

**GSTC**

**GSTC-RECOGNIZED  
MANUAL**

Version 4.0

22 August 2017

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

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

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#### **Document Control**

This version of the GSTC-Recognized Manual replaces versions 3.2, 2.0 and 1.2 of the GSTC Recognition Manual published in February 2017, 2014 and 2012.

#### **Version Notes**

This version of the GSTC-Recognized Manual has been re-structured. The Benchmarking Criteria are now referred to as GSTC Criteria Components, they are now embedded in the application form matrix for the assessment of equivalency. This Manual includes provisions relating to reliance on legislation and omitted criteria. It specifies a process for conditional GSTC-Recognized status. Renewal procedures have been included for when the GSTC changes its criteria and when a standard changes. Relevant sections of the GSTC Bylaws which apply to the GSTC-Recognized process are included.

This document will be updated from time to time, and users should periodically check for later versions on the GSTC website.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 GSTC Integrity Program

The GSTC Integrity Program is designed to be applicable to all schemes certifying tourism enterprises for their sustainability management and performance. Relevant certification schemes and the bodies that run them vary from sizeable international operations or national schemes, some with support from government agencies, to small schemes covering local areas or particular types of tourism product.

The GSTC intends to build a long-term relationship with all certification schemes. An aim of the GSTC is to continually increase the percentage of schemes that are GSTC-Approved and/or GSTC-Accredited.

The GSTC considers it desirable for all sustainable certification standards to be GSTC-Recognized to ensure that an overall global baseline is set for sustainable tourism standards.

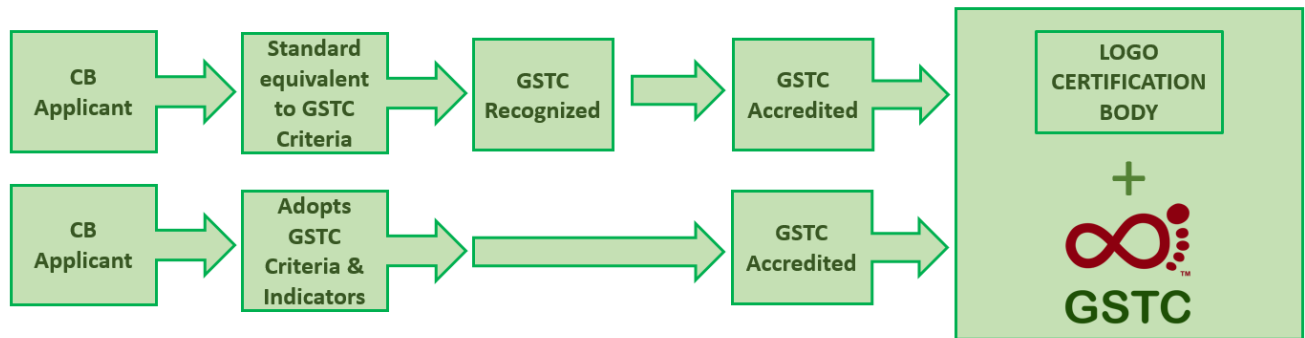
It is recognized that many standards do not currently cover all the elements of the GSTC Criteria or certifiers comply with all of the GSTC requirements for certification bodies. It may take some time for these bodies to complete the changes required to achieve compliance.

The GSTC acknowledges these challenges, and has a number of options for standard owners and CBs to gain GSTC endorsement.





- **GSTC-Recognized:** GSTC recognizes equivalence of a certification body's standard (criteria) against GSTC Criteria (Industry or Destinations). This document, the GSTC-Recognized Manual, applies.
- **GSTC-Accredited:** Third party accreditation (by ASI or GSTC) of certification body that either uses a GSTC- Recognized Standard OR certifies directly against GSTC Criteria and Indicators (GSTC-Industry, formerly Hotels, Tour Operators, and/or Destinations). See the GSTC-Accredited Manual.

Not all certification schemes cover all aspects of sustainability: economic, social, cultural and environmental. For example, a number are solely covering environmental matters and may grant the use of an eco-label. These schemes would only be eligible to become GSTC-Recognized if they first transformed themselves into sustainable tourism certification programs and included all aspects of sustainability. The GSTC encourages certification schemes, where appropriate, to consider this transition.

The diagram below provides a simplified graphical depiction of the pathways of the GSTC Integrity Program and the table on the following pages summarizes the processes, key aspects and benefits.



## 1.2 GSTC Integrity Program - Summary and Benefits

	<b>GSTC- Recognized</b>	<b>GSTC- Accredited GSTC</b>	<b>GSTC- Accredited ASI</b>
<b>Summary</b>			
GSTC recognizes equivalency of certification body's standard (criteria) against GSTC Criteria ( <b>Hotels/Accommodations, Tour Operators, or Destinations</b> ).	✓	✓ <sup>1</sup>	✓
GSTC approves the policies and procedures of certification body that uses either a GSTC-Recognized standard OR certifies directly against GSTC Criteria and Indicators to certify Destinations, or for certification bodies operating within a single country to certify Hotels/Accommodations or Tour Operators.		✓	
Third party accreditation (by ASI) of certification body that uses either a GSTC Recognized Standard OR certifies directly against GSTC Criteria and Indicators to certify Hotels/Accommodations or Tour Operators.			✓
<b>GSTC Logo Usage</b>			
GSTC-Approved Certification Program or GSTC-Accredited Certification Body may use logo (subject to license agreement).	~ <sup>2</sup>		
Certified Hotel/Tour Operator/Destination may use logo (subject to license agreement and annual fee – administered by certification body).	~ <sup>3</sup>		
<b>Promotion by GSTC</b>			
Certification program or certification body promoted on GSTC website.	✓	✓	✓
Announcement of achievement in GSTC newsletter, GSTC website and GSTC social media outlets.	✓	✓	✓
<b>Inclusion of Certification Body's logo on all GSTC official presentations, including Annual General Meeting, as well as all other speaking engagements and publications.</b>		✓	✓
<b>Publication on GSTC website of case studies (i.e. written blog post, video blog) of individual certified businesses.</b>		✓	✓
<b>Market Access</b>			
Certified hotels and tour operators listings are made available to online travel providers		✓	✓

<sup>1</sup> To be GSTC-Accredited the certification body's standard must first be GSTC-Recognized.

<sup>2</sup> A certification body that is a member may show the GSTC Member logo.

<sup>3</sup> A certified business that is a member may show the GSTC Member logo.

### 1.3 The Need for Sustainability of Tourism

Travel and tourism account for around 10% of the world's economic activity. It is a rapidly growing sector, with international tourist arrivals forecast to grow from 1.1 billion in 2014 to around 1.8 billion in 2030<sup>4</sup>.

