



MANUAL FOR GSTC RECOGNITION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STANDARDS

Version 6.0

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

To make comments on this document, please email the GSTC Technical staff

Document Control

Version Notes

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This version 6.0 of the Manual for GSTC Recognition of Sustainable Tourism Standards includes but is not limited to the following revisions. Significant changes are System Recognition removal and changes in standard owner eligibility.

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1 INTRODUCTION - GSTC Recognition of Sustainable Standards

The GSTC considers it desirable for all sustainable tourism standards to be aligned with the GSTC Standard to ensure that an overall global baseline is set for sustainable tourism. The GSTC Standards are developed and maintained according to the principles laid out in the Standards Setting Code of the ISEAL Alliance, utilizing a highly inclusive development process that produces globally relevant outcomes. This document guides the processes and procedures whereby owners of other sustainable tourism standards voluntarily seek formal verification by GSTC that their standard includes and is equivalent to the GSTC Standard. GSTC describes standards that attain the formal verification of the standard equivalency as “GSTC-Recognized Standards.”

The program labeled “GSTC Recognition of Standards” may serve as shorthand for the Recognition of the following:

- Sustainable tourism standards, where the term “standards”¹ fits the definitions of the ISEAL Alliance codes and ISO standards.

See also Section 3.2 on eligibility of standard owners for further information.

It is essential to note the distinction between the following two GSTC offerings under the Assurance Program:

- GSTC-Recognized: GSTC recognizes the equivalence of standards against GSTC Standards (Industry or Destination). This relates merely to the content in the standard and **does NOT consider the process** by which the standard is applied. As such, this is NOT an endorsement of a certification or awards process or any such process, nor is it an endorsement of the organization that owns the standard. It is simply a verification of the standard equivalency relating to the content of the standard.
- GSTC-accredited: The status of being accredited by GSTC given to a certification body certifies tourism businesses and/or destinations against relevant GSTC Standard or a GSTC-Recognized

¹ Standard; Document that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for products or related processes and production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory. (Setting Social and Environmental Standards, ISEAL Code of Good Practice version 6.0 December 2014)

standard in a competent and neutral manner while complying with all the GSTC accreditation requirements. See [the GSTC-Accreditation Manual](#).

1.1 The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

GSTC is a multi-stakeholder initiative formed in 2007 under the umbrella of the United Nations, including among its founding partners UNEP, UN Tourism, UN Foundation, Sabre Holdings, and Rainforest Alliance, amongst others. It was formed in response to the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism by merging two previous initiatives. In 2015, GSTC merged with the Tour Operators' Initiative, with TOI's operations within the GSTC organization.

Over 250 organizations from the public, private, and voluntary sectors and from the worlds of tourism, environmental management, and sustainable development have contributed to the work of the GSTC and its two predecessor bodies.

The GSTC is a Membership Council with a Board of Directors. The Board provides the governance of the organization. However, the Council, which elects the Board, has responsibility for the by-laws of the GSTC, for its principles, criteria, and operational guidelines, for the admittance of members and for resolving disputes.

The mission of the GSTC is:

"To improve tourism's potential to be a driver of positive conservation and economic development for communities and businesses around the world and a tool for poverty alleviation".

The GSTC fulfills its mission by fostering increased knowledge and understanding of sustainable tourism practices and adopting universal sustainable tourism principles. It also works in many other ways to strengthen education, communication, knowledge-sharing, and business engagement in the field of sustainable tourism and to achieve improved market access for sustainable tourism products.

1.2 A Common Agenda for Sustainable Tourism

The challenges of sustainable tourism articulated earlier encompass economic, social, and environmental impacts. This broad spectrum of concern is increasingly recognized by bodies promoting sustainable tourism. UNEP and UN Tourism identified an agenda for sustainable tourism

based on twelve functional aims and showed how each of them has economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The dimensions are seen as interrelated.

In the private sector, tourism, and other economic spheres, enterprises and investment projects are encouraged to consider a triple bottom line. Many companies report on corporate social responsibility policies and actions, which address a broad range of economic, social, and environmental impacts and initiatives beyond straight financial reporting. Some companies use the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative, the world's most widely used sustainability reporting framework (www.globalreporting.org).

The GSTC program supports this broad approach to sustainable tourism and encourages certification schemes to move beyond a more mono-dimensional, often environmental focus.

The principles for sustainable tourism behind the GSTC program are that:

- Sustainability objectives should be defined, and actions should be coordinated by an effective management system.
- Tourism should bring the greatest possible social and economic benefits to local communities and minimize any negative impacts on them.
- Local cultural heritage must be respected, and opportunities should be taken to strengthen its integrity and richness.
- Impacts on the global and local environment, such as pollution and depletion of natural resources, should be minimized, and support should be given to the conservation of local landscapes and biodiversity.

These principles of sustainable tourism are seen as relevant in all parts of the world and can be reflected in many different kinds of tourism enterprises. The overall agenda remains the same. However, key concerns about tourism impact and priorities for improving sustainability will vary from place to place. It is hoped and expected that sustainable tourism standards will be adapted to local and industry sector conditions and far exceed the minimum requirements set out in the GSTC Standard.

