

GRIEVANCE MECHANISM



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Grievance Mechanism

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

www.gstcouncil.org

Document Control

This is version 1.0 of the Grievance Mechanism, 25 July 2023.

1. Introduction

Before a formal complaint procedure is submitted, stakeholders must first attempt to settle disputes informally, preferably at the lowest level. Both parties should aim to resolve the dispute in a cordial and professional manner. If it is not possible to resolve complaints at an informal level, a formal complaint may be submitted.

2. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this document is to set forth GSTC procedures for managing complaints, concerns and feedback. The document is normative reference which will be used alongside other normative GSTC documents.

Complaints against the GSTC normative framework, staff, procedures and programs are managed and processed by the GSTC through this grievance mechanism.

Complaints against the performance of GSTC Recognized Standards (SO) are managed and processed by the GSTC through this grievance mechanism.

Complaints against the performance of a GSTC-Accredited Certification Body (CB) for Industry are managed by ASI and processed according to their procedures.

Stakeholders with complaints about a GSTC-Accredited CB or GSTC Recognized Standard Owner (SO), in the first place, should contact the CB/SO and seek to resolve the matter with them directly either through dialogue or by making use of the CB/SO own grievance mechanism.

If complaints cannot be resolved directly with the CB/SO, stakeholders are encouraged to contact the GSTC Secretariat to highlight their concern by email at complaints@gstcouncil.org. The GSTC Secretariat reserves the right to forward the complaint to the relevant institution.

Stakeholders with complaints related to the performance of the Assurance Services International (ASI) shall first use the dispute mechanism established by ASI.

Complaints against entities (e.g. hotel) certified by a GSTC-Accredited CB about their compliance with the GSTC certification requirements are managed and processed by the CB who issue the Certificate according to the CB own grievance mechanism. The GSTC Secretariat reserves the right to forward the complaint to the relevant institution.

Complaints and appeals relating to processes and decisions about Recognition and Accreditation for Destinations issued by applicants are not included within the scope of this mechanism. Those complaints and appeals are dealt with by the procedures in the GSTC Recognition Manual and GSTC Accreditation Manual for Destinations, respectively. See more in section 7.

3. Responsibility

The GSTC Secretariat holds the primary responsibility for managing the grievance mechanism. The GSTC Secretariat will review the content of this document on a regular basis.

The GSTC Secretariat is responsible to appoint an impartial investigator or team of investigators, should this role be needed in the case of a Complaint

Investigation. The selection of investigators shall be based on their expertise, neutrality, and absence of conflicts of interest with any involved parties.

4. Principles

Impartiality

The process should not be open to any forms of influence which might raise doubts about the objectivity of the decisions taken.

Transparency

The processes adopted should be transparent and available for scrutiny by stakeholders.

Confidentiality

All information directly or indirectly disclosed during the process by all parties involved shall be treated as confidential. Information will not be shared with any third party except with explicit consent in writing from GSTC in advance.

5. Normative References

- [GSTC Industry Criteria v3.0, December 2016](#)
- [GSTC Destination Criteria 2.0, December 2019](#)
- [GSTC Accreditation Manual v2.5, April 2021](#)
- GSTC Accreditation Manual for Destinations v1.2, April 2018 (under review)
- [GSTC Standard Setting Manual v3.0 2023](#)
- [GSTC Recognition Manual v5.0, June 2020](#)
- [ASI-PRO-20-104-Complaints-V7.0 Compliant Procedure](#)

6. Terms and Definitions

Appeals: Request by a Certification Body and Standard Owner to GSTC for reconsideration of any Recognition or Accreditation decision made by the GSTC Assurance Panel.

Complaints: Expression of dissatisfaction related to

- GSTC Governance and Memberships
- GSTC Personnel (boards and staff)
- GSTC Working Groups and Partnerships
- GSTC Policies and Procedures
- GSTC Criteria development, use, and revision
- GSTC Assurance Program: Recognition and Accreditation
- GSTC Training, Market Access, and Destination Assessment
- GSTC other activities (conference, workshop, newsletter, social media, etc.)