The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 are aimed at, inter alia, ending extreme poverty, fighting inequality and justice and tackling climate change. The significant relevance of tourism to most of the 17 SDGs has been recognized. The UNWTO is working with governments, public and private partners, development banks, international and regional financial institutions, UN agencies and international organizations to achieve the SDGs, with a special focus on Goal 8 (economic growth), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production patterns) and Goal 14 (marine resources) where tourism has been specifically featured.

The impact of travel and tourism on global and local environments and on host communities can be both positive and negative, providing both opportunities and responsibilities.

Negative impacts and concerns associated with travel and tourism include:

- Its contribution to climate change, being responsible for an estimated 5% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions which is growing rapidly;
- Depletion of natural and precious resources, such as the use of land and water;
- Creation of pollution of all kinds;
- Social changes and dislocation of traditional societies;
- Pressure on cultural heritage sites, natural environments and biodiversity;
- Poor labour conditions and exploitation in parts of the sector.

Travel and tourism can also deliver many positive benefits, including:

- A growing opportunity for enterprise development and employment creation, with low barriers for entry;
- Direct and indirect support for local communities, through the provision of jobs, income, services and infrastructure;
- Awareness of natural and cultural heritage and support for their conservation;
- Health, wellbeing and educational benefits for tourists and hosts, which should be accessible to all.

Sustainable tourism requires an approach to tourism development and management that recognises and responds to these responsibilities and opportunities.

Actions that encourage, identify and promote a positive response from enterprises are crucial for the future of the tourism sector and the contribution it can make to sustainable development. The tourism sector is highly fragmented. While there are some important multinational players, many of the providers of tourism services are independent businesses and the majority are small and micro enterprises. Tourism enterprises of all sizes are responding in different ways and to different degrees to the need for sustainable tourism.

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<sup>4</sup> UN World Tourism Organisation, Tourism Highlights 2016 Edition



## 1.4 The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

GSTC is a multi-stakeholder initiative formed in 2010 under the umbrella of the United Nations, including amongst its founding partners UNEP, UNWTO, 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.<sup>5</sup> In 2015, GSTC merged with the Tour Operators' Initiative, with TOI's operations now coming within the GSTC organization.

Over 150 organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors and from the world of tourism, environmental management and sustainable development have been contributing 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 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 fulfils its mission by fostering increased knowledge and understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the adoption of 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.

## 1.5 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 UNWTO identified an agenda for sustainable tourism based on twelve functional aims<sup>6</sup> and showed how there are economic, social and environmental dimensions to each of them. The dimensions are seen as interrelated.

In the private sector, in tourism as well as in 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](http://www.globalreporting.org)).

The GSTC program is in line with 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:

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<sup>5</sup> The Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council

<sup>6</sup> UNEP, UNWTO *Making Tourism More Sustainable, A Guide for Policy Makers*, 2005

- Sustainability objectives should be defined and actions coordinated by an effective management system
- Tourism should bring the greatest possible social and economic benefits to local communities and any negative impacts on them should be minimised
- Local cultural heritage must be respected and opportunities should be taken to strengthen its integrity and richness.
- Impacts on the global and local environment, through pollution and depletion of natural resources, should be minimised 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 enterprise. 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 that they will far exceed the minimum requirements set out in the GSTC Criteria.

## 1.6 GSTC Criteria

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council has developed two sets of criteria and associated indicators:

- GSTC-Industry: the Global Sustainable Tourism Industry Criteria (version 3, December 2016). At this stage, GSTC-Industry is available in two versions, GSTC-Hotel and GSTC-Tour Operator, each with their own set of performance indicators;
- GSTC- Destinations: The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations

The development of GSTC-Industry allows the GSTC to develop sub-sector specific Indicators for this broader set of criteria, for example MICE, cruise, attractions.

## 1.7 GSTC Accreditation Panel

The GSTC Accreditation Panel is established by the GSTC by-laws:

The GSTC Accreditation Panel (“the Panel”) will operate the recognition, approval and accreditation program under the umbrella of GSTC. The Panel will:

1. Establish the requirements for recognizing standards, approving certification programs, and validating the accreditation of conformity assessment bodies, through Manuals for Recognition, Approval, and Accreditation; guidance documents, and other documentation of procedures;
2. Determine whether a contractor is qualified to review a standard’s conformity with the GSTC Criteria; review certification program procedures and processes; or award accreditation;
3. Declare standards to be “GSTC-Recognized”;
4. Declare certification programs to be “GSTC-Accredited” and validate and provide surveillance of accreditation body Accredited by ASI;

The Panel shall operate independently of the GSTC Board and executive staff. While appointed by the GSTC Board, the members of The Panel shall disregard any instructions from the Board or executive staff that they feel may jeopardize their independence and impartiality.

The GSTC Board shall have the discretion to accept or reject any of the Panel’s recommendations or decisions. If GSTC rejects one of the Panel’s recommendations or decisions, it is obligated to provide an explanation for doing so to the Panel. The Panel may choose to raise the matter at the next annual Membership Council Meeting.

## 1.8 Principles for the implementation of the GSTC Integrity Program

The following principles apply to all aspects of the GSTC program – including to work performed by certification scheme owners, CBs and Accreditation Bodies.

### 1 Integrity

Integrity should be demonstrated in every aspect of the process, requiring honesty, fairness and consistency throughout.

### 2 Credibility

The process should spread confidence in certification as a meaningful way of identifying and stimulating good sustainability practice in the tourism sector.

### 3 Impartiality

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

### 4 Accessibility

Recognition of standards and accreditation should be as accessible as possible to all relevant certification schemes and certification should be as accessible as possible to all tourism enterprises. There should be no discrimination on grounds of size and location and financial barriers should be minimized.

### 5 Comprehensiveness

All recognized sustainable tourism standards covering sustainable tourism should address all aspects of sustainability, including socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts.

### 6 Rigorousness

Accreditation and certification should be robust processes and require high standards and levels of sustainability to be met.

### 7 Effectiveness

The process should be impacts-driven and shaped to help as many tourism enterprises as possible achieve maximum change towards sustainability. The accreditation programme should strengthen the impact of the certification schemes.

### 8 Transparency

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

### 9 Diversity

The process should recognize and encourage the diversity of local, regional and sectoral certification schemes, including their criteria and standards, provided there is no loss of sustainability outcomes.

### 10 Achievability

The accreditation process must be practicable and sustainable over time and not place burdens on certification schemes that they could not meet.

## 2 Normative References

The following documents contain provisions which, through reference in this text, become part of the GSTC-Recognized Manual.

- For documents which specify a date or version number, later amendments or revisions of that document do not apply as a normative requirement. Readers are encouraged to review the most recent editions and any guidance documents available to gain further insight about how the document has changed, and to consider whether or not to implement latest changes.
- For documents without dates or version numbers, it is the latest published edition of the document referred to which applies.

ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards

ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004

## 3 The GSTC Criteria and Components

This section explains how the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC Criteria) were derived and how they will be maintained and updated.