1.3 GSTC Standard

GSTC has developed three sets of criteria and associated indicators:

- GSTC Industry Standard (version 3, December 2016); serving as guiding principles for all subsectors of travel and tourism and developed for purposes of assurance, including certification, awards, etc., for hotels/accommodations and tour operators each having specific performance indicators;
- GSTC Destination Standard (version 2, December 2019) with performance indicators; serving as guiding principles for policy-makers at the national, provincial, or municipal/destination levels plus as a management tool for destination management; and developed for purposes of assurance including certification, awards, etc. for destination stewardship.
- GSTC MICE Standard (version 1, February 2024); serving as guiding principles for subsectors of MICE and developed for purposes of assurance, including certification, awards, etc., for Venues, Event Organizers, and Events/Exhibitions, each having specific performance indicators. It was developed to provide a common understanding of sustainable tourism in the MICE industry throughout the world.
- GSTC Attraction Standard (version 1, November 2024); serving as guiding principles for subsectors of Attractions and developed for purposes of assurance, including certification, awards, etc., for national parks and businesses like theme parks, museums, and other similar entities.

1.4 GSTC Recognition Decision-making Committee (RDMC)

The GSTC Recognition Decision-making Committee (hereafter the RDMC) is appointed by the GSTC to make decisions on applications for approval of the GSTC's Recognition program.

The Committee member's core role is to:

1. Declare standards to be "GSTC-Recognized"

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The RDMC operates independently while appointed by the GSTC CEO, and it is authorized to disregard any instructions from the Board or executive staff that may jeopardize its independence and impartiality.

2 The GSTC Standard

This section explains how the GSTC Standards were derived and how they will be maintained and updated.

2.1 Introduction

The GSTC Standards are administered by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The GSTC standard-setting process is implemented by following the GSTC Standard-Setting Manual version 3.0, along with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems as a guideline. The stakeholders in the process are a group of partners representing public, private, and voluntary sector interests from different global regions, following a needs assessment and the determination of scope and terms of reference.

The sustainability challenges of tourism and the possible responses available are not static. Pressures, priorities and technologies change over time. The GSTC Standards are periodically reviewed and updated to reflect this. In addition, lessons from the application of the GSTC Standards will point to helpful and necessary improvements.

The official language of the GSTC Standard is English. The GSTC Standards are available to download from the GSTC website without charge. The Standards are allowed to be used for not-for-profit purposes. It is only permitted for commercial purposes with the completion of the appropriate process by GSTC.

The original Global Sustainable Tourism Standard for Hotels and Tour Operators (GSTC-HTO) was released in 2008 with a partnership of 27 organizations. The GSTC reviewed all comments received, responded to each, and revised the criteria accordingly. Following the same process of Standard development, the Global Sustainable Tourism Destination Standard was released in 2013 by GSTC through a stakeholder consultation process. In 2024, the third set of GSTC Standard was launched, the GSTC MICE Standard (for Venues, Event Organizers, and Events & Exhibitions) aim to serve as the global

sustainability standards for the industry and were created to provide a common understanding of sustainable tourism in the MICE industry throughout the world. In addition to it, the GSTC Attraction Standard was released as the fourth new set of GSTC Standard in the same year, for guiding businesses such as theme parks, museums, and national parks toward sustainable practices. See more [details on the Standard development and revision history](#).

The GSTC will update the GSTC Standard from time to time, and at intervals typically of five years, or to correct errors. The GSTC shall, as far as practicable, follow the GSTC Standard-Setting Manual version 3.0. along with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems as a guideline when updating the GSTC Standards. Comments and suggestions on the GSTC Standards can be submitted anytime via the GSTC's website. Please see more [details on Standard development](#).

The scope of the GSTC Standards is currently limited to (a) accommodation facilities and tour operators, (b) destinations, and (c) MICE (Venue, Event Organizer, and Event/Exhibition). (d) Attractions. There are plans to expand to other sub-sectors potentially, but the present versions should not be interpreted as having a broader scope.

2.2 The GSTC Standard Components

The Components of each criterion are set out in the GSTC-Recognized Application. They do not form part of the published GSTC Standard. The purpose is to support the technical analysis of each criterion. These components are not to be confused with the performance indicators and each criterion consists of these components.

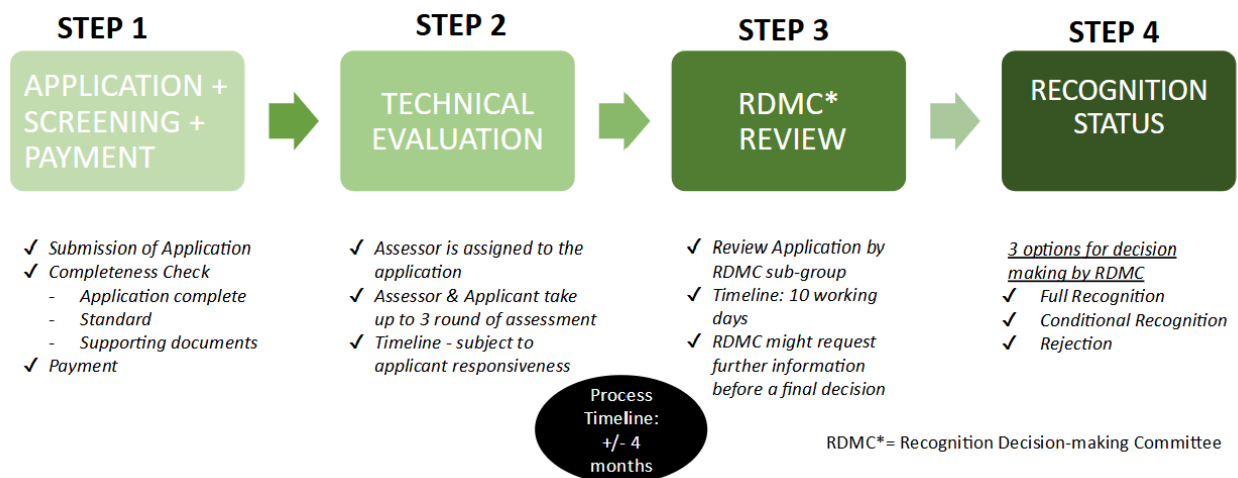
3 GSTC-Recognized Framework

All GSTC-Recognized procedures are governed in the first instance by the GSTC Bylaws and in the second instance by the GSTC-Recognized Manual.

