



# GSTC Findings Procedure

## version 1.0

*October 2024*

### Document History

Version	Date of Approval	Description of Amendment	Affected Section/Page
1.0	1 October 2024	New Document	N/A

## Table of Contents

1. Purpose and Scope	3
2. Normative Reference and Associated Documents	3
3. Terms and Definitions	3
4. General	3
5. Documentation of Findings	4
6. Grading of Nonconformities	4
7. CB Response to Findings	6
7. The GSTC Evaluation of CB Responses	6
8. Timeline	8

## Document Controls

This is version 1.0 of the GSTC Findings Procedure, 2024.

Document Approval: GSTC Global Assurance Director

**© The Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2024, All Rights Reserved**

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

[www.gstcouncil.org](http://www.gstcouncil.org)

## **1. Purpose and Scope**

- 1.1. The procedure outlines the process GSTC follows to identify and manage nonconformities from Applicant and Accredited Certification Bodies (ACBs) during any accreditation assessment conducted by GSTC.

## **2. Normative Reference and Associated Documents**

- The latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Manual for Certification Bodies-Industry: Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator.
- The latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Manual for Certification Bodies-Destination.
- The latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Procedure.
- The latest version of the GSTC Witnessing Procedure
- The latest version of the GSTC Compliance Assessment Procedure.

## **3. Terms and Definitions**

- 1.2. Unless specified otherwise, all GSTC terms and definitions are provided in the [GSTC Glossary of Sustainable Tourism Terms](#).
- 1.3. For terms related to Recognition and Accreditation, please refer to the GSTC Accreditation Glossary.

## **4. General**

- 4.1. GSTC findings may be identified in all assessments related to the accreditation process or through other sources of information such as complaint investigations.
- 4.2. Findings will be raised in the event of CB's non-conformity with GSTC requirements.
- 4.3. Findings may have their grading adjusted during assessment, after assessment, or during EOF.

4.4. Where the assessment team cannot reach a conclusion on a finding among assessors, the team shall seek the Global Assurance Director's review and consensus on the finding.

4.5. The type of NC as follow:

4.5.1. Nonconformities (NCs)

4.5.1.1. Major Nonconformities (Major NC)

4.5.1.2. Minor Nonconformities (Minor NC)

4.5.2. Opportunity of Improvement (OFI)

4.6. NCs shall only be raised against the GSTC accreditation requirements or other related documents relevant to the accreditation process.

*NOTE: Findings may also be raised if the CB does not conform to its internal policies and procedures.*

## **5. Documentation of Findings**

5.1. The GSTC assessor shall provide an assessment report, containing a Summary of Findings (SOF), to the CB within two weeks following the assessment closing meeting.

5.2. The findings shared during the closing meeting may differ from those presented in the SOF.

5.3. Assessment reports that undergo the GSTC Assurance Panel's sign-off process may also vary, and there may be changes between the SOF and the final assessment report. Existing NCs may be re-evaluated and adjusted as needed, with any modifications reflected in the final report.

## **6. Grading of Nonconformities**

6.1. There are two grading NCs in GSTC

6.1.1. Major NCs

6.1.1.1. Major NCs are used for systematic failures in accreditation that significantly impact the validity of certification decisions or the functioning of the CB's management system.

- 6.1.1.2. Major NCs also can be used if CB fails to correctly identify, grade, or address one or more critical NCs at the client level which wrestling in NCs with accreditation requirements,
- 6.1.2. Minor NCs
  - 6.1.2.1. Minor NCs are used for non-systematic failures of accreditation that do not significantly impact the validity of certification decisions or the functioning of the CB's management system.
- 6.2. Any NC which did not meet the Major NC criteria shall be considered Minor NC.
- 6.3. Minor NCs may be upgraded to Major if one or more of the following conditions apply:
  - 6.3.1. Minor NCs that are recurrent may be upgraded to Major.
  - 6.3.2. Minor NCs that show no improvement from consecutive to another assessment.
  - 6.3.3. Systematic failure in the CB's GSTC certification management system.
- 6.4. Minor NCs may be downgraded to OFIs if following conditions apply:
  - 6.4.1. After Error of Facts (EOF), the assessor found that the Minor NCs pose a minimal risk to the management system performance.
- 6.5. Sanction may be given by the assessor to the CB If the Major NCs recurrent within 2 assessments in a row, CB shall be sanctioned following Accreditation Procedure.
- 6.6. Major NCs may be downgrade to Minor if following conditions apply:
  - 6.6.1. After Error of Facts (EOF), the assessor found that the Major NCs do not significantly impact the effectiveness of the management system.
- 6.7. Findings may be closed if following conditions apply:
  - 6.7.1. CBs can provide explanations and present factual documentation and proof during the EOF in response to the SOF provided by the assessor; and

- 6.7.2. CBs can provide the Root Cause Analysis (RCA), Correction (C), Corrective Action (CA), and Preventive Action (PA) along with the related document and proof.

