



Development of the  
Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

**Attraction Criteria**

**Terms of Reference**

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

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

**Document Control**

This is version 1.0 of the Terms of Reference for the GSTC Attraction Criteria, 2023

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Development of GSTC Attraction Criteria

The purpose of this Terms of Reference document is to set out the need and requirements for the development of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria for Attraction (hereafter referred to as GSTC Attraction Criteria) and the processes to be followed.

The GSTC Attraction Criteria will be developed with the input of relevant stakeholders in the field of Attraction.

This document provides an overview of the background and contexts of the Attraction Criteria including a) the proposed scope and the intended geographic application; b) justification of the need for the standard including: an explanation of whether the proposed standard will meet an expressed need; and documentation of other standards operating or in development that meets all or in part of the expressed need; c) clear social, environmental and economic outcomes that the standard seeks to achieve and how those are linked to the GSTC's intended change; d) an assessment of risks in implementing the standard and how to mitigate these, including: identification of factors that could have a negative impact on the ability of the standard to achieve its outcomes; unintended consequences that could arise from its implementation; and possible corrective actions that could be taken to address these potential risks. (ISEAL Impacts Code 7.6 and 7.4); and e) decision-making procedures, including how decisions are made and who makes them.

A final section of the document outlines the stages that will be followed in the revision process.

The whole process of development and revision will be overseen by the International Standards Committee (ISC) of the GSTC.

The development and content of these Terms of Reference meets the requirements of the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice (Version 6.0), referred to below.

## 1.2 ISEAL Standard-Setting Code

ISEAL is a non-governmental organization whose mission is to strengthen sustainability standards systems for the benefit of people and the environment. ISEAL is the global leader in

defining and communicating what good practice looks like for sustainability standards through guidance and credibility tools, which include three Codes of Good Practice. ISEAL is currently revising and integrating the ISEAL Impacts, Standard-Setting, and Assurance Codes, along with essential practices from the ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide, into one single Code of Good Practice<sup>1</sup>. The GSTC Attraction Criteria Development is developed based on the following three codes:

- ISEAL Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice Version 6.0,
- ISEAL Assurance Code of Good Practice Version 2.0, and
- ISEAL Impact Code of Good Practice Version 2.0.

ISEAL members include many of the world's most respected standard-setting organizations and accreditation bodies. They drive the sustainability standards movement forward across various sectors, improving its effectiveness and increasing its impact. To become a member, organizations must meet ISEAL's membership and code compliance requirements and progress through ISEAL's membership application process.

GSTC is currently a Community Member and aspires to make sure the development process follows the ISEAL Code of Good Practice: Setting Social and Environmental Standards, Version 6.0 – December 2014 for Attraction Criteria Development. Internally the development process and procedures follow the GSTC Standard Setting Manual version 3.0.

## 2 Background and Context

### 2.1 Attractions - towards a definition

A Tourist Attraction is a place of interest that is owned and/or managed by an identifiable entity for the purposes of attracting visitors, operating and delivering services and/or experiences including but not limited to recreation, leisure, natural, historical, cultural,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://iseal.org/get-involved/resources/iseal-code-good-practice-first-consultation-draft-excel>

▪ educational or religious experiences.

A destination is a geographic region that involves multiple businesses and a resident community. Tourists visit a destination for a range of experiences and amenities such as hotel accommodations, dining, tours, venues, sightseeing and attractions.

A sustainable set of criteria is to be developed for the Attraction that aligns with the prevailing goals and objectives of the GSTC.

Sustainable tourism requires an approach to tourism development and management that recognizes and responds to these responsibilities and opportunities. Given the ever-growing size of and the increasing demand for sustainable tourism, there is a need for global guidelines that inform sustainable practices that Attractions must follow.

To date there are no globally adopted standards or criteria for Attractions; even a common definition of the term is missing. With this project, GSTC aims to bring a common understanding and develop a sustainable set of standards of Attractions and guidelines that aligns with the prevailing goals and objectives of the GSTC.

## **2.2 The Global Sustainable Tourism Council**

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council is a global, multi-stakeholder membership organization dedicated to setting baseline sustainability standards for travel and tourism and applying the standards as an Accreditation Body that governs certification of sustainable products.