3.1 Process

Standard Recognition: GSTC shall determine whether a standard is equivalent to the GSTC Standard, upon which it shall be declared a “GSTC-Recognized Standard”. The GSTC Recognition process is described in Flow Chart 1.

Flow Chart 1.



3.2 Eligible Standard Owner

GSTC shall accept applications for GSTC-Recognized Standard status for the following types of standards applied to sustainable tourism. The standard owner shall declare to the GSTC one of the following categorizations with a letter (or similar document) and declare any future changes to the GSTC in writing.

3.2.1 Standards used in certification, where “certification” follows the definitions in relevant ISO standards.

3.2.1.1 The standard used for certification shall declare to the GSTC one of the following options described in 3.2.1.2 due to the eligibility changes to the GSTC-Recognized standard owners after the 31st December 2024. Please see more details on [this page](#).

3.2.1.2 The standard owner shall select 1) applying for the GSTC accreditation or 2) applying for the Certification Scheme – Certification Body Framework. Please see [the Accreditation Manual](#) for more details.

3.2.2 Standards used for education and other purposes² but not intended for use in certification. In this case, the standard status remains the same after the end of 2024.

Note: The organization that applied for the GSTC-Committed program is not eligible to apply for the GSTC Recognition.

3.3 Formal Adoption of the Standard

National bodies or any kind of public sector may declare their adoption of the GSTC Standard verbatim to be applied as formal policy, and not for the certification business for profit. The only business entities, those who are not for certification business or any type of verification business are eligible for the formal adoption of the GSTC Standard. The program using the GSTC Standard by making a formal public declaration and paying the GSTC a usage fee is eligible to have their program listed in GSTC's public list of Recognized Standards. This means to adopt GSTC Standard and performance indicators. If a language other than English will be used, the standard owner must provide GSTC with a formal certificate of translation from a reputable translation service and an evidence letter of review by a sustainability tourism expert.

3.4 Decision

GSTC Recognition Decision-making Committee (RDMC) declares standards to be "GSTC-Recognized".

4. Process for Recognition

This section describes the process by which a standard will be evaluated to determine its equivalency to the GSTC Standard and achieve GSTC-Recognized status.

² Examples of other purposes: policy framework/ guidelines for internal improvement, and or promoting sustainability.

4.1 Requirements for Standard Owners

- 4.1.1 The standard's owner shall demonstrate legal ownership of or the right to use the standard to be assessed.
- 4.1.2 Standard owners are encouraged to have documented rules for the updating of the standard, including how the standard will be reviewed to ensure continued equivalency with the GSTC Standards if either the standard or the GSTC Standards are changed. The standard must have a version number and the issued date of the standard.
- 4.1.3 Any changes in the standard and requirements shall be communicated to the GSTC within a period of 10 days of the formal release of the amended version.
- 4.1.4 The standard owner may provide guidance on the standard to clients and other interested parties.
- 4.1.5 The equivalency matrix in the application form for GSTC Recognition of Standard shall have a section that evaluates the conformity of the standard owner with the requirements set out in this section. Should the standard owner not conform to the requirements of this section, the areas of non-conformity shall be noted in the evaluation report.
- 4.1.6 The standard owner shall become a GSTC member before applying for GSTC Recognition. This requirement serves to maintain the GSTC Recognition status.
- 4.1.7 The standard used for certifying tourism businesses shall provide the evidence of the application for Accreditation or Certification Scheme - Certification Body Framework before applying for the GSTC Recognition of Standard to maintain the Recognized status.

4.2 Requirements for Standards

- 4.2.1 The standard shall be written in a form that permits a clear decision on whether or not a business or activity complies with each criterion.
- 4.2.2 The application for GSTC-Recognized shall indicate the scope of the standard (e.g. entire businesses, individual hotels only, destinations, or specific tours, MICE Event etc.), its geographic coverage, standard version with date, original and translated languages of standards, and the standard name explicitly.

- 4.2.3 Standard owners may go beyond the requirements of the GSTC Standards by including additional criteria, local adaptation, or sector specificity.
- 4.2.4 The content of the standard may take into account local and regional differences, including economic, social, and ecological realities or regulatory conditions.
- 4.2.5 The standard may differ from the GSTC Standards in the way it is structured and expressed but should avoid conflicting and inconsistent use of terminology and definitions.
- 4.2.6 It is not necessary for the criteria of the standard owner to follow the same sequence as those of the GSTC Standard, nor use the same words or language. However, if the standard will be used for certification business by an Accredited Certification Body after gaining the Recognized status, it is required to prepare the criteria of the standard owner to follow the same sequence as those of the GSTC Standard.
- 4.2.7 Where the wording or intent of a criterion is significantly different from the corresponding criterion of the GSTC Standard, the standard owner will be required to explain in what way the application of the criterion corresponds to the intent of the GSTC criterion. This explanation may include any indicators and evaluation guidelines used by the certification program, where relevant.
- 4.2.8 Standard content shall be informed by any guidance provided by the GSTC to assist standard owners and the GSTC RMDC in considering equivalency between standards and the GSTC Standard.
- 4.2.9 Where the GSTC has published indicators or guidance for GSTC Standard relating to the relevant tourism industry sector(s) to which the standard applies, these indicators or guidance may be taken as non-exclusive interpretative guidance.
- 4.2.10 For each criterion in the Standard, the standard owner shall indicate (in the appropriate field of the matrix in the Application Form) whether or not that criterion is a mandatory requirement for its certification process. The standard can be awarded GSTC-Recognized status even if not all relevant criteria are mandatory. However, for a certification program to be awarded GSTC Accredited status or Certification Scheme - Certification Body Framework, conformity with at least one of the criteria matching each of the GSTC Standard shall be mandatory in order to demonstrate that all certified businesses and activities comply with all the GSTC Standard. Exempted Legal

requirements in the criteria need to be included and marked as mandatory for auditing (See 4.4.3.3).

- 4.2.10.1 The standard owners applying for Accreditation or Certification Scheme - Certification Body Framework after gaining the GSTC Recognition shall prepare the GSTC-Recognized standard in the same order as the GSTC Standard for efficient accreditation assessments.

4.3 Non-applicability or Omission of Standard

- 4.3.1 Where a standard fails to cover one or more of the GSTC Standards, the reasons and justification for this omission must be clearly stated and documented.
- 4.3.2 In certain circumstances, criteria may be omitted without prejudice to the award of GSTC-Recognized status. For example, the criterion may not be relevant, given the scope of the standard. In such cases, convincing evidence must be presented that the criterion is outside the scope of the standard.
- 4.3.3 A standard (or any guidance attached to it) may also indicate that certain criteria, including those that are equivalent to a particular GSTC criterion, may not always be applicable. In this case, the practice shall be described in the standard, guidelines, or policy document. The circumstances, reasons, and justification for this deemed non-applicability must be clearly stated and documented.
- 4.3.4 Reasons and justification for omission of criteria or deemed non-applicability may include:
- 4.3.4.1 Evidence of complete lack of relevance of a particular criterion to local circumstances or industry sector/subsector
 - 4.3.4.2 Evidence that the application of a particular GSTC criterion may be impossible, illegal or unreasonable
 - 4.3.4.3 Evidence of coverage by legislation and regulation that is fully enforced and universally complied with in the countries covered (e.g., the official document with a specific clause of the law). This is further elaborated in Section 4.4 below.
- 4.3.5 Reasons and justification for omission or non-applicability may be specific to the particular country or region where the standard is being applied. Separate evidence in English must be provided and documented for each country or region

where the standard is applied to justify any omission or deemed non-applicability of a criterion or criteria.

- 4.3.6 Standards that are used in more than one country must have criteria that match each GSTC Criterion, except as above.

4.4 Reliance on Legislation

- 4.4.1 Standards that are used in only one country or a smaller region may be able to demonstrate that a particular criterion is covered by legislation.

- 4.4.2 In the case of 4.4.1:

- 4.4.2.1 The specific law(s) in English must be identified;
- 4.4.2.2 The standard or the auditors' verification manual must require demonstrated compliance with applicable laws.

- 4.4.3 Convincing evidence will be required. Acceptable evidence may include:

- 4.4.3.1 A criterion that fully matches GSTC criterion requiring compliance with relevant legislation;
- 4.4.3.2 A requirement for a legally binding sworn statement by the organization to be certified with respect to compliance with specific, named laws and regulations;
- 4.4.3.3 Text from the auditors' manual or verification criteria indicating that compliance with specific, named laws and regulations will be verified during the audit.
- 4.4.3.4 In the case of reliance on legislation, the award of GSTC-Recognized status for the standard will apply only in that area of legal jurisdiction.

4.5 Step 1: GSTC-Recognized Application

- 4.5.1 Standard owners wishing to have their standard GSTC-Recognized shall download the GSTC-Recognized Manual and relevant GSTC-Recognized Application documents which provide details of the process and application document from [this page](#).
- 4.5.2 The standard owner shall complete the sections of the form "GSTC-Recognized Application" relating to the requirements for the ownership and operation of the standard or certification scheme.

- 4.5.3 The standard owner shall indicate the degree of correspondence between its own standard and the GSTC Standard by completing a matrix provided in the application designed to map the requirements of the standard against the GSTC Standard.
- 4.5.4 Where a standard owner believes that there is justification for the non-inclusion of a GSTC criteria in its standard, it may indicate this justification. In all such cases, it shall provide a written, evidence-based justification for this non-inclusion.
 - 4.5.4.1 Evidence will be required to demonstrate that the element in question is not an issue for the sustainability of tourism in any of the countries and types of tourism enterprises covered by the certification.
 - 4.5.4.2 Justification shall not be based on a difference in the meaning and coverage of sustainable tourism between the certification scheme owner and the GSTC.
- 4.5.5 During the application process for "GSTC-Recognized", the standard owner shall undertake to:
 - 4.5.5.1 Inform the GSTC of any substantial changes to the ownership of the standard.
 - 4.5.5.2 Submit the updated version of the standard to the GSTC within 10 days from the date of update.
- 4.5.6 The application shall be assessed against the version of this Recognition Manual that is current on the date of payment. Should the GSTC revise or amend this manual during the period of the application process, that version shall remain in effect. The RMDC may consider revisions to the Manual to support an acceptance of the application but not a rejection.
- 4.5.7 If the standard is used in multiple languages, all languages shall be written in the application form. When the standard is translated into an additional language, the standard owner shall inform and submit to the GSTC the formal translation certificate from the professional translation agency and the evidence letter of review by the tourism expert in sustainability within 10 business days.