### 3.1 Introduction

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Criteria (GSTC Criteria) are administered by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The GSTC standard-setting process is implemented by the GSTC International Standards Working Group, 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 process of establishing and revising the GSTC Criteria take careful note of the requirements of ISEAL's Code of Good Practice for Setting Environmental and Social Standards.

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

The GSTC Criteria Components for sustainable tourism are based on the GSTC Criteria. The GSTC Criteria Components consist of each of the GSTC Criteria broken down into simple verifiable statements for the purpose of evaluating the equivalence of other sustainable tourism standards with the GSTC Criteria.

### 3.2 Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Industry

The original **Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators (GSTC-HTO)** were developed between 2007 and 2008 by a partnership of 27 organisations. The first version of the criteria was released in October 2008 and was publicly available for comment until April 2011. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council reviewed all comments received, responded to each, and revised the criteria accordingly. The revised criteria were available for public comment and review from July 15 – October 15, 2011 in English, French, Spanish, and Mandarin. Again, all comments were reviewed and addressed, to produce version 2 of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators. The most recent revision of the criteria took place with full consultation in 2016, released as "GSTC Industry Criteria (GSTC-Industry), version 3, December 2016".

Development of the Criteria has involved a broad-based stakeholder consultation process, which included:

- Consultation with the tourism industry and sustainability experts;
- Analysis of more than 4,500 existing criteria in the field of tourism sustainability, used by over 60 certification schemes and other initiatives;
- Preparing draft criteria and inviting comments on them from across the sector;
- Assessing comments received from over 2,000 stakeholders as a basis for amending the criteria;
- Widely disseminating the final criteria and promoting awareness of them.

### 3.3 Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D)

The **Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D)** were developed between 2010 and 2013 by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council following a similar process. The first version was released in October 2013.

The need for the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) was determined in late 2009 by the Destination Stewardship Think Tank co-convened by Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines and Sustainable Travel International. As a result, the GSTC Destination Working Group (the “Destinations WG”) was formed in February 2010. The methodology for the development of the GSTC-D was approved by the Working Group in July 2011, informed by ISEAL guidelines for the development of social and environmental standards.

A working draft of criteria and related performance indicators was proposed in October 2011, incorporating the shared principles from over 37 destination guidelines and standards from around the world. The GSTC Destinations and International Standards Working Groups reviewed the draft and submitted recommendations to the GSTC Board, which approved draft 1 of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) on 7 March 2012. The criteria were subsequently submitted to public consultation from 2 April – 4 August 2012 in English, Spanish, French, Mandarin, German, Catalan, and Russian, and were pilot tested in six Early Adopter destinations in North America, Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia between May and August 2012. The Draft 1 criteria were revised to incorporate the comments received from the consultation and from the early adopters. All comments were reviewed and addressed, although not necessarily adopted.

Draft 2 was approved by the GSTC Destinations and International Standards WGs in October 2012 and approved by the GSTC Board in November. Draft 2 was published for public consultation from December 1, 2012 to April 15, 2013 in English, Spanish, and Mandarin, as very few comments were received to the first survey in other languages. A second round of early adopters was used to evaluate the Draft 2 criteria and indicators between March and August 2013. Once again, every comment and suggestion was evaluated, and Draft 3 of the criteria, incorporating the results of the second public consultation and the second round of early adopters, was submitted to the Destinations WG in September 2013. After incorporating the recommendations of the WG, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) were approved by the GSTC Board on 31 October 2013.

### 3.4 Updating the GSTC Criteria

The official language of the GSTC Criteria is English.

The GSTC will update the GSTC Criteria from time to time, and at intervals of no more than five years, or to correct errors.

The GSTC shall, as far as practicable, follow the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Environmental and Social Standards when updating the GSTC Criteria.

Comments and suggestions on the GSTC Criteria can be submitted at any time via the GSTC’s website.

At the start of each review process, the processes to be followed for that revision shall be made available to interested parties through the GSTC’s website and in other ways as felt appropriate by the International Standards Working Group (ISWG).

Once issued, any revised GSTC Criteria shall be published promptly, and made freely available in electronic form.

Hard copies of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC Criteria) shall be provided on request on a cost-recovery basis (printing and shipping).

Changes in the Criteria shall be communicated to all known sustainable tourism standard owners by electronic communication and posting on the GSTC website.

The scope of the GSTC Criteria is currently limited to (a) accommodation facilities and tour operators and (b) destinations. There are plans to potentially expand to other sub-sectors but the present versions should not be interpreted as having a wider scope.

### 3.5 The GSTC Criteria Components

The individual aspects of each GSTC criterion are set out in specific GSTC Criteria Components.

The basis of GSTC-Recognized is that a candidate Standard can demonstrate that it includes a criterion, or criteria, which is equivalent to each individual GSTC Criteria Component.

The GSTC Criteria Components are set out in the GSTC-Recognized Application.. They do not form part of the published GSTC Criteria.



## 4 GSTC-Recognized Framework

All GSTC-Recognized procedures are governed in the first instance by the GSTC Bylaws, section XI, and in the second instance by the GSTC-Recognized Manual. Relevant extracts from the Bylaws follow (section numbers as in original):

**Section 1. Process.** GSTC will (1) Recognize sustainable tourism standards intended for conformity assessment, including certification, and other users

1. Standard Recognition: GSTC shall determine whether a standard is equivalent to the GSTC Criteria and the associated GSTC benchmarking criteria; upon which it will be declared a “GSTC-Recognized Standard”;

**Section 2: The Panel.** The GSTC Accreditation Panel (“the Panel”) will operate the recognition program under the umbrella of GSTC. The Panel will:

1. Establish the requirements for recognizing standards, approving certification programs, and validating the accreditation of certification bodies, through Manuals for Recognition, and Accreditation; guidance documents, and other documentation of procedures;
2. Determine whether a contractor is qualified to review a standard’s conformity with the GSTC Criteria; review certification program procedures and processes; or award accreditation if this is not managed by ASI.
3. Declare standards to be “GSTC-Recognized”;

**Section 4: Decisions.** A quorum of three (3) Panel members is required to make decisions. Every attempt should be made to make decisions by consensus. In the absence of consensus, decisions shall be made by a two-thirds majority of members voting. Silence will be construed as approval, unless the member explicitly abstains. The Panel may delegate decisions to a rotating sub-panel of three members. The rotation shall include all members according to a pre-established roster. A member who does not participate shall be replaced by the next member on the roster.

**Section 5: Conflict of Interest.** Panel members may not be direct employees of an accreditation body, certification program, or conformity assessment body that seeks recognition, approval, endorsement, or accreditation from the GSTC, however members may offer advice or consultancy to such entities, provided that they recuse themselves from any decisions related to that entity for at least 24 months since their last activity. In the event of a real or perceived conflict of interest, a member of the panel shall recuse him or herself from decisions related to the potential conflict of interest. Under this Section, a conflict of interest is defined as voicing an opinion, voting or making a decision affecting organizations or activities in which a panel member has a continuing, recent past or forthcoming interest.