Born as a strategic coalition of partners (the UN Foundation, the UN Environmental Program, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Sabre Holdings and Rainforest Alliance, supported by many others), the GSTC brings together businesses, governments, non-governmental organizations, academia, individuals and communities engaged in and striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism. The GSTC serves as the international body for promoting education, understanding, and adoption of sustainable tourism practices.

GSTC's vision is for tourism to fulfill its potential as a vehicle for social, cultural, and economic good while removing and avoiding any negative impacts from its activities in terms of environmental and social impacts.

It seeks to achieve this by:

- developing global standards;
- serving as the Accreditation Body for sustainability in travel and tourism;
- helping destinations to become more sustainable;
- promoting market access; and
- increasing knowledge.

## 2.3 GSTC Criteria

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council currently has two sets of established and managed global sustainable standards, known as the GSTC Criteria. These are the globally-applicable guiding principles and minimum requirements that any tourism business or destination should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources, while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation. They were developed, and continue to be periodically revised, through extensive public consultation throughout the globe, in both developed and developing countries, striving to adhere to the Standard-Setting Code of the ISEAL Alliance. They serve as vital tools for elevating good practice and policy, as well as driving market demand, by all players in travel and tourism.

The GSTC Criteria have been built on decades of prior work and experience around the world, taking into account the numerous guidelines and standards for sustainable tourism from every continent.

They are arranged in four pillars:

1. Sustainable management.
2. Socioeconomic sustainability.
3. Cultural sustainability.
4. Environmental sustainability (resource consumption, reducing pollution, conserving biodiversity and landscapes).

The Criteria are the minimum, not the maximum, which businesses, governments, and destinations

should achieve to approach social, environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability. Since tourism destinations each have their own culture, environment, customs, and laws, the Criteria are designed to be adapted to local conditions and supplemented by additional criteria for the specific location and activity.

The GSTC Strategic Plan 2020 states that GSTC will continue to promote widespread application of the GSTC Criteria as global baseline standards and maintain them for relevance to current market conditions.

The two sets of GSTC Criteria are:

1. **GSTC Industry Criteria**, abbreviated as GSTC-I, relating to the sustainable management of the private sector travel industry, focusing currently on Hotels and Tour Operators.
2. **GSTC Destination Criteria**, abbreviated as GSTC-D, relating to the sustainable management of tourism destinations and intended for public policy-makers and destination managers.

With the two sets of Criteria, GSTC intends to raise awareness and education levels of all travel and tourism players of sustainable tourism concepts in order to support sustainable consumption and production.

Both sets of Criteria, together with associated Performance Indicators, are publicly available for download from the GSTC website. While the official language of the GSTC Criteria is English, translations into a number of languages are available. GSTC-I was last revised in 2016, while GSTC-D was first released in 2013 and updated in December 2019.

GSTC is developing the MICE Criteria, which started in April 2023 and the final Criteria will be publicly announced in February 2024.

## 3 GSTC Attraction Criteria

### 3.1 Need and Justification

The two existing GSTC Criteria sets can be used as a tool for businesses (hotel and tour operator) and destination management organizations to reflect upon the economic, social, and environmental impact arising from their activities. But clearly, there is a need to widen the scope of the GSTC Criteria. Given the ever-growing size of and the increasing demand for sustainable



tourism, there is a need for global guidelines that inform sustainable practices that Attractions should follow.

While the GSTC-I criteria cover many issues of direct relevance to the sustainable management of attractions, there are some aspects which require additional or stronger elements for its spatial significance, for example with respect to visitor and resource management as well as stewardship of its territory.

### 3.2 Scope of the Criteria

Based on the definition set out in 2.1 and with an aim to be inclusive, tourist attractions shall be categorized into the following 3 broad types and aims

Type	Main target
Nature & Parks	Mostly open natural environment (few facilities) & facility-oriented
Culture & History	Mostly open cultural environment (few facilities) & facility-oriented
Recreation & Leisure	Mostly facility-oriented

### 3.3 Objectives and Uses

The GSTC Attraction Criteria can be used in a variety of ways. For example, they may:

- serve as basic guidelines for developing and managing Attractions;
- help leisure and business travelers identify sound, safe and sustainable Attractions;
- serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize sustainable and safe attractions and inform the public regarding their sustainability;
- help certification programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly accepted baseline;
- offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a starting point for

- developing sustainable tourism requirements for Attractions;
  - serve as basic guidelines in hospitality schools or recreation-related institutions and education or training materials for attraction.