4.6 GSTC-Recognized Application Documentation

The following documentation must be completed and sent to the GSTC for Recognition of the standard:

- 4.6.1 A GSTC-Recognized Application. Current versions of the GSTC-Recognized Application form are available to download from the GSTC website or available from the GSTC on request.
- 4.6.2 The form includes a matrix for comparison of the standard with the GSTC Standard. The comparison matrix shall be completed in English.
- 4.6.3 The standard owner shall provide a copy of the standard in its entirety, in its original language. Where the standard's original language is not English, it must be translated into English, and a professional certificate of translation (or equivalent justification of the translation accuracy) and the evidence letter of review by the tourism expert in sustainability must be provided.
- 4.6.4 All other relevant documents are required to show conformity to the GSTC requirements.

4.7 Step 2: GSTC Assessment of GSTC-Recognized Applications

- 4.7.1 The completed application form, together with all the documentation requested, shall be reviewed for completeness by GSTC staff, who may request further information and documentation.
- 4.7.2 Once satisfied that the application is complete, the GSTC will issue an invoice to the standard owner. The GSTC will only process the Application once the relevant application fee has been paid.
- 4.7.3 A member of GSTC technical staff will be appointed to undertake an assessment of the standard against the GSTC Standard. In cases of conflicts of interest, or the appearance thereof, the GSTC shall identify an alternative assessor with appropriate qualifications.
- 4.7.4 The appointed assessor shall undertake a technical assessment of the equivalency of the standard against the relevant GSTC Standard and whether the application is

completed comprehensively with sufficient evidence of compliance for the RDMC to make its determination. The assessor(s) shall:

- 4.7.4.1 Draw the attention of the standard owner to any GSTC Standard where the standard appears not to be equivalent and ask for further clarification if required.
 - 4.7.4.2 Seek comment from the standard owner on any areas where the standard may appear to have no equivalent criterion and may ask the standard owner to provide further evidence relating to the equivalency of its standard.
 - 4.7.4.3 Write in the matrix based on the assessment of the equivalency of the standard to the GSTC Standard.
 - 4.7.4.4 Return the matrix to the standard owner, with an invitation to amend any areas where equivalency has not yet been established, prior to further consideration by GSTC.
 - 4.7.4.5 Undertake the assessment after the matrix has been revised by the standard owner. The technical assessor will undertake up to 3 assessment rounds repeating from section 4.7.4.2 to 4.7.4.5.
- 4.7.5 Upon completion of the technical assessment the assessor shall forward the application, including the updated assessment and final versions of supported materials, to the RDMC for it to make its determination on the merits of the application.
- 4.7.6 The RDMC shall make its determination within based on a simple majority and shall inform the standard owner of their decision. The RDMC shall determine whether the application is accepted, rejected, or conditionally accepted by stating a deadline for compliance with specified issues. A fee may be applicable for re-assessments of applications with five or more conditions.

4.8 RDMC Decision

- 4.8.1 Recognition decision is determined by the RDMC, an independent body, with no involvement from GSTC in the decision-making process. The decision is final and not subject to change. If the standard owner wishes to object to the decision, he or she may submit an appeal (Please see Section 6. Complaints and Appeals Procedures).
- 4.8.2 If the decision is to grant GSTC-Recognized status with or without conditions, the GSTC shall provide the standard owner with a letter (or similar document) regarding claims that can be made and the terms upon which they may be made.
- 4.8.3 If the decision is to reject Recognized status, GSTC shall provide the standard owner with a letter (or similar document) outlining the RDMC decision and justification. Before rejection, the RDMC shall communicate with the technical assessor about the decision.
 - 4.8.3.1 In the event of a rejection, RDMC shall provide a comprehensive information outlining the justifications for the decision. This information shall include detailed explanations, referencing the specific criteria or requirements that were not met, ensuring transparency and clarity in the decision-making process.
- 4.8.4 GSTC-Recognized status applies to the English version of the standard that has been provided by the standard owner. A professionally translated version of a GSTC-Recognized standard, or the standard in its original language, can subsequently be used in any appropriate country that falls within the declared scope of the standard in the application.
- 4.8.5 The results of the assessment of the standard shall be confidential, and available only to the GSTC Secretariat and the RDMC and to the standard owner. Only those standards that are GSTC-Recognized will be publicly identified.
- 4.8.6 The GSTC will not reveal the names of those standards that have applied for GSTC-Recognized in any of the following circumstances: for one reason or another, the standard owner has not completed the process; the standard has been

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GSTC-Recognized (Conditional); the standard has not achieved GSTC-Recognized status.

- 4.8.7 The GSTC will notify all owners known to have applied for a GSTC-Recognized standard of any timetable for review and revision of the GSTC Standard and invite their involvement in the revision process.

4.9 GSTC-Recognized Standard Maintenance

- 4.9.1 The GSTC-Recognized standard owner will be required to maintain the GSTC membership or subscription as it is equivalent to the maintenance fee for the GSTC Recognition. If the membership or subscription lapse, the Recognition status shall be removed concurrently. Please contact GSTC Recognition team for further clarification of maintenance fee if it's needed.
- 4.9.2 The standard owner is responsible for informing the GSTC Secretariat of the changes to the standard within 30 days. If an omitted declaration is not made in a timely manner, the GSTC-Recognized status shall be removed after 90 days from the day the GSTC notices the changes.

5. Renewal Process

5.1 Validity of GSTC-Recognized

GSTC-Recognized status will apply to a standard until the earlier occurrence of one of the following:

- 5.1.1 The Standard owner amends their Standard; or
- 5.1.2 The GSTC amends the relevant GSTC Standard.