Complainant: person or organization filing a complaint

Concern: is an expression of dissatisfaction or concern by any person or organisation regarding any aspect of the GSTC, which is not sufficiently substantiated to be classified as a complaint and where a response is expected.

Feedback: Expression, suggestion or input by any person or organization regarding the GSTC Criteria or Manuals.

7. Procedure for Appeals

Appeals relating to processes and decisions about Recognition and Accreditation for Industry and Destinations issued by applicants are dealt with by the procedures in the GSTC Recognition Manual, GSTC Accreditation Manual for Destination, and ASI's procedures, respectively.

- GSTC Recognition Appeal management: See [the Recognition Manual v5.0 - 6. Complaints and Appeals Procedures](#).
- GSTC Accreditation for Destination Appeal management: See the [Manual](#)
- GSTC Accreditation for Industry Appeal management: [See ASI's Complaints Procedure](#).

8. Procedure for Complaints

GSTC will work with stakeholders and with all parties involved to resolve complaints.

The GSTC encourages individuals to first attempt to resolve their concerns through an informal process of direct dialogue whenever possible.

if it is not feasible to address the complaint informally or if the nature of the complaint warrants a formal investigation, individuals may choose to follow the formal complaint procedure outlined in this grievance mechanism. This

procedure provides a structured and fair process for addressing complaints, ensuring that all concerns are thoroughly investigated and resolved in accordance with the principles and standards set forth by the GSTC.

8.1. Submission of Formal Complaints

8.1.1. Formal complaints shall be submitted by submitting via email the GSTC form for submitting grievances in [Annex A](#). The GSTC Secretariat manages the questions regarding the submission of the complaint form or submitted grievances via complaints@gstcouncil.org

8.1.2. Complaints shall include:

- Contact details of the complainant
- Nature of their complaint
- Specify against which organization the complaint is submitted
- A detailed explanation of the events and issues leading to the complaint
- Provide evidence to support the elements of the complaint
- Indication of any prior attempts to raise the issues with the organization and their responses, if applicable
- If a remedy is requested, a clear description of the desired outcome

8.1.3. Only complaints that meet all the requirements above shall be evaluated for further action.

8.1.4. As the working language of the GSTC is English, complainants may be requested to provide translations of evidence submitted in other languages to facilitate the evaluation process.

8.1.5. By submitting a formal complaint, the complainant agrees to accept the final decision of the grievance mechanism. Should the complainant disagree with the outcome, they may submit a formal appeal. See section 10 for detailed information.

8.1.6. The GSTC Secretariat will acknowledge receipt of the complaint via email within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint.

8.2. Initial review of complaints

8.2.1. The GSTC Secretariat will initially determine if the complaint is admissible under the scope of this procedure by using the control questions listed in [Annex B](#). Should the complaint be found not admissible under the GSTC grievance mechanism scope, the complainant will be notified accordingly, indicating the reason(s).

8.2.2. If the complaint is admissible, the GSTC Secretariat will assess the complaint's validity, implications, and potential need for immediate action within 10 working days. The Secretariat will then decide whether to proceed with a formal investigation, and if so, an impartial investigator or team of investigators will be appointed, as outlined in Section 3.

8.2.3. Once the initial review is completed, the complainant will be notified:

- If the initial review of the complaint determines that no actionable grievance is required, the GSTC Secretariat will provide a response indicating the conclusion of the

complaint and the rationale of the decision. In such cases, GSTC shall close the complaint.

- If the initial review determines that the complaint raised by the complainant requires further investigation, the GSTC Secretariat shall appoint an investigator or team of investigators to assess the complaint and related evidence. See section 8.3 for detailed information on this process.

8.3. Investigation of Complaints

8.3.1. The GSTC-appointed investigator will evaluate the information submitted by the complainant. A decision on the merits of the complaint and a summary of the investigation will be prepared within 30 working days of initiating a formal investigation of the complaint. The final response will be communicated to the complainant and all the parties involved in the process.