### 3.4 Outcomes

The intended outcome of the existence and application of the GSTC Attraction Criteria is for industry players to plan for more sustainable amusement parks, entertainments for recreation and shows, understand the basic elements for maintaining management processes for sustainability, and implement sustainable practices based on the Attraction Criteria.

GSTC is committed to ensuring that sustainable tourism best practices are adopted and implemented by the industry and the traveling public<sup>2</sup>. With the development of the Attraction Criteria, GSTC will add a new training program on Attractions. This is an expansion of the Sustainable Tourism Training Program which will provide more access to more tourism players.

The above are the GSTC’s intended impacts through the activities of Global Criteria Development and training on the Criteria.

### 3.5 Risks

Risks may arise from the use of the GSTC Attraction Criteria. These are summarized in the table below, with mitigation approaches identified (Table 1).

Table 1. Risk and mitigation plan.

RISK	MITIGATION
Many attractions may not be reflected fully in the criteria or indicators with their unique characteristics.	GSTC will develop indicators that reflect different characteristics of the various types of attractions, as the criteria may be similar for

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gstccouncil.org/about/gstc-impact/>

	any type of attraction.
The criteria may allow some organizations, especially small and micro businesses in Attraction, to fall short in meeting aspects of tourism sustainability.	Ensure that the criteria are fully comprehensive of sustainability issues and are sufficiently challenging to stimulate improvements regardless of business size.
Already existing standards may perceive the new GSTC Attraction Criteria as a competitor.	GSTC will position the GSTC Attraction Criteria in the market and provide clear guidance on who they best apply to. Also, GSTC will seek effective ways to recognize the existing standards as long as they are equivalent to the global requirements.
Not many globally acknowledged incentives in the tourism market.	Develop a global sustainable Attraction Certification Program under the GSTC Sustainable Tourism Certification Scheme.

## 4 The Standard-Setting Process

### 4.1 Approach to the GSTC Attraction Criteria Development

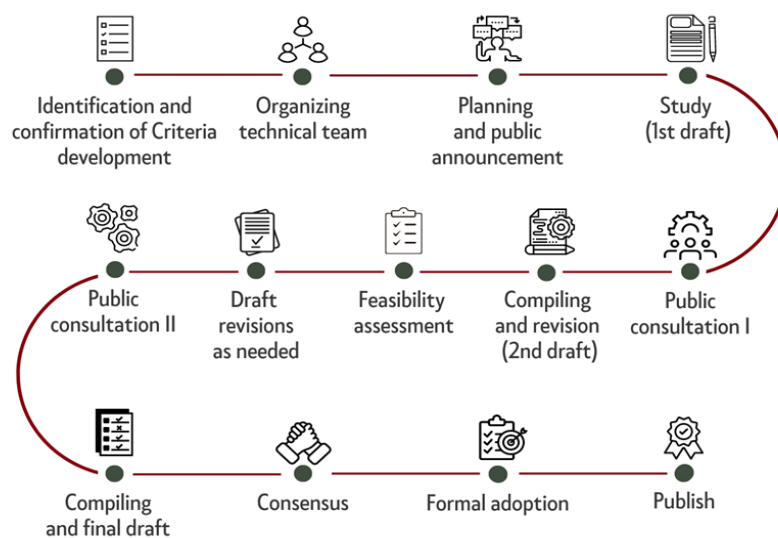
It is proposed to take a practical approach to developing standards for Attraction to respond to the demand of the market. With the Attraction Criteria, GSTC promises to act on its mission to deliver on impacts such as:

- o inform Attractions of issues and actions to engage in sustainable events;
- o provide effective guidelines to the marketplace;
- o to comply with universal principles.

Instead of drafting a completely new standard, the Attraction Criteria will start off by using the existing GSTC Criteria as its basis. Already two workshops were conducted in Gunsan, South Korea in September 2022 and Sevilla, Spain in December 2022 to gather the very first comments on the Attraction Criteria.

### 4.2 The Criteria Development Process

A visual for the Criteria development process is shown below (Figure 1).



The tasks by each step are as follows:

## **1) Confirmation of the Attraction Criteria Development**

- Public announcement of the collaboration between the GSTC and key contributor(s) on the development of the Attraction Criteria ("Public Announcement").

## **2) Organizing the Attraction Criteria Development Technical Team**

- GSTC internal experts and external organizations/expert(s) from the Attraction business (GSTC Assurance Director manages the process and experts work on making an initial draft).

## **3) Planning and public announcement: Developing Term of Reference following the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code**

- Summary of the TOR for the standard, including the proposed scope, objectives, and justification of the need for the standard; b. steps in the standard-setting process, including timelines and clearly identified opportunities for contributing; and c. decision-making procedures, including how decisions are made and who makes them.

## **4) Study of the 1<sup>st</sup> draft: Preliminary study and preparation of a draft outline**

- Compilation of the criteria for all known standards and guidelines for the sector and related activities to determine common elements.
- Sharing preliminary results (a draft set of criteria) with the GSTC internal expert groups and outside experts in the sector.

## **5) Public consultation I: Public consultation on the 1<sup>st</sup> draft**

- Develop a list of Attraction stakeholder groups within the subsectors, based on the Criteria's scope.
- Make separate lists of Key stakeholder groups that are directly affected.
- Online and Offline consultation.
- GSTC website (inviting all stakeholders' inputs).
- Reaching out to under-engaged and under-represented groups by two international NGOs
- Focused group workshop, interview, email communication, etc. (i.e., practitioners in the

- relevant sectors).

**6) Compiling and revision of 2<sup>nd</sup> draft**

- Compiling all comments from the consultation.
- Refining the draft for feasibility assessment.

**7) Feasibility assessment: Applying the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft to the field and refining it and preparing 3<sup>rd</sup> draft development for public consultation**

- The systematic analysis and thoughtful evaluation of a potential Criteria's benefits to the field as well as anticipated impediments to their adoption and implementation by the relevant sector(s) (feasibility and auditability of requirements in the draft Criteria).
- Voluntary participation from Attraction businesses.
- Self-assessment.
- Local experts' assessment.
- Technical Team.

Type	Main target	Geographical scope	sociocultural	economical
Nature & Parks	Mostly open natural environment (few facilities) & facility-oriented	Global coverage of 5 continents.  Local- Urban and rural location	Either international or local market-oriented	Developed and developing countries
Culture & History	Mostly open cultural environment (few facilities) & facility-oriented			
Recreation & Leisure (including Adventure, Rides & Edutainment)	Facility-oriented			

## **8) Public consultation on the 3<sup>rd</sup> draft**

- Online and Offline consultation.
- GSTC website (inviting all stakeholders' inputs).
- Key stakeholders.
- Underrepresented and under-engaged groups.
- Information to be shared.
- Public sharing of SYNOPSIS of the comments from the 1st public consultation and the GSTC responses.
- 3rd draft.
- Email to the first public consultation participants.

## **9) Compiling and final draft: Compiling all comments from the public consultation and refining the final draft**

- The Public sharing of SYNOPSIS of the comments from the 2nd public consultation and the GSTC responses.
- Email to the public consultation participants.

## **10) Consensus on the final draft**

- ISC reviews it and agrees to accept it as the final version.

## **11) Formal adoption: GSTC Board of Directors' formal adoption of the final draft**

- Making sure stakeholders' views are reflected in decision-making.

## **12) Publish**

- New Criteria are published promptly and made available for free in electronic format.
- Making hard copies of public summaries, standards, and other related materials available upon request.

- o Standards and supporting documents shall each include:
  - ✓ Contact information on the GSTC
  - ✓ The formal status of the document
  - ✓ The official language(s) and
  - ✓ A note that, in the case of inconsistency between versions, reference shall default to the official language version

Below is the timeline of each of the 12 steps of the Criteria development (Table 2).

Table 2. Timeline of Attraction Criteria Development.