5.2 Amendment of GSTC Standard

- 5.2.1 If the relevant GSTC Standard have been amended by the GSTC, the GSTC will give due notice to GSTC-Recognized standard owners of any changes made to the GSTC Standard and subsequent actions that they may be required to take.

5.2.2 In the event of an amendment to the GSTC Standard, owners of GSTC-Recognized standards will be given a period of two years to comply with the new GSTC Standard.

5.3 Amendment of a GSTC-Recognized Standard

5.3.1 When the standard is amended, the standard owner shall inform the GSTC within a period of 10 days of the formal release of the amended version. The version number and date of amendments shall be indicated on the standard.

5.3.2 The standard owner shall indicate the amendments or the extent of the amendments which have been introduced in the standard. The GSTC RDMC will provide guidance to the standard owner on how to report the amendments.

5.3.3 The GSTC RDMC shall consider all revisions of GSTC-Recognized standards submitted to it and, if it feels necessary, shall require any or all steps in the Recognition process to be repeated, including re-submission for a renewed GSTC-Recognized evaluation.

5.4 Scope Extension of a GSTC-Recognized Standard

5.4.1 When the scope of the standard is extended, the standard owner shall inform the GSTC before the formal release of the extended version. If it is already released, the standard owner shall inform the GSTC within a period of 10 business days of the formal release.

5.4.1.1 Scope extension of tourism type. The scope of the GSTC Standards is currently limited to;

5.4.1.1.1 Hotel/Accommodation,

5.4.1.1.2 Tour Operator,

5.4.1.1.3 Destination,

5.4.1.1.4 MICE Venue,

5.4.1.1.5 MICE Event Organizer, and

5.4.1.1.6 MICE Event/Exhibition.

5.4.1.1.7 Attraction

5.4.1.2 Geographical scope extension. The standard owner shall expect a full review of the equivalency matrix if the scope changes from national to global and/or multiple countries. Evidence that the standard covers a new geographical scope is required to submit (e.g., language, cultural elements).

5.4.1.3 Linguistic scope extension. When the standard is translated into languages other than English, the standard owner shall submit a translated standard with a professional certificate of translation and the evidence letter of review by the sustainability tourism expert.

5.4.1.4 If the Recognized standard is used for certification by the accredited certification body beyond its initial geographical scope, the standard owner shall be required to apply for the scope extension of the Recognized standard before it is used by the accredited certification body.

5.5 Ongoing Conformity of a Standard

Should the GSTC RDMC have reason to be concerned about the ongoing conformity of a standard already recognized as equivalent to the GSTC Standard, it may require the standard owner to provide further information at any time. As an ultimate sanction, once the standard owner has been offered time to conform and after due consideration, GSTC-Recognition may be withdrawn. Additionally, the GSTC may consider the conformity of the recognized standard if there is an official complaint and/or feedback to its standard owner due to the impacts on the GSTC's credibility and/or reputation.

5.6 Transfer of Recognized Standard Ownership to another party

If the ownership of the GSTC-Recognized standard has been transferred to another party, the initial owner shall inform the GSTC of the reason why within a period of 10 days of the formal announcement of the new ownership. The Recognition program was not made for profitable businesses, and the Recognized standard is not for sale. White labeling the GSTC-Recognized standard to the different entity will not be awarded the GSTC Recognition. The GSTC will determine the applicability of transferring the ownership per case.

6. Complaints and Appeals Procedures

6.1 Complaints

6.1.1 Any complaints made about matters relating to GSTC-Recognized processes shall be submitted to the GSTC Secretariat.

6.1.2 Submission of Formal Complaints

6.1.2.1.1 Individuals or entities with a grievance related to GSTC's Recognition Program should follow these steps to initiate a grievance:

6.1.2.1.1.1 Initiate the grievance submission process by documenting the nature of the grievance.

6.1.2.1.1.2 Offer a clear and succinct description of the matter, incorporating pertinent dates, times, and the individuals involved as determined in the GSTC Grievance Submission Form.

6.1.2.1.1.3 Verify the completeness and accuracy of all accompanying documentation, ensuring it is attached to the Grievance Submission Form.

6.1.2.2 Formal complaints should be lodged by sending the GSTC Grievance Submission Form to recognition@gstc.org via email.

6.1.2.3 Complaints that fulfill all the specified requirements below will be considered for further assessment:

6.1.2.3.1 Detailed Description of the Grievance:

- a. Nature of the complaint.
- b. A comprehensive explanation of the events and issues leading to the grievance.
- c. Any correspondence relevant to the grievance.
- d. Supporting evidence (e.g., emails, documents, photographs, etc.).
- e. Indication of any prior attempts to address the issues with the organization and their responses, if applicable.
- f. If a remedy is sought, a clear description of the desired outcome.

6.1.2.3.2 Contact Information:

- a. Specify the organization against which the complaint is filed.

6.1.3 GSTC may reject a Complaint in various circumstances, including but not limited to the following cases:

- 6.1.3.1 When the Complaint is submitted anonymously or when the complainant requests anonymity during the grievance process.
- 6.1.3.2 When the Complaint lacks sufficient, appropriate, or substantial evidence.
- 6.1.3.3 When the Complaint does not comply with the requirements described in 6.1.2.3.
- 6.1.3.4 When the Complaint solely pertains to events that occurred either before the Recognition process.
- 6.1.4 Investigation of Complaints
 - 6.1.4.1 The GSTC-appointed investigator or a team of investigators 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.
 - 6.1.4.2 The investigator or the investigation team appointed by the GSTC must have no conflicts of interest (COI).
 - 6.1.4.3 The investigation may involve interviews or other methods to gather evidence from the complaint and relevant parties.
 - 6.1.4.4 Before concluding the investigation, GSTC will distribute the draft complaint investigation report to all parties involved for their input, allowing a fourteen-day (14-day) window for comments.
- 6.1.5 If necessary, GSTC may refer to the latest version of the GSTC Grievance Procedure for Accreditation for management of complaints.
- 6.1.6 The GSTC shall record all actions taken and communicate the outcome of the complaint to the complainant.
- 6.1.7 GSTC maintains the right to bill costs and expenses to the parties submitting complaints for investigation at the GSTC Daily Rate.