(Guidance: All members of the Panel or Secretariat who have a conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest must declare this in writing to the Accreditation Panel and shall not participate in any related decision.)

**Section 6: Terms and Conditions.** The Panel members shall serve two-year terms and will meet in person or via e-mail and teleconferences. Meetings will be convened by the chair, by e-mail, with at least two weeks of anticipation. Written minutes of each meeting shall be taken and approved by the Panel members at the following meeting. All non-confidential information shall be made available to GSTC members. Honoraria, to be determined by the GSTC Board, may be paid to Panel members per decision or per meeting or both.

## 5 GSTC-Recognized Process

This section describes the process by which a standard will be evaluated to determine its equivalency to the GSTC Criteria Components in order to achieve GSTC-Recognized status.<sup>7</sup>

### 5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 An important purpose of GSTC recognition of standards is to assure tourism stakeholders that recognized standards, when conformed to, result in travel and tourism operations that meet the basic requirements of sustainable tourism.
- 5.1.2 To be GSTC-Recognized, a standard must be equivalent to the relevant GSTC Criteria. Matching a standard's criteria with each of the GSTC Criteria Components shall provide guidance as to whether or not a standard is considered to be equivalent.
- 5.1.3 After the standard has gained GSTC-Recognized status, and if the Certification Program performs third-party audits and using their GSTC Recognized standard, the Certification Program is encouraged to apply for GSTC Accreditation. For information on GSTC Accreditation, consult the GSTC Accreditation Manual as posted on [www.gstccouncil.org](http://www.gstccouncil.org).

### 5.2 Requirements for Standard Owners

- 5.2.1 A standard's owner shall demonstrate legal ownership of, or the right to use, the standard to be assessed.
- 5.2.2 The standard owner shall have documented rules for the updating of the standard, including how the standard will be reviewed to ensure continued equivalency with the GSTC Criteria Components if either the standard or the GSTC Criteria Components are changed.
- 5.2.3 Any changes in the standard and requirements will be communicated to the GSTC.
- 5.2.4 The standard owner may provide guidance on the standard to clients and other interested parties

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<sup>7</sup> Equivalent standards might have differences in presentation and even in substance, e.g. in explanatory notes, guidance on how to fulfil the requirements of the standard, preferences for alternatives and varieties. Equivalency for purposes of GSTC Recognized includes harmonized, unified, identical, unilaterally-aligned, and comparable standards. (ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.8, and 6.9)

- 5.2.5 The conformity of the standard owner with criteria set out in this section shall be assessed by the GSTC in the same way that equivalency of the standard is assessed (see Section 5.8).
- 5.2.6 The GSTC-Recognized Application evaluation report shall have a section which evaluates the conformity of the standard owner with the requirements set out in this section. Should the standard owner not conform to requirements of this section, the areas of non-conformity shall be noted in the evaluation report.
- 5.2.7 The GSTC Accreditation Panel may decline to approve a standard applying for recognition should the owner not conform to requirements set out in this section.

### 5.3 Requirements for Standards

- 5.3.1 The sustainable tourism standard to be assessed shall be documented and be capable of use as a standard to certify clients conforming to sustainable tourism principles and practices.
- 5.3.2 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.
- 5.3.3 The application for GSTC-Recognized shall indicate the scope of the standard (e.g. entire businesses, individual hotels only, destinations, or specific tours, etc.) and its geographic coverage.
- 5.3.4 The standard's coverage and content shall be as consistent as possible with the GSTC Criteria Components.
- 5.3.5 Standard owners are encouraged to go beyond the requirements of the GSTC Criteria Components in including additional criteria, local adaptation, or sector specificity.
- 5.3.6 The content of the standard may take into account local and regional differences, including economic, social and ecological realities or regulatory conditions.

(Guidance: Each of the GSTC Criteria Components, based on the GSTC Criteria, should be reflected in one or more criteria of the sustainable tourism standard. However, because the GSTC Criteria indicate the minimum requirements for application worldwide, it is expected, but not required, that the sustainable tourism standard may have additional criteria to reflect local cultural and environmental conditions, as well as others specific to the types of activities indicated by the scope of the sustainable tourism standard.)

- 5.3.7 The standard may differ from the GSTC Criteria Components in the way it is structured and expressed, but should avoid conflicting and inconsistent use of terminology and definitions.

- 5.3.8 It is not necessary for the criteria of the sustainable tourism standard to follow the same sequence as those of the GSTC Criteria, nor use the same words or language.
- 5.3.9 Where the wording or intent of a criterion is significantly different from the corresponding criterion of the GSTC Criteria, the applicant will be required to explain in what way 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.
- 5.3.10 Standard content shall be informed by any guidance provided by the GSTC to assist standard owners and the GSTC Accreditation Panel in considering equivalency between standards and the GSTC Criteria Components
- 5.3.11 Where the GSTC has published indicators or guidance for GSTC Criteria relating to the relevant tourism industry sector(s) to which the standard applies, these indicators or guidance shall be taken as non-exclusive interpretative guidance.
- 5.3.12 For each criterion in the Standard, the applicant must 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<sup>8</sup>. However, for the certification programme to be awarded GSTC-Accredited status, conformity with at least one of the criteria matching each of the GSTC Criteria must be mandatory in order to demonstrate that all certified businesses and activities comply with all the GSCT Criteria.
- 5.3.13 The content of the standard shall be publicly available on the Internet and easily accessible without charge.

(Guidance: Application for certification must not be a requirement in order to obtain the standard. In addition to being made publicly available on the Internet, the sustainable tourism standard to be evaluated may also be published in a form that is readily accessible to interested parties and obtainable in printed form on a cost recovery basis. If necessary in order to protect Intellectual Property Rights, performance indicators and/or evaluation/verification criteria may be retained as confidential information to be made available to candidates for certification or verification.)

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<sup>8</sup> i.e. where a tourism enterprise may not be required to conform to all the standard's requirements in order to be certified (for example by allowing partial conformity or through the use of scores)

## 5.4 Non-applicability or Omission of Criteria

- 5.4.1 Where a standard fails to cover one or more of the GSTC Criteria, the reasons and justification for this omission must be clearly stated and documented.
- 5.4.2 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.
- 5.4.3 A standard (or any guidance attached to it) may also indicate that certain criteria, including those that are equivalent to particular GSTC criteria, may not always be applicable. In this case, the practice shall be described in the standard, guidelines, or a policy document. The circumstances, reasons and justification for this deemed non-applicability must be clearly stated and documented.
- 5.4.4 Reasons and justification for omission of criteria or deemed non-applicability may include:
- Evidence of complete lack of relevance of a particular criterion to local circumstances or industry sector
  - Evidence that the application of a particular GSTC criterion may be impossible, illegal or unreasonable<sup>9</sup>
  - Evidence of coverage by legislation and regulation that is fully enforced and universally complied with in the countries covered. This is further elaborated in Section 5.5 below.
- 5.4.5 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 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.
- 5.4.6 Standards that are used in more than one country must have criteria that match each GSTC Criterion, except as above.

