



# GSTC Witnessing Procedure

## version 1.0

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### Document History

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## Document Controls

This is version 1.0 of the GSTC Witnessing Procedure, 2024.

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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 Witnessing of a Certification Body (CB) at the client level.
- 1.2. GSTC observes a CB's audit team conducting a full or partial audit of a client's management system. The goal is to assess the CB's ability to carry out GSTC certification effectively. The purpose of the witnessing is to verify the CB's competence and adherence to relevant requirements during a live audit. It covers the CB's audit activities, including planning, implementation, and reporting.

## **2. Normative Reference and Associated Documents**

- 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 Procedure.

## **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. Assessment Planning**

- 4.1. Assessment may be scheduled as part of the following:
  - 4.1.1. Accreditation (initial, reaccreditation, or scope extension).
  - 4.1.2. Regular Assessments —part of the GSTC Surveillance Assessment.

- 4.1.3. 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.
- 4.2. 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.
- 4.3. Before each witnessing, GSTC shall inform the CB about the composition of the GSTC team, including observers.
  - 4.3.1. 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).
- 4.4. GSTC will request relevant documentation from the CB before conducting an assessment, such as:
  - 4.4.1. Audit plan and agenda.
  - 4.4.2. Audit team competence records.
  - 4.4.3. Previous audit reports.
  - 4.4.4. Evidence of corrective actions for nonconformities.
- 4.5. The CB shall ensure the client's consent to GSTC's presence during audits and facilitate access to premises and records.
- 4.6. The CB shall ensure that its client communicates all relevant safety regulations to the GSTC and the CB before conducting any field assessment.

## **5. Witnessing Process**

- 5.1. Preparation and Opening Meeting
  - 5.1.1. The CB is responsible for informing the client about GSTC's presence during the audit and obtaining the client's consent. The CB shall

provide GSTC with the full audit agenda, including details of the client's operations, scope, and timelines.

5.1.2. GSTC may request additional documentation prior to the audit, such as the CB's previous audit reports for the client, auditor competence records, and any corrective actions taken by the client or CB from past audits.

5.1.3. The audit plan and scope are shared with the GSTC team, and time is allocated for CB-GSTC opening and closing meetings without the client's presence.

## 5.2. Conducting Witnessing

5.2.1. During the CB-client opening meeting, the CB will explain to the client that GSTC is observing the audit to ensure CB adherence to accreditation and certification standards. This explanation must clarify that GSTC will not participate in or influence the audit outcomes.

5.2.2. GSTC observes without intervening in the audit process. However, GSTC may seek clarifications on audit procedures.

5.2.3. During the audit, GSTC will focus on:

5.2.3.1. Auditor competence (e.g., knowledge of the GSTC standards and the client's operations).

5.2.3.2. Methodologies used by the audit team (e.g., sampling techniques, interview methods).

5.2.3.3. Whether the audit conforms to the certification requirements, including compliance with GSTC Accreditation Manual and relevant ISO requirements.

5.2.4. GSTC may gather objective evidence through passive observation and review of documents, without influencing the audit outcome. GSTC may take notes or request copies of certain documents (e.g., audit plans, checklists) for review, provided that both the CB and the client give consent.

5.2.4.1. If any issues or ambiguities arise during the audit, GSTC may seek clarifications from the CB's audit team, but without directing or influencing their decisions.

5.2.5. If any issues or ambiguities arise during the audit, GSTC may seek clarifications from the CB's audit team, but without directing or influencing their decisions.

5.2.6. The CB's audit team should inform GSTC of any identified NCs throughout the audit.

### 5.3. Closing Meeting and Reporting

5.3.1. After the CB-client audit concludes, GSTC and the CB will hold a closing meeting without the client present. GSTC will provide preliminary feedback, including any findings or observations regarding the CB's audit performance.

5.3.1.1. GSTC will also provide recommendations on potential improvements in the CB's audit process, auditor competence, or the methodologies employed.

5.3.2. GSTC will draft a detailed assessment report, containing Summary of Findings (SOF), summarizing the audit scope, the CB's performance, any identified nonconformities, and the effectiveness of the CB's audit process. The report will also highlight any areas where the CB failed to meet GSTC or ISO requirements.

5.3.3. The report will include both positive and negative remarks regarding the CB's performance and recommendations for corrective actions, if applicable.

5.3.4. GSTC will issue the report to the CB within an agreed timeframe, following internal reviews and approvals. Any nonconformities will require the CB to submit corrective action plans within a set deadline.

### 5.4. Post-Witnessing Follow-up

5.4.1. If nonconformities are identified, the CB will be required to take corrective actions. GSTC will review and approve the CB's corrective

action plans and monitor their implementation through follow-up assessments or desk reviews.

5.4.1.1. Nonconformities will be followed up in accordance with the GSTC Accreditation Procedure.

5.4.2. All findings, evidence, and reports from the witnessing process will be securely stored in GSTC's document management system for future reference and surveillance purposes.