TASK	TIMELINE	OUTPUT	BY
1. CONFIRMATION of Attraction Criteria development	Year 2022		GSTC Board of Directors
2. ORGANIZING Attraction Criteria Development Technical Team	Jun - Aug. 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2023	Initial draft drafted by GSTC internal experts (GSTC staff) and external experts	GSTC Secretariat
3. PLANNING and PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT: Developing Term of Reference following ISEAL Standard Setting Code	September 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2023	Public announcement and information sharing	Technical Team International Standards Committee (ISC) GSTC Secretariat
4. STUDY (1 <sup>ST</sup> DRAFT) Preliminary study and preparation of a draft outline	Sep. 1 <sup>st</sup> - Dec.. 14 <sup>th</sup> , 2023	Draft set of criteria (compilation of criteria)	Technical Team



TASK	TIMELINE	OUTPUT	BY
5. PUBLIC CONSULTATION I Public consultation on the 1 <sup>st</sup> draft	Jan. 1 <sup>st</sup> - Feb. 29 <sup>th</sup> , 2024	Key stakeholder list and consult with them doing FGI, workshops, interview etc.	Technical Team
6. COMPILING and REVISION OF DRAFT (2 <sup>ND</sup> DRAFT)	March, 2024	Draft for feasibility assessment	Technical Team
7. FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT Applying the 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft to the field and refining it	April 1 <sup>st</sup> - May 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2024	Draft of the outcome of the feasibility assessment with comments from Advisory group	Technical Team
8. PUBLIC CONSULTATION II Public consultation on the 3 <sup>RD</sup> draft	July, 2024	Consultation review based on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft	Technical Team
9. COMPILING and Final DRAFT Compiling all comments from the public consultation	August, 2024	Refining for final draft	Technical Team
10. CONSENSUS Consensus on the final draft.	September, 2024	Agreement between Technical Team and ISC on the final draft	Technical Team and ISC
11. FORMAL ADOPTION GSTC Board of Directors' formal adoption of the final draft	End of November, 2024	Review of final draft by GSTC Board of Directors	GSTC Board of Directors
12. PUBLISH		New criteria published as electronic format	GSTC Secretariat

## 4.3 Stakeholder Mapping

### Private businesses managing attractions

The private businesses who are responsible for managing any type of attractions for their business. The contracted company to manage the public attractions on behalf of the public agency does not apply as a private business here.

### Public agencies managing attractions

The public agencies who are responsible for managing any type of attractions. The contracted company for managing the public attraction on behalf of the public agency applies as a public agency.

### Attraction Associations

Association for amusement parks and associations for entertainment comprise networks with the resources for the industry. These organizations are instrumental in advancing the knowledge, skills, and professionalism and promoting the growth and sustainability of businesses.

### Tour operators

Tour operators or leisure-related businesses are important in promoting and leading sustainable attraction businesses by providing travel and logistical support.

### Tour guides/Interpreters

A tour guide/interpreter is a person employed by a travel company and/or attraction related organization. The person with knowledge of attractions, and is able to explain the necessary information to visitors.

### Neighboring Communities

Attractions can have a significant impact on the neighboring community, both positive and negative. Local communities involvement is critical to the continuous operation and the sustainability of attractions in the long term.

### Destination Enterprises not directly involved in Attractions

Enterprises in the destination that are not directly involved in Attraction management still connect with and benefit from the attractions in a number of ways such as increased demand for goods

and services, increased awareness of the destination, opportunities for networking and collaboration, or improved reputation and branding. These can have a positive impact on the local economy and the quality of life for residents. Destination enterprises have an important role to play in supporting its growth and development regardless of their direct involvement or not.

### **Public (Potential Customers to the Attraction)**

The public may be directly and indirectly involved in the attraction by visiting the attraction site or facility and experiencing them, providing feedback and input through surveys or focus groups, etc.

### **Attraction Standard Owners and Certification Bodies**

There are organizations that have developed, used, and/or certified the Attractions. They play an important role in promoting best practices and sustainability in the development and management of attractions. By setting standards and providing certification, these organizations help to improve the quality and safety of attractions, protect the environment, and promote responsible business practices.

### **Disadvantaged Groups**

For the GSTC Attraction Criteria development, the Disadvantaged Groups are defined as under-engaged and underrepresented groups due to linguistic, geographic, technical, and other difficulties/barriers. Disadvantaged groups will be contacted to get their input in the GSTC Attraction Criteria development.

## **4.4 Guiding principles**

This standard-setting process adheres to the guiding principles described in the GSTC Standard Setting Manual version 3.0 as follows:

**Collaboration** - Governments, businesses, and civil society organizations, including other sustainability systems, that are working towards shared sustainability objectives. It actively seeks alignment, establishes partnerships, and shares learning to improve efficiency and direct or systemic impacts.