## **7. CB Response to Findings**

- 7.1. The CB shall respond to the findings through a SOF provided by the GSTC assessment team.
- 7.2. The CB may file the EOF for the findings within seven (7) calendar days after receiving the SOF from the GSTC.
- 7.3. For NCs, the CB needs to submit the RCA, C, CA, and PA to the assessment team.
- 7.4. For OFIs, CBs are not required to submit responses. However, if a CB chooses to share a response, it should be included in the RCA or Preventive Action. OFIs will not be evaluated unless the CB requests it during the assessment the OFIs were raised. However, GSTC will review OFIs during the next assessment.
- 7.5. For each NC, the CB shall:
  - 7.5.1. Perform RCA to identify the cause of the NC;
  - 7.5.2. Document C specifying action(s) taken to address the issues. If no correction is needed, the CB shall provide a justification;
  - 7.5.3. Specify CA taken or will be taken as a plan. If the CA is not necessary, the CB shall provide a justification;
  - 7.5.4. Specify the PA taken to ensure that the issue will not recurrence; and
  - 7.5.5. Provide evidence of the resolution of the NC.

*NOTE: If all documents are in a language other than English, the CB shall provide a translation at their own expense within a specified timeline. In some countries with legal requirements, notarized translations may be necessary, and additional time may be granted for this process.*

## **7. The GSTC Evaluation of CB Responses**

- 7.1. GSTC may respond to the EOF within maximum seven (7) calendar days after receiving the EOF from the CBs
  - 7.1.1. Any amendments to the findings justified by GSTC shall be applied before the Final Report and specified in the GSTC response to the EOF in the finding listing.
  - 7.1.2. If GSTC does not consider any amendments justified, an explanation shall be provided to the CB.
- 7.2. GSTC shall send the revised report to the CB so that the CB can work on the RCA, C, CA, and PA against NCs within two (2) weeks after receiving the EOF.
- 7.3. GSTC shall evaluate the CB responses within the timeframe:
  - 7.3.1. The evaluation of the initial CB response to the RCA and C for NCs which includes details of actions taken and their effectiveness in addressing the identified root cause to deliver conforming outcomes, should be evaluated within 14 days from the date of the closing meeting.
    - 7.3.1.1. The deadline for evaluating the CB's responses may be adjusted based on an agreement between two parties with acceptable reasons.
- 7.4. To change the status of conformity, evidence of effective implementation of applicable C and/or CA shall be deemed satisfactory. The CB shall demonstrate conformity with the relevant requirement, and GSTC will not be responsible for searching for conforming instances.
- 7.5. If GSTC does not consider the submitted response effective in delivering conformity to the requirement, GSTC shall not close the finding and shall provide justification in the GSTC Report. The CB shall revise its response accordingly if the closure deadline has not been reached.

- 7.6. If the GSTC evaluation is not carried out within the timelines specified in Table 1, the deadline for submission of the closure response shall be extended accordingly.

## **8. Timeline**

- 8.1. The timeline for addressing and closing GSTC NCs is 90 days for both major and minor NCs from the date of the final Assessment Report shared with the CB.
- 8.1.1. If the CB requires more time than the deadline, CB shall provide the justification.
- 8.1.2. Following a timeline extension, GSTC shall not consider circumstances that are demonstrably beyond the CB's control.
- 8.2. There is no deadline for the OFIs. However, if the CB wishes to provide the RCA, C, CA, and PA. The GSTC assessor may close the OFIs.
- 8.3. No deadline will be established until the Final Assessment Report is provided to the CB. Any deadlines indicated prior to that point will be considered provisional and non-binding.
- 8.4. Deadlines are as indicated within the relevant findings on the report.
- 8.5. If the CB does not submit initial responses RCA, C, CA, and PA to the GSTC findings within the set deadline, GSTC may implement sanctions as per the latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Procedure as applicable.
- 8.6. If the CB fails to submit NC closure responses to GSTC before the deadline, or if the submitted responses do not demonstrate conformity with the applicable requirements by the closure deadline, GSTC will take the following actions:
- 8.6.1. Minor NC shall be upgraded to Major NC, and the deadline for submission of closure responses shall be extended by three (3) months, following the default Major NC timelines.
- 8.6.2. For Major NC, a sanction shall be implemented as per the latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Procedure, as applicable.



8.6.3. GSTC shall provide justification explaining the reasons why the NC could not be closed.

**Table 1 Findings Timeline**

Grade	Deadline for submission of RCA, C, CA, and PA	Deadline for initial GSTC evaluation for RCA, C, CA, and PA
<b>Minor</b>	No later than 90 days from the date of issuance.	14 days from the deadline from the submission of RCA, C, CA, and PA along with the documentation from the CB.
<b>Major</b>		
<b>OFI</b>	Not Applicable	