

GBCI Verification Protocol

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Introduction

GBCI is the premier organization for independently recognizing excellence in green business industry performance and practice globally through third-party verification services. These services, provided for a range of certification and verification programs, are used within the global green building industry to demonstrate credibility, provide a metric for comparisons, and add significant value.

GBCI operates on well-established standards and follows six guiding principles outlined in the [GBCI Strategic Plan](#). GBCI ensures rigor in the design, development, and implementation of the processes and tools used to measure performance and practice across a suite of programs. The approaches and methods consistently and objectively deliver to assure the validity of these programs.

GBCI Guiding Principles

GBCI employs six guiding principles to support the advancement of its mission. These principles provide a foundation for operational strategy and growth and serve as a tool for evaluating both successes and new challenges.

Reconcile Humanity with Nature

GBCI will endeavor to create and restore harmony between human activities and natural systems.

Ensuring Validity and Quality

We ensure rigor in the design, development and implementation of the processes and tools used to measure performance (certification) and practice (credentialing). Our approaches and methodologies deliver consistency and objectivity to assure the validity of those certifications and credentials.

Operating with Transparency and Clarity

We are open and transparent in both the way we do business and in the information we share. We conduct our business with a deep sense of integrity and ethical responsibility that creates predictability and confidence in the marketplace and for our stakeholders.

Adapting to Change

We continually adapt to the changing needs of the global marketplace, advancing our knowledge and expertise to accelerate the adoption of green business practices and enhance their effectiveness around the world.

Providing Excellence in Service

Through our responsiveness and excellence in service, we are committed to establishing high-quality, enduring relationships with our customers and clients.

Driving Change to Create Lasting Benefits for the World

We drive market transformation on a global scale that is economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable. We recognize leadership through third party verification of green business performance, the accreditation / credentialing of individual green business knowledge and business expertise, and the verification of green performance buildings, communities, cities, states, and countries through our performance certification platform.

Certification and Verification Programs

The overall aim of certification and verification is to give confidence to all interested parties that a project (i.e., building, site, portfolio, etc.) fulfills the requirements of a specified standard or program. The value generated is commensurate with the level of trust established by competent and impartial verification of specified requirements by a third party.

1. Competence

Building on the successful global administration of LEED certification, GBCI has developed extensive processes, infrastructure, systems, and oversight mechanisms to ensure the high-quality delivery of its certification and verification programs.

GBCI employs a broad network of employees, practitioners, and contractors (Reviewers, or Review Teams) to deliver these services globally. GBCI Review Teams adhere to the best practice requirements for conformity assessments set forth in various conformity assessment standards, as applicable. Select Review Teams employed by GBCI have achieved or are pursuing ISO/IEC 17029, ISO/IEC 9001, and/or ISO/IEC 17065 certification.

GBCI ensures that Review Teams are demonstrably skilled and proficient. Each team is responsible for recruiting individuals with the right expertise, credentials, and experience and for delivering the rigorous training and professional development necessary for them to complete effective verification services within their assigned scope of work. GBCI Review Teams include more than 50 licensed professionals, including engineers, architects, interior designers, and urban planners.

Review Teams are also expected to have processes and protocols in place to produce high-quality work in a timely, efficient, and standardized manner.

2. Independence and impartiality

GBCI's independence from the reporting organization¹ is a critical aspect of third-party verification. It enables certification and verification awards to be delivered without conflicts of interest.

Review Teams must disclose any activities or relationships that threaten impartiality or that give the appearance of a conflict of interest. Review Teams are obligated to decline any work assignments where a conflict of interest exists, as defined in the contractual agreement held between GBCI and each Review Team. No individual Reviewer or Review Team providing or contributing to verification services for a project is permitted to provide consulting services (for example, design or construction-related services) for that same project.² Additionally, no individual Reviewer or Review Team providing verification services may have a financial, ownership, or direct employment relationship with the project owner/developer.

¹ An organization that is responsible for the preparation and publication of disclosures on sustainability topics and that engages an assurance or certification provider to undertake an engagement relating to third-party verification and sustainability reporting. Commonly referred to as "project team", "owner", "owner's agent" or "the entity seeking services/certification."

² Except where permitted under program rules.

GBCI employees must act with impartiality and must never use their positions with GBCI, or any of its customers, for private gain, to advance personal interests, or to obtain favors or benefits for themselves, members of their families, or any other individuals, corporations, or business entities. A “threat to impartiality” includes, but is not limited to, ownership, management, governance, personnel, shared resources, finances, contracts, marketