address, phone number, and website).
- 28.2. GSTC may publish Assessment Report to the extent permitted by GSTC Service Agreement.

29. Transfer of Accreditation

- 29.1. If an accredited CB (transferor CB) wishes to transfer its accreditation to another CB (transferee CB), the following shall apply:
- 29.1.1. If the transferee CB is already accredited by GSTC for the relevant geographic and technical scope, the CBs may arrange for a transfer of certificates and the CB's contracts with its clients. In such situations, a transfer of accreditation between the CBs may not be required. The CBs shall notify GSTC of any significant transfer events under Section 25, and if the transferor CB reduces scope or withdraws accreditation, the provisions of Sections 20 or 23 apply after the certificate transfer.
- 29.1.2. If the transferee CB is not GSTC accredited, the CB shall apply for GSTC Accreditation under Section 11. If the transferee CB is partially accredited (e.g., only wants to add a technical scope), they shall apply for a scope extension as per Section 19 unless the situation below applies.

29.1.3. If the transferee CB: a) is under common ownership and control as the transferor CB, or b) has been a subcontractor of the transferor CB and has managed a substantial part of the Certification Activities under the GSTC Accreditation for the previous 18 months, GSTC may apply a simplified accreditation transfer process, which shall be communicated to the CB in writing, on a case by case basis.

29.1.4. In the case of minor changes (e.g., change of CB's name) that do not involve transfer of the accreditation to another legal entity, it is at GSTC's discretion to note the changes on the basis of submitted documentation.

29.2. The transferee CB shall be responsible for closing all open NCs from the transferor CB.