8.3.2. Investigations of complaints may lead to various resolutions, including but not limited to:

- Improvement of GSTC procedures
- Clarification on public information
- Provide further information/ technical assistance
- Request the CB/SO to provide further information of compliance to the requirements
- Request a witness audit to the CB
- Schedule an anticipated renewal of Accreditation
- Withdraw GSTC Recognition status of the SO
- Withdraw GSTC Accreditation of the CB
- Ask the CB to investigate an allegation against a certified holder

- Ask the CB to revoke the certification of a certification holder

8.3.3. Once the investigation of the complaint is closed and the decision is notified to all parties involved, the complaint shall be recorded accordingly. Should the complainant disagree with the outcome, they may submit a formal appeal. See section 10 for detailed information.

8.4. General Requirements for Complainants

8.4.1. Complainants shall always disclose their identity to GSTC. In exceptional circumstances, GSTC will consider Complainant's request to remain anonymous to the Parties to the complaint and shall protect their privacy and identity.

8.4.2. GSTC will endeavour to promptly address any complaint that is brought to its attention.

8.4.3. In extraordinary cases, the GSTC Secretariat has the discretion to extend any timelines indicated in this procedure for a cumulative maximum of 30 working days. All Parties shall be informed accordingly.

8.4.4. All Parties involved in the process shall refrain from commenting publicly on the complaint until a decision is made and all Parties have been informed accordingly.

8.4.5. GSTC will consider Complainants request of non-disclosure of the complaint.

9. Procedure for Concerns and Feedback

Formal concerns or feedback shall be submitted via the Grievance Form in [Annex A](#) to complaint@gstcouncil.org. The GSTC Secretariat manages questions regarding the submission of the grievance form or submitted grievances.

The GSTC Secretariat will acknowledge receipt of the concern/feedback via email within 10 working days of receipt of the concern/feedback.

Feedback regarding the GSTC Industry Criteria and the GSTC Destination Criteria shall be analyzed and grouped per theme for future consideration in the revision process of the GSTC Industry and/or Destination. To provide feedback on current Criteria please email criteria@gstcouncil.org.

10. Appeals for the investigation outcome

Where a complainant disagrees with the outcome of the investigation, they may submit a formal appeal to the GSTC Secretariat.

10.1. Appeal Procedure

10.1.1. The GSTC Secretariat will appoint an Appeal Committee that will be responsible for receiving and deciding on appeals and their decision is final. The Appeal Committee shall consist of impartial members who were not involved in the initial complaint investigation.

- 10.1.2. Appeals must be submitted to the GSTC Secretariat within 30 working days of the notification of the outcome of the complaint. The Appeal shall clearly explain the nature of the appeal and include all documented evidence to support the appeal.
- 10.1.3. The GSTC Secretariat will acknowledge the receipt of the appeal within 10 days.
- 10.1.4. The GSTC Secretariat will notify the Committee and forward the appeal and all supporting information within 10 days of acknowledging receipt.
- 10.1.5. The Committee will undertake the assessment of the submitted information within 30 days of receiving and determine whether to accept or reject the appeal and will inform the GSTC Secretariat.
- 10.1.6. The GSTC Secretariat will notify the appellant within 10 days to inform them of the Appeal Committee's decision.
- 10.1.7. The Appeal Committee's decision is final and concludes the grievance process. The GSTC Secretariat will record all appeals and their outcomes for future reference and monitoring.

11. Monitoring and evaluation

All complaints, concerns and feedback shall be analyzed for patterns and similar causes. The GSTC Secretariat will conduct this analysis annually.

Where patterns are identified, corrections to the corresponding GSTC Program shall be proposed and handled according to the level of risk to the system.

12. Record keeping

All records generated from appeals, complaints, concerns and feedback will be kept by the GSTC for a maximum of 5 years, including:

- Appeals, complaints, concerns and feedback
- Acknowledgements and notifications to the complainant
- Confidentiality agreements signed by the complainant
- Reports prepared during the evaluation, including proposed determination and corrective action plan or improvement plan.
- Final decisions and outcomes of investigations
- Annual summaries from ASI and certification bodies regarding complaints
- GSTC records of all summaries of complaints relating to the GSTC program.