6.2 Appeal against GSTC-Recognized Decision

- 6.2.1 An appeal by a standard owner against a GSTC-Recognized decision may only be made in relation to the following events:
 - 6.2.1.1 Refusal by the GSTC to accept its application for GSTC-Recognized;
 - 6.2.1.2 Refusal by the GSTC to proceed with a Recognition evaluation;

6.2.1.3 A decision to refuse, suspend, or withdraw GSTC-Recognition or any other action that impedes the attainment of Recognition.

6.2.2 The grounds for an appeal are limited to:

6.2.2.1 Failure of the GSTC to follow its own procedures or meet the requirements of the GSTC Recognition Manual; or

6.2.2.2 The case that the GSTC has incorrectly interpreted the requirements for Recognition.

6.2.3 Notifications of an appeal shall be directed to the GSTC Secretariat at recognition@gstc.org by submitting the GSTC Grievance Submission Form and received within 30 days of the GSTC decision being communicated to the standard owner. All documents shall be prepared in English.

The appeal notice has no set format but shall:

- a. Be in writing and signed by the appellant standard owner or its legal representative;
- b. Specify the grounds on which the appeal is made;
- c. Be accompanied by relevant and objective documented evidence;
- d. Indicate what steps were taken to resolve the issue prior to lodging the appeal;
- e. Contain an agreement to pay the costs of the appeal process, if and as allocated by the Appeals Panel;
- f. Contain an agreement to adhere to all terms and provisions of this procedure.

6.2.4 The GSTC Secretariat shall verify that the conditions for appeal set out above have been met and, if not, shall advise the appellant accordingly.

6.2.5 If and once conditions have been met, the GSTC Secretariat shall formally acknowledge receipt of the appeal.

6.2.6 An Appeal Committee shall be established by the GSTC.

- 6.2.7 The appellant will have the opportunity to object to membership of the Appeal Committee on grounds of conflict of interest. The Appeal Committee shall consider such a challenge, but will not be bound to change its membership.
- 6.2.8 The decision of the Appeal Committee shall be binding on all parties, and no further appeal on the same matter shall be accepted.
- 6.2.9 The Secretary of the Appeal Committee shall be responsible for keeping records of the appeal. On the instruction of the Chair of the Appeals Panel, these records may be sealed to protect confidentiality.
- 6.2.10 If necessary, the GSTC may refer to the latest version of the GSTC Grievance Procedure for Accreditation for appeal management.

6.3 Review of Appeals

- 6.3.1 Records of appeals shall be reviewed at meetings of the GSTC RDMC.
- 6.3.2 Should the GSTC Appeal Committee request action from the GSTC Secretariat and/or RDMC in addition to those that have already been taken or actions of a more general nature, then these actions shall be undertaken by the GSTC.

6.4 Functions of the Appeal Committee

- 6.4.1 The functions of the Appeal Committee will be as follows:
 - 6.4.1.1 To decide on the validity of the appeal made by the owner of a standard or its legal representative (the "Appellant") against a decision of the GSTC on Recognition of a standard.
 - 6.4.1.2 To make a binding decision on the appeal.
 - 6.4.1.3 To advise the parties of their final decision(s).

6.5 Cost

- 6.5.1 The cost of hearing an appeal shall be determined by the GSTC.

- 6.5.2 The Appeal Committee shall determine the apportionment of the costs of the appeal.
- 6.5.3 In apportioning costs, the Appeal Committee shall commence with the assumption that costs should be borne equally between the Appellant and the GSTC.
- 6.5.4 Should the Appeal Committee consider that the appeal is frivolous and without merit, it may require the appellant to pay a proportion of up to 100% of the costs.
- 6.5.5 Should the Appeal Committee consider that the GSTC has acted in a way that does not display all due diligence, it may require the GSTC to pay a proportion of up to 100% of the costs.
- 6.5.6 In the event that the appellant has been ordered to pay the costs or part of them, the appellant will be under an obligation to pay the amount due to the GSTC within ten days of the date of the decision being notified.

7. Fees

7.1 GSTC-Recognized Application

- 7.1.1 A standard owner will be required to pay a fee for the process of recognizing its standard, amended standards, translated standards and the annual GSTC membership fee serving as a maintenance fee.
- 7.1.2 Fees must be paid upon application and before the GSTC-Recognized Application is considered.
- 7.1.3 Contact the GSTC Recognition Team at recognition@gstc.org for current fees. Consult [the website](#) for information on GSTC Recognition, including why and how to apply.

7.2 Pre-Lodgement Advice

- 7.2.1 A standard owner may (for an agreed-upon fee) request pre-lodgement support/advice from GSTC technical staff. Technical staff may also comment on a standard or a draft GSTC-Recognized application.

- 7.2.2 Such advice is offered to support standard owners in achieving GSTC-Recognized status. The advice is offered as officer-level advice. Therefore, it must not be considered as a GSTC RDMC policy, a commitment, or a liability for positive consideration or otherwise.
- 7.2.3 Provision of such advice by a member of GSTC technical staff is not a conflict of interest for undertaking the subsequent assessment of a lodged GSTC-Recognized Application.