**Continual Improvement** - Objectives, strategies, and performance of the tools and system are

regularly reviewed by which the impacts and outcomes are evaluated. Lessons learned from the continual improvement process are for improvement purposes that respond to new evidence, stakeholder input, and external changes, adapting its strategies to improve its impacts and remain fit for purpose.

**Measurable Progress** - Quantitative or qualitative tools that are relevant to achieving sustainability objectives, whereby progress towards objectives is measured over time. The sustainability system of GSTC collects and analyzes the data it needs to measure and understand. Measuring the progress ensures that the user of the data is directed toward the sustainability objectives.

**Reliability** - Information is consistent and tools are designed in a way so that they can be implemented and assessed with consistency. Reliability ensures assessments of users' sustainability performance are competent and accurate and that these assessments support any claims they allow users to make.

**Rigor** - All components of a standard system are structured to deliver quality outcomes. Standards are set at a performance level that results in measurable progress toward the scheme's sustainability objectives, while compliance assessment provides an accurate picture of whether an entity meets the standard's requirements.

**Stakeholder Engagement** - The sustainability system of GSTC empowers stakeholders to participate in decisions and hold the system to account. A balanced and diverse group of stakeholders are involved in decisions that will affect the system (or the building of the Criteria of GSTC). Stakeholder engagement is essential and provides clear and transparent feedback that guarantees adaptation to the whole system. It shall be a fair, impartial, and accessible mechanism for resolving complaints and conflicts.

**Sustainability Impacts** - Results that deliver what achievements have been met to what has been measured. The sustainability impact communicates the strategies for achieving objectives involving social, environmental, economic, and cultural aspects of current scientific evidence and international norms when relevant. It is adapted to local or sector-specific conditions which helps improve impacts.

**Transparency** - Important information is publicly available and easily accessible while protecting confidential and private information. Stakeholders can further understand and evaluate the system's processes, decision-making, results, and impacts. Through openness and

- honesty, stakeholders have the necessary information and resources to actively participate in decisions or raise concerns.

## 4.5 Attraction Criteria Development Process Management

### GSTC Technical Team

The GSTC Technical Team will consist of internal and external experts. The internal experts are the GSTC staff, including the Global Assurance Director, the Asia-Pacific Region Manager, and the Project Manager.

A group of 9 external experts were contacted based on their experience in sustainability programs and events and professionalism in Attraction and international settings. The role of the external experts is to provide guidance to the overall process by engaging with the internal experts at the first stages of the Criteria development and performing as experts the drafts, consultation, and review process. The external experts will be the facilitators for each of the draft development and consultation stages.

Overall, the GSTC Technical Team is responsible for the whole process and communication with internal and external stakeholders. The final work of the Technical Team will be approved by the GSTC Board.

### Advisory Group

GSTC will invite a maximum of 10 globally important organizations from both public and private sectors to the Attraction Criteria Development Advisory Group.

The role of the advisory group is to provide high-level feedback and comments to the Technical Team. As leaders in the field, they will be asked to share key stakeholders' contact information so the Technical Team can engage them in the Criteria Development Process and encourage the Attraction businesses to participate in the Public Consultation and Feasibility Assessment. Apart from this role, they are asked to attend the online meeting for each phase of the development.

### Key Stakeholders Group

Key players in the Attraction that are of considerable volume to the destination and play significant roles will be identified as key stakeholders. These key stakeholders shall give input based

on their experience/knowledge and insights from international and national.

### **Disadvantaged Group Consultation**

GSTC will outsource disadvantaged group consultation. To cover the global geographical scope of 5 continents, GSTC will make contracts with two international NGOs working in different regions. The contracted organizations will conduct disadvantaged group consultations on behalf of the GSTC Technical Team.

### **GSTC International Standards Committee**

The International Standards Committee shall oversee the development process of the GSTC Attraction Criteria in all its forms in accordance with the ISEAL Alliance Standards Setting Code. Any disputes on management approach between the Committee and the Secretariat shall be resolved by the Board.

### **GSTC Board**

The GSTC Board is responsible for governance oversight of the Corporation's mandate, program of work, and operations. The Board will give final approval to new Attraction Criteria, as proposed by the International Standards Committee.

#END#