



GSTC Compliance Assessment Procedure

version 1.0

October 2024

Document History

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

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Document Controls

This is version 1.0 of the GSTC Compliance Assessment Procedure, 2024.

Document Approval: GSTC Global Assurance Director

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

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1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1. This document details the procedure for performing GSTC Compliance Assessments of a Certification Body (CB) at the client level.

2. Normative Reference

- ISO 19011:2018 Guidelines for quality and/or environmental management systems auditing.
- The latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Manual for Certification Bodies-Industry: Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator.
- The latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Manual for Certification Bodies-Destination
- The latest version of the GSTC Accreditation Procedures.

3. Terms and Definition

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

4. General

- 4.1. **Compliance Assessment:** GSTC evaluates the CB's compliance with the GSTC accreditation and relevant ISO requirements by reviewing audit evidence, reports, and decision-making processes. The compliance assessment aims to assess the effectiveness of the certification decision-making process by comparing audit reports with actual conditions at the client's site. It's conducted through the review of documentation, audit reports, and stakeholder feedback.

5. Assessment Planning

- 5.1. Assessment may be scheduled as part of the following:
 - 5.1.1. Accreditation (initial, reaccreditation, or scope extension).

- 5.1.2. Regular Assessments —part of the GSTC Surveillance Assessment.
- 5.1.3. Extra Assessments —beyond the GSTC Surveillance Assessment – are conducted when there are particular concerns regarding CB performance. These may stem from issues like a complaint, an incident, the results of a previous evaluation, or other circumstances considered appropriate by GSTC.
- 5.2. GSTC shall notify the CB at least 14 days before planned assessments, except for unannounced assessments. For unannounced assessments, CBs are informed of the objective but not the date.
- 5.3. Before each Compliance Assessment, GSTC shall inform the CB about the composition of the GSTC team, including observers.
 - 5.3.1. The CB may submit a written objection against a team member within 5 calendar days of receiving notification from GSTC about the team composition, along with the justification, to mitigate or eliminate any existing or perceived Conflict of Interest (COI).
- 5.4. GSTC will request relevant documentation from the CB before conducting an assessment, such as:
 - 5.4.1. Audit plan and agenda.
 - 5.4.2. Audit team competence records.
 - 5.4.3. Previous audit reports.
 - 5.4.4. Evidence of corrective actions for nonconformities.
- 5.5. The CB shall ensure the client's consent to GSTC's presence during audits and facilitate access to premises and records.
- 5.6. The CB shall ensure that its client communicates all relevant safety regulations to the GSTC and the CB before conducting any field assessment.

6. Compliance Assessment Process

6.1. Preparation

- 6.1.1. GSTC defines the scope of the Compliance Assessment based on the CB's certification activities, previous assessments, stakeholder concerns, or the need for follow-up from past nonconformities. The scope typically includes:
 - 6.1.1.1. Reviewing past audit reports.
 - 6.1.1.2. Evaluating the effectiveness of the CB's decision-making processes.
 - 6.1.1.3. Assessing compliance with the GSTC Accreditation Manual and relevant ISO requirements, as applicable.
- 6.1.2. The CB shall provide the necessary documentation and confirm logistics for the assessment.
- 6.1.3. GSTC may seek stakeholder feedback from clients, CB personnel, or other relevant parties regarding the CB's performance, particularly if the Compliance Assessment is triggered by complaints or incidents.
- 6.1.4. The CB may be informed of the assessment and encouraged to attend as an observer. Before the assessment, GSTC shall inform the CB regarding the following in case of an announced assessment:
 - 6.1.4.1. Objectives of the Compliance Assessment;
 - 6.1.4.2. Proposed assessment agenda;
 - 6.1.4.3. Assessment type, whether Regular or Extra;
 - 6.1.4.4. If the assessment is grounded in either an Incident or a Complaint;
 - 6.1.4.5. The CB needs to confirm proposed assessment dates with its Client;
 - 6.1.4.6. Findings will be raised to the CB and not to the Client and

- 6.1.4.7. Additional details may be required based on the technical scope.
- 6.1.5. Prior to an unannounced compliance assessment:
 - 6.1.5.1. The CB shall not inform the Client of the assessment.
 - 6.1.5.2. At GSTC's discretion, inform the CB about the Client's name or location.
- 6.1.6. If the CB is not present during a Compliance Assessment, an opening meeting may be arranged on the working day before the assessment.
- 6.2. Conducting Compliance Assessment
 - 6.2.1. GSTC will review the CB's audit reports and compare the findings with the actual conditions at the client's level. This includes assessing whether the CB's auditors effectively identified and reported nonconformities, and whether the audit conclusions were accurate and well-supported by objective evidence.
 - 6.2.2. GSTC will assess whether the CB has adequately addressed previous nonconformities and how its audit processes align with GSTC Accreditation Manual and ISO requirements.
 - 6.2.3. GSTC will assess the CB's certification decision-making process, including the adequacy of evidence used to support certification decisions. This review includes checking whether CB decisions align with the audit findings and if the CB followed the proper procedures for certification issuance, suspension, or withdrawal.
 - 6.2.4. GSTC will review how the CB handled nonconformities identified in previous audits. This includes verifying whether corrective actions were implemented effectively and if any recurring issues indicate systematic problems in the CB's processes.
 - 6.2.5. GSTC may conduct an on-site visit to the client's premises to verify that conditions align with the CB's audit findings.
- 6.3. Reporting and Follow-up

- 6.3.1. After completing the Compliance Assessment, GSTC will hold a closing meeting with the CB (either on-site or remotely) to present its findings.
- 6.3.2. GSTC will provide feedback on areas where the CB needs to improve its audit processes, decision-making, or follow-up on nonconformities.
- 6.3.3. If the CB is not present during a Compliance Assessment, a closing meeting shall be held off-site within two working days after completing the on-site assessment. If no closing meeting can be arranged, the SOF shall be sent to the CB, and the closing meeting shall be waived.
- 6.3.4. GSTC will issue a Summary of Findings (SOF) to the CB. The final report will emphasize the CB's performance rather than client-specific issues, which includes:
 - 6.3.4.1. A summary of the assessment scope and objectives.
 - 6.3.4.2. A review of the CB's audit reports and decision-making.
 - 6.3.4.3. Identification of any nonconformities, with supporting evidence.
 - 6.3.4.4. Recommendations for corrective actions.
 - 6.3.4.5. An evaluation of how the CB addressed past nonconformities and any follow-up actions required.
- 6.3.5. If a CB is absent during the assessment and does not join the offered remote closing meeting without justification, no EOF will be accepted on the findings in question.
- 6.4. Post-Assessment Follow-up
 - 6.4.1. If nonconformities are identified, the CB will be required to submit a corrective action plan within a specified timeframe. GSTC will review and approve the plan, and conduct follow-up assessments to ensure the corrective actions have been implemented effectively.
 - 6.4.2. The CB may be required to submit additional documentation or undergo another on-site assessment to verify that corrective actions have resolved the identified issues.

6.4.3. GSTC may schedule additional surveillance assessments to monitor the CB's continued compliance with accreditation requirements. These assessments may focus on specific areas identified during the Compliance Assessment or broader issues related to the CB's certification activities.

6.5. General Requirement

6.5.1. The CB shall inform the client about the objectives and consequences of the GSTC Compliance Assessment based on GSTC's findings.

6.5.2. The CB shall not conduct a surveillance audit of the Client during the Compliance Assessment.

6.5.3. GSTC Compliance Assessments do not substitute for the regular surveillance audits that the CB is responsible for conducting.