## 5.5 Reliance on Legislation

- 5.5.1 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.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, the requirements for local hiring and purchasing might be considered inapplicable for a certification program applied exclusively in Antarctica

5.5.2 In this case:

- a) the specific law(s) must be identified;
- b) the laws must be enforced; and
- c) the standard or the auditors' verification manual must require demonstrated compliance with applicable laws.

5.5.3 Convincing evidence will be required. Acceptable evidence may include:

- (a) a criterion that fully matches GSTC Criterion A.2 requiring compliance with relevant legislation;
- (b) a requirement for a legally-binding sworn statement by the organization to be certified with respect to compliance with specific, named laws and regulations;
- (c) text from the auditors' manual or verification criteria indicating that compliance with specific, named laws and regulations will be verified during the audit.

5.5.4 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.

## 5.6 GSTC-Recognized Application

5.6.1 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.

5.6.2 The standard owner shall complete the sections of the form "GSTC-Recognized Application" relating to the requirements for ownership and operation of the standard and certification scheme.

5.6.3 The standard owner shall indicate the degree of correspondence between its own standard and the GSTC Criteria Components, through completing a matrix provided in the application designed to map the requirements of the standard against the GSTC Criteria Components.

5.6.4 In completing the GSTC-Application, the standard owner:

- may be required to justify their belief that any or all of the requirements of its standard correspond to the GSTC Criteria Components.
- shall justify any variations between their standard and the relevant GSTC Criteria.

5.6.5 Where a standard owner believes that there is justification for non-inclusion of a GSTC Criteria or Component of the GSTC Criteria in its standard, it may indicate this. In all such cases it shall provide a written, evidence-based justification for this non-inclusion.

- 5.6.6 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 enterprise covered by the certification scheme.
- 5.6.7 Justification shall not be based on a difference in the meaning and coverage of sustainable tourism between the certification scheme owner and the GSTC.
- 5.6.8 In completing the form “GSTC-Recognized Application”, the standard owner shall undertake to:
- Inform the GSTC Accreditation Panel of any substantial changes to the ownership of the standard.
  - Give the GSTC any updated version of its standard within 10 days of it being updated.
  - Abide by GSTC’s requirements for GSTC-Recognized status.
  - Follow the procedures set out in Section 7 in the event of a complaint or an appeal.

## 5.7 GSTC-Recognized Application Documentation

The following documentation must be completed and sent to the GSTC for both recognition of a certification scheme owner and recognition of a standard:

- 5.7.1 A GSTC-Recognized Application. Current versions of the GSTC-Recognized Application are available to download from the GSTC website, or available from the GSTC on request.
- 5.7.2 The form includes a matrix for comparison of the standard with the GSTC Criteria Components. The comparison matrix must be completed in English.
- 5.7.3 The standard owner must provide a copy of the standard, in its original language. Where the standard's original language is not English, it must be translated to English and a certificate of translation (or equivalent justification of the translation accuracy) must be provided.
- 5.7.4 All other relevant documents required to show conformity to GSTC requirements.

## 5.8 GSTC Assessment of GSTC-Recognized Applications

- 5.8.1 The completed application form together with all the documentation requested shall be reviewed for completeness by GSTC technical staff, who may request further information and documentation.
- 5.8.2 Once satisfied that the application is complete, GSTC will issue an invoice to the standard owner. GSTC will only process the Application once the relevant application fee has been paid.

- 5.8.3 A member of GSTC technical staff will be appointed to undertake an assessment of the standard against the GSTC Criteria Components. In cases of conflicts of interest, or the appearance thereof, GSTC may identify an alternative assessor with appropriate qualifications.
- 5.8.4 The appointed assessor(s) shall undertake an assessment of the equivalency of the standard against the relevant GSTC Criteria. The assessor(s) shall:
- Draw the attention of the standard owner to any GSTC Criteria Components where the standard appears not to be equivalent and ask for further clarification if required.
  - Ask the standard owner to comment 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.
  - Write an evaluation report based on the assessment of the equivalency of the standard to the GSTC Criteria Components.
  - Submit the report to the standard owner, with an invitation to amend any areas where equivalency has not yet been established, prior to further consideration by GSTC. The standard owner may also be invited to agree to address potential conditions to allow the correction of any areas where equivalency has not been established and which may require action subsequent to further consideration by GSTC-Recognized.
  - Update the evaluation report on receipt of the requested information from the standard owner.
- 5.8.5 The assessor(s) shall include in the final evaluation report a recommendation on whether or not GSTC-Recognized status should be granted to the standard.
- 5.8.6 A positive recommendation shall be made if the assessor(s) believe(s) that the applicant's standard is equivalent to the GSTC Criteria Components.
- 5.8.7 A recommendation not to grant GSTC-Recognized status shall be accompanied by a summary of those areas where it is considered that equivalence has not been demonstrated, and of the views of the standard owner on equivalency of those areas.

## 5.9 GSTC Accreditation Panel Decision

- 5.9.1 The Chair of the GSTC Accreditation Panel shall recruit three panel members to consider the application for GSTC-Recognized on behalf of the Accreditation Panel. A Chair of the sub-panel will be selected by mutual agreement.
- 5.9.2 The sub-panel shall review the evaluation report and make a decision on whether or not to grant GSTC-Recognized status to the standard.



- 5.9.3 The sub-panel may decide to grant GSTC-Recognized (Conditional) status if there are a limited number of GSTC Criteria Components which it considers can be rectified by the standard owner within a given period.
- 5.9.4 The Chair of the Accreditation Panel shall inform the standard owner of the GSTC Accreditation Panel's decision.
- 5.9.5 If the decision is not to grant GSTC-Recognized status, the GSTC Accreditation Panel shall specify what if any steps the standard owner must take before GSTC-Recognized can be granted.
- 5.9.6 Should the standard owner subsequently submit further information or a revised standard, the process shall recommence.
- 5.9.7 If the decision is to grant GSTC-Recognized (Conditional), with conditions to be met by a specified date, the standard owner shall:
- Commit to meet the conditions by the specified date;
  - Agree to submit evidence to the GSTC that the conditions have been met prior to the specified date.
  - Acknowledge that no publicity or claims may be made about the GSTC-Recognized (Conditional) status;
  - Acknowledge that GSTC-Recognized (Conditional) status will be withdrawn if the conditions have not been met by the specified date;
- 5.9.8 A fee may be applicable for re-lodgement and re-assessment of a standard which has received GSTC-Recognized (Conditional) status.
- 5.9.9 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.
- 5.9.10 GSTC-Recognized status applies to the English version of the standard that has been provided by the applicant. 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.
- 5.9.11 The results of the evaluation of the standard shall be confidential, available only to the GSTC Secretariat and Accreditation Panel and to the applicant. Only those standards that are GSTC-Recognized will be publicly identified.
- 5.9.12 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 applicant has not completed the process; the standard has been GSTC Recognized (Conditional); the standard has not achieved GSTC-Recognized status.

- 5.9.13 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 Criteria and invite their involvement in the revision process.

## 6 Renewal Process

6.1.1 GSTC-Recognized status will apply to a Standard until the earlier occurrence of the following:

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

### 6.2 Amendment of GSTC Criteria

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

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

6.2.3 They may be required to complete a new GSTC-Recognized Application.

6.2.4 A GSTC-Recognized (Renewal for Revised GSTC Criteria) may set out those criteria which have been revised or added in a short form matrix (including the full text of the individual criteria and components).

### 6.3 Amendment of a GSTC-Recognized Standard

6.3.1 Should a GSTC-Recognized standard be amended by a standard owner, a copy shall be provided to the GSTC Accreditation Panel within a period of 10 days.

6.3.2 The GSTC Accreditation Panel 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.

### 6.4 Ongoing Conformity of a Standard

6.4.1 Should the GSTC Accreditation Panel have reason to be concerned about the ongoing conformity of a standard already recognized as equivalent with the GSTC Criteria Components, 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-Recognized status may be withdrawn.

## 7 Appeals Procedure

### 7.1 Complaints

- 7.1.1 Any complaints made about matters relating to GSTC-Recognized processes shall be submitted to the Secretariat of the GSTC.
- 7.1.2 The GSTC Secretariat shall forward complaints to the GSTC Accreditation Panel, who will discuss the complaint with the complainant and / or standard owner and agree appropriate action.
- 7.1.3 The GSTC shall record all actions taken and communicate the outcome of the complaint to the complainant.

### 7.2 Appeal from a standard owner regarding a decision on GSTC-Recognized status

- 7.2.1 An appeal by a standard owner against a GSTC-Recognized decision may only be made in relation to the following events:
  - Refusal by the GSTC to accept its application for GSTC-Recognized;
  - Refusal by the GSTC to proceed with a recognition evaluation;
  - A decision to refuse, suspend or withdraw GSTC-Recognized status or any other action that impedes the attainment of recognition.
- 7.2.2 The grounds for an appeal are limited to:
  - Failure of the GSTC to follow its own procedures or meet the requirements of the GSTC Recognition Manual; or
  - The GSTC having incorrectly interpreted the requirements for recognition.
- 7.2.3 Notifications of an appeal shall be directed to the GSTC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and received within 30 days of the GSTC decision being communicated to the standard owner. The appeal notice has no a 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.
- 7.2.4 The GSTC CEO shall verify that the conditions for appeal set out above have been met and, if not, shall so advise the appellant.

- 7.2.5 If and once conditions have been met, the GSTC CEO shall formally acknowledge receipt of the appeal.
- 7.2.6 An Appeals Panel shall be established by the GSTC Board.
- 7.2.7 Terms of Reference for the Appeals Panel and its operating procedures are described below, but may be amended at the sole discretion of the Appeals Panel to suit the nature of the appeal.
- 7.2.8 The decision of the Appeals Panel shall be binding on all parties and no further appeal on the same matter shall be accepted.
- 7.2.9 The Secretary of the Appeals Panel shall be responsible for keeping records of the appeal. On the instruction of the Chair of the Appeals Panel, these may be sealed to protect confidentiality.

### 7.3 Review of Appeals

- 7.3.1 Records of appeals shall be reviewed at meetings of the GSTC Accreditation Panel.
- 7.3.2 Should the GSTC Accreditation Panel request action from the GSTC in addition to that already taken, or actions of a more general nature, then these actions shall be undertaken by the GSTC.

### 7.4 Appeals Panel Terms of Reference

- 7.4.1 Up to three members will be appointed to each Appeals Panel, at the invitation of the GSTC CEO on behalf of the GSTC Board.
- 7.4.2 Members will have knowledge of accreditation and standards and may seek additional advice as they see fit.
- 7.4.3 Persons not from the GSTC Accreditation Panel shall be enrolled as members of the Appeals Panel, ensuring that the Appeals Panel has the expertise, balance of interests and impartiality required to make a decision.
- 7.4.4 Members of the Appeals Panel shall be independent and impartial, with no conflict of interest to the appeal in question.
- 7.4.5 Members of the Appeals Panel will be requested to sign a confidentiality agreement if they have not already done so.
- 7.4.6 The appellant will have opportunity to object to membership of the Appeals Panel on grounds of conflict of interest. The Appeals Panel shall consider such a challenge, but will not be bound to change its membership.
- 7.4.7 One member of the Appeals Panel shall be appointed by members of the Panel to act as its Chair.

## 7.5 Functions of the Appeals Panel

7.5.1 The functions of the Appeals Panel will be as follows:

- To decide on the validity of the appeal made by the owner of a standard (the “Appellant”) against a decision of the GSTC on recognition of a standard.
- To make a binding decision on the appeal.
- To advise the parties of their final decision(s).

## 7.6 Procedure

7.6.1 The GSTC CEO shall appoint a staff member not directly involved with the appeal to act as Secretary to the Appeals Panel.

7.6.2 The GSTC CEO shall forward all information related to the appeal to members of the Appeals Panel.

7.6.3 The Chair of the Appeals Panel shall determine the most appropriate method to review the appeal. It may be conducted by conference call, email or by meeting.

7.6.4 Any party may be requested by the Appeals Panel to provide additional information, attend in person meetings (at each party’s cost) or participate in conference calls as required.

7.6.5 Parties may be asked by the Appeal Panel chair to present oral arguments at an in-person review meeting. Use of lawyers for this purpose is not allowed; the parties involved shall represent themselves.

7.6.6 Reasonable efforts shall be made to ensure that all parties have an opportunity to put their case to the Appeals Panel, with a general preference for the written form.

7.6.7 The Appeals Panel shall make its own operating rules and procedures as necessary.

7.6.8 The Appeals Panel shall bear in mind the grounds for appeal:

- Should the grounds for appeal be that the GSTC has failed to follow its own procedures, the Appeals Panel shall limit its investigation to whether or not the procedure has been followed.
- Where the procedure is unclear or is silent on a matter, the GSTC’s interpretation of a requirement shall prevail unless it is felt by the Appeals Panel to be against best practice for the standards and/or certification industry, or against the principles of natural justice;

- Should the grounds for appeal be that the GSTC has incorrectly interpreted a requirement of the GSTC Criteria Components, the GSTC International Standards Working Group shall be asked to provide an interpretation which shall be binding;
  - Should the grounds for appeal be that the GSTC has incorrectly interpreted a requirement of its own procedure, the GSTC Accreditation Panel shall be asked to provide an interpretation which shall be binding;
- 7.6.9 No timescales are defined but it is recommended that the appeal review is held within 60 days of the formation of the Appeals Panel, and the appeal decision be made within 30 days of the Appeals Panel's review.
- 7.6.10 While a consensus approach to decision making is desirable, if this is not possible the appeal decision shall be made by simple majority vote. In the event of a tied vote, the Chair of the Appeals Panel has a casting vote.
- 7.6.11 The Appeals Panel will communicate their decision, which will be binding, to all parties and no further appeal shall be permitted.
- 7.6.12 Copies of the decision of the Appeals Panel shall be forwarded to the appellant and GSTC personnel as appropriate by the Secretary of the Appeals Panel within seven days of the decision being made.
- 7.6.13 The GSTC shall be responsible to ensure that the appellant undertakes any required actions, and for taking any actions for which it is itself responsible.
- 7.6.14 The GSTC shall verify that effective actions have been taken.
- 7.6.15 Where required the GSTC CEO will take follow-up action.
- 7.6.16 On completion of the appeal all records will be forwarded to the Secretary of the Appeals Panel for retention.

## 7.7 Costs

- 7.7.1 The cost of hearing an appeal shall be determined by the GSTC.
- 7.7.2 The Appeals Panel shall determine the apportionment of the costs of the appeal.
- 7.7.3 In apportioning costs, the Appeals Panel shall commence with the assumption that costs should be borne equally between the Appellant and the GSTC.
- 7.7.4 Should the Appeals Panel consider that the appeal is frivolous and without merit, it may require the appellant to pay a proportion up to 100% of the costs.

- 7.7.5 Should the Appeals Panel 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 up to 100% of the costs.
- 7.7.6 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 having been notified.



## 8 Fees

### 8.1 GSTC-Recognized Application

- 8.1.1 A standard owner will be required to pay a fee for the process of recognizing its standard.
- 8.1.2 Fees must be paid upon application and before the GSTC-Recognized Application is considered.
- 8.1.3 Contact the GSTC Technical Director at [td@gstcouncil.org](mailto:td@gstcouncil.org) for current fees. Consult the website for information on GSTC Accreditation including why and how to apply.

### 8.2 Pre-Lodgement Advice

- 8.2.1 A standard owner may (for an agreed fee) request pre-lodgement support/advice by GSTC technical staff. Technical staff may provide comments on a standard, or comment on a draft GSTC-Recognized Application.
- 8.2.2 Such advice is offered to support standard owners in achieving GSTC-Recognized status. However the advice is offered as officer level advice and is not to be considered as GSTC Accreditation Panel policy nor a commitment or liability for positive consideration.
- 8.2.3 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.

## 9 Publicity and Promotion

### 9.1 GSTC Promotion of GSTC-Recognized Standards

- 9.1.1 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.
- 9.1.2 The GSTC will make publicly available 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.
- 9.1.3 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 Certifying Bodies and their certificate-holders of GSTC-Accredited certification programs and bodies than to GSTC-Recognized standards.

### 9.2 Promotion by GSTC-Recognized Standard

- 9.2.1 A GSTC-Recognized standard is not entitled to use any specific GSTC logo, but may make general statements that its standard is GSTC-Recognized. It may not use the terms "Accredited" or similar implication that GSTC has in any way confirmed the efficacy of the Standards owner's certification policies and procedures.
- 9.2.2 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 set of Standards and NOT to any certification processes nor to the Certifying Body's brand.

For example, statements such as the following cannot be made

*"Our Certification Body or Certification Program is Recognized by GSTC".*

An example of an appropriate statement is "Our sustainable tourism standards have achieved GSTC-Recognized status for their equivalence to the GSTC Criteria"

### 9.3 GSTC Promotion and Market Access Benefits

- 9.3.1 The GSTC publishes a summary of the promotion and market access benefits on [www.gstcouncil.org](http://www.gstcouncil.org).

## 10 GSTC Glossary of Relevant Terms

10.1.1 A full glossary of sustainability terms used by the GSTC may be found at <https://www.gstccouncil.org/gstc-criteria/glossary/>

10.1.2 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

Term	Definition
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Term	Definition
Accreditation	Accreditation is the formal declaration by a neutral third party that the certification program is administered in a way that meets the relevant norms or standards of certification program.
Accreditation body	An independent entity that operates in conformity with the standard ISO/IEC 17011 and that is technically competent to accredit CBs to perform conformity assessment using a GSTC-Recognized standard. Abbreviated “AB”.
Audit	A systematic and comprehensive process of investigation through checking documents, conducting interviews, observation and other means
CB	See “Certification Body” or Conformity assessment body
Certification	Voluntary, third-party assessment, through an audit, of a tourism enterprise for conformity to a standard
Certification body	A body that verifies that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person or body are fulfilled.
Certification scheme	A specific, named programme of certification resulting in the granting of a certificate of conformity to a tourism enterprise by a CB along with the right to display a mark associated with the scheme. It is defined by ISO as “[the rules, procedures, and management for carrying out certification] related to specified [services], to which the same specified requirements, specific rules and procedures apply.” <i>After draft ISO/IEC 17067:2013</i>
Certification scheme owner	A person or other legal entity who owns the intellectual property associated with a sustainable tourism certification scheme
Client	A tourism enterprise that purchases a certification service from a CB
Conflict of interest	A situation where the capacity for objectivity of a person or body is at risk
Conformity assessment	A process of checking and verifying the extent to which a tourism enterprise or certification scheme meets a specified standard and criteria
Consultancy	The provision, for a fee (directly or indirectly), of expertise to a tourism enterprise or CB on the design, management and operation of their services

Term	Definition
Equivalent standard	A standard whose requirements have a direct correspondence with the requirements with the GSTC Criteria Components. The standard may differ in presentation, or even in substance, e.g. in providing guidance on how to meet requirements. Equivalency for purposes of GSTC- Recognized includes harmonized, unified, identical, unilaterally-aligned, and comparable standards. (ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.8, and 6.9).
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Council
GSTC Accreditation	Accreditation provided by an accreditation body that is appointed by the GSTC.
GSTC Accreditation Panel	An independent body of the GSTC that is technically competent and impartial, that will make decisions on recognizing sustainable tourism standards and approving certification programmes, and may endorse accreditation body recommendations to accredit CBs.
GSTC Criteria	GSTC Criteria are a common understanding of sustainable tourism, and are the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach. They are organized around four main themes: effective sustainability planning; maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community; enhancing cultural heritage; and reducing negative impacts to the environment. Although the criteria are initially intended for use by the accommodation and tour operator sectors, they have applicability to the entire tourism industry.
GSTC Criteria Components	The elements of each individual GSTC Criterion which are used to assess equivalence of a tourism standard with the principles of sustainable tourism as identified by the GSTC through the GSTC Criteria.
GSTC requirements for CBs	The requirements that a CB shall meet in terms of its structure, management and operational procedures
GSTC-Recognized standard	A sustainable tourism standard that has been evaluated by the GSTC as being equivalent to the GSTC Criteria Components.
Impartiality	The ability to make judgements and take decisions that are objective, based strictly on facts and free from other influences
Non-conformity	The absence of, or failure to meet, an element of a standard or performance criteria
Standard owner	A person or other legal entity who owns the intellectual property associated with a sustainable tourism standard

Term	Definition
Sustainable tourism standard	A set of rules and guidelines that define the requirements of tourism enterprises in delivering sustainable tourism. For GSTC-Recognized status, the standard shall be equivalent to the GSTC Criteria Components.
Third party	Carried out by an individual or body that is independent of the entity being certified or accredited.
Tourism enterprise	An entity providing one or more services to tourists.
Unilaterally aligned standard	A standard that is equivalent or comparable to the relevant GSTC Criteria Components but contains further requirements not contained in the GSTC Criteria Components.

## Appendix A – Information on Applications for GSTC Recognized

Current versions of the GSTC & GSTC-D Recognized Application (Matrix) are available to download from the GSTC website, or available from the GSTC on request.

In order to be assessed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) for possible recognition of a sustainable tourism standard **for hotels and/or tour operators** and destinations the standard owner must:

- Complete this application form;
- Complete the matrix for standard comparison with the GSTC Industry or Destinations Criteria;
- Send to the GSTC as part of the application:
  - The standard, in its native language and in English translation.
  - The completed comparison matrix, in English.
  - All other relevant documents required to show conformity to GSTC requirements.

All these documents need to be submitted to: [td@GSTCouncil.org](mailto:td@GSTCouncil.org). GSTC will only process this application upon receipt of the above requirements. Once GSTC can confirm that the application is complete, and before assessment can be commenced, the applicant will be required to pay the fee to cover the costs of review of the standard.

To achieve GSTC-Recognized Status, the sustainable tourism standard to be assessed must:

- be documented as a formal written standard;
- be able to be used as a standard to certify or verify that clients conform to sustainable tourism principles and practices;
- be written in a form that permits a clear decision on whether a business or activity complies or not with each criterion;
- make the content of the standard publicly available on the Internet and easily accessible without charge;
- have at least one criterion equivalent to each of the GSTC Industry Criteria or adequately justify differences and omissions; and
- comply with the rules governing GSTC-Recognition of standards in GSTC-Recognized Manual version 3.4 or its subsequent replacement.

### Criteria Versions

The current GSTC-Recognized Application is based on the GSTC-Recognized Manual version 3.4 dated August 2017 and the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Industry, version 3.2, dated 20th December 2016.

### Summary of Application Process

Please refer to the GSTC-Recognized Manual version 3.4 for the complete process, policies and procedures applicable. In summary, the process is:

- Applicant lodges documentation, GSTC Technical Staff confirm a complete application and raise invoice.
- Applicant pays fee.
- GSTC Technical Staff undertake initial assessment.
- This draft assessment is provided to the Applicant:
  - If any GSTC Criteria (or components) are not matched by equivalent criteria in the Applicant's standard, GSTC Technical Staff will correspond with the Applicant and the Applicant may be invited to revise their Standard and/or application to maximise equivalence.
- GSTC Technical Staff finalise the assessment, complete an evaluation report which includes a recommendation, and forward this to the GSTC Accreditation Panel.
- The GSTC Accreditation Panel Chair appoints three panel members to consider the evaluation report and recommendation. The Panel then reviews the evaluation report and considers the recommendation that has been made in order to reach their decision, which may be:
  - to confer GSTC-Recognized status without conditions;
  - to confer GSTC-Recognized (Conditional) status, setting out those GSTC Criteria for which there is currently no equivalent criterion in the Applicant's Standard; or
  - to decline to confer GSTC-Recognized status, with a summary of the GSTC Criteria for which there is no equivalent criterion in the Applicant's Standard.
- The Chair of the GSTC Accreditation Panel then provides a letter communicating the result to the Applicant. In the case of conferring GSTC-Recognized (Conditional) status, the Applicant will be invited to take steps to conform within a given period at which point they will be considered for the award of full GSTC-Recognized status.


## Fees For GSTC Recognition

Contact the GSTC Technical Director at [td@gstccouncil.org](mailto:td@gstccouncil.org) for current fees.



## GSTC Criteria Equivalency Matrix - Guide


Applicants only complete the columns with black text and white background.

 <b>GSTC Criteria Equivalency Matrix - For Completion By Applicant</b>		Submission Date: DD - MM - YYYY				
GSTC Criteria Identifier	GSTC Criteria Component	CB Criteria Identifier	Standard Criteria Text	Mandatory		Explanation and Justification
			Include a text of all criteria equivalent to GSTC criteria, may be more than one criterion	Yes	No	
<b>SECTION A: Criteria Section Name</b>						
<b>A.1 GSTC Criteria Tekst</b>						
A.1.1	Each GSTC Criterion has one or more Components. The Applicant's Standard must have a criterion to meet each component	Add a unique identification	The applicant should include full text of each criterion which demonstrates equivalency to the GSTC Criteria Component. For example: 4.3.1 The enterprise records consumption of electricity and fossil fuels on a monthly basis.	Yes	No	The Applicant should include any relevant commentary and any guidelines, policies or indicators for each relevant criterion. Should there be any reliance on legislation, the clauses of any relevant legislation should be included.

## GSTC Criteria Equivalency Matrix - Example

From the examples below it can be seen how one single criterion in the Applicant's Standard may meet a GSTC Criteria Component, or how multiple criteria can be listed to show coverage of aspects of each GSTC Component.

NOTE: A single clause of an Applicant's Standard may be listed more than once against any relevant GSTC Criteria Components to which it is equivalent.

 <b>GSTC Criteria Equivalency Matrix - For Completion By Applicant</b>		Submission Date: DD - MM - YYYY				
GSTC Criteria Identifier	GSTC Criteria Component	CB Criteria Identifier	Standard Criteria Text	Mandatory		Explanation and Justification
			Include an unique identifying number and text of all criteria equivalent to GSTC criteria, may be more than one criterion	Yes	No	
D.1.3.1	Energy consumption is measured by type.	4.3.1	The enterprise records consumption of electricity and fossil fuels on a monthly basis.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	The Applicant should include any relevant commentary and any guidelines, policies or indicators for each relevant criteria. Should there be any reliance on legislation, the clauses of any relevant legislation should be included.
D.1.3.2	Steps have been taken to minimize overall consumption of energy.	4.3.2	A baseline for energy consumption by the enterprise has been established and demonstrates a decrease in energy consumption per guest night.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Performance must demonstrate reduction.
		4.3.6	The enterprise has implemented a policy for energy conservation, with concrete goals, a calendar for implementation, and personnel assigned.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	This criterion establishes the methodology for reducing energy consumption.