8. Publicity and Promotion

8.1 GSTC Promotion of GSTC-Recognized Standards

- 8.1.1 The GSTC will make publicly available a list of the GSTC-Recognized standards together with a brief summary of each recognized standard, approved for publication by the standard owner.
 - 8.1.1.1 For standard owners applying for Accreditation or the GSTC CS-CB Framework as specified in Clause 3.2.1.2 to maintain the status, the GSTC-Recognized Standard will only be officially announced upon the successful completion of the Accreditation or GSTC CS-CB Framework. Standard owners who fail to comply fully with the Accreditation and CS-CB Framework requirements will forfeit their Recognized status, even if the RDMC's decision grants the Recognized status.
- 8.1.2 The GSTC will publicly disclose and implement a clear policy on claims of GSTC Recognition of standards. This will include surveillance of the use of those claims and taking action against incorrect use.
- 8.1.3 The GSTC may arrange publicity and promotion of GSTC-Recognized standards and tourism businesses/products certified by a GSTC-Recognized standard. However, GSTC gives higher priority and placement to any communications regarding Certification Bodies and their certificate-holders of GSTC Accredited certification programs and bodies than to GSTC-Recognized standards.
- 8.1.4 The GSTC may arrange publicity and promotion of GSTC-Recognized standards only. The translated standards that fail to complete the process will not be considered GSTC-Recognized standards.

8.2 Promotion by GSTC-Recognized Standard

8.2.1 A GSTC-Recognized standard is **not entitled to use any specific GSTC logo** (e.g., GSTC members logo) but may make general statements that its standard is GSTC-Recognized. It may not use the terms "Accredited", "Certified", "Approved", "GSTC - xxx" or similar implications that GSTC has in any way confirmed the efficacy of the Standards owner's certification policies and procedures.

8.2.2 References in the marketplace by GSTC-Recognized Standard owner and its affiliates to GSTC-Recognized designation must clearly state that this is a designation relating to the Standards and NOT to any certification processes, program, system, organizations, and the Certifying Body's brand. Using the GSTC logo on the certificate is not allowed unless the GSTC-Recognized standard owner is the GSTC-accredited Certification Body or the Certification Scheme owner partnering with GSTC-accredited Certification Body. For example, statements such as the following cannot be made;

"Our Certification Body is Recognized by GSTC" or

"Our Certification/Award Program is Recognized by GSTC".

An example of an appropriate statement is;

"Our sustainable tourism standard is GSTC-Recognized for its equivalence to the GSTC Standard"

Guidance for how to communicate GSTC-Recognized status is available in Annex A.

9. GSTC Glossary of Relevant Terms

9.1.1 A full glossary of sustainability terms used by the GSTC may be found at the [GSTC Glossary of Sustainable Tourism Terms](#) and in [the GLOSSARY AND TERMS of the Accreditation Manual \(page 48\)](#).

9.1.2 The hierarchy of definitions used is:

1. ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social & Environmental Standards version 6

- 2. ISO/IEC 17065
- 3. ISO/IEC 17067
- 4. ISO/IEC 17011
- 5. ISO/IEC 17000
- 6. ISO Guide 2
- 7. Standard English dictionaries

Levels of GSTC requirements	
'will'	An entity commits to undertake the specified action
'shall'	An entity must take the specified action to be in compliance
'should'	An entity is expected to take the specified action
'may'	An entity is allowed to take the specified action

Annex A - How to Reference “GSTC-Recognized”

GSTC-Recognized is a designation that GSTC places on standards for sustainable travel and tourism.

Recipients can and should proudly proclaim that their standards include the global baseline standards for sustainable tourism known as the GSTC Standard.

However, public messaging about standards being GSTC-Recognized sometimes implies that it relates to accreditation or certification. GSTC-Recognized does NOT relate to accreditation or certification. Therefore, there is a need to communicate better what GSTC-Recognized is and what is not. This document provides guidelines for how GSTC-Recognized may be accurately described, plus indications on what constitutes inaccurate descriptions of its meaning.

How to Reference GSTC-Recognized - - Use wording that accurately points out that the term refers to a set of standards.

How NOT to Reference GSTC-Recognized - - Do not say or imply that the designation refers to a company, brand, system, program or product offering, and does not relate to accreditation of your process of certification (or issuance of awards, etc.). Do not use any form of the GSTC logo to indicate or imply that the GSTC has placed a quality mark on the organization that owns the standard or any certification process or other process that the organization operates.

A specific logo for GSTC members explains that the organization is a GSTC member and nothing related to the GSTC-Recognized standard. GSTC members' logo is NOT allowed to be used when the standard owners claim that their standard is recognized by GSTC.

Examples of usage:	NOT Acceptable	Acceptable References
by Certification Bodies	<p>"Organizations X is recognized by the GSTC"</p> <p>"Organization X's certification is recognized by the GSTC"</p>	<p>"the organization uses standards that have gained 'Recognition' by the GSTC"</p> <p>"Organization X certifies with an internal set of standards that is 'Recognized' by the GSTC"</p>
by Hotels and Tour Operators	"Grand Hotel is certified by Ace Certification, which is Recognized by the GSTC"	"Grand Hotel is certified by Ace Certification, whose standard for sustainability is Recognized by the GSTC for being equivalent to the GSTC Standard"
by Destinations and Government	"Pretty Valley is certified by Ace Certification, which is Recognized by the GSTC"	"Pretty Valley is certified by Ace Standard Owner, whose standards for sustainability are Recognized by the GSTC for being equivalent to the GSTC Standard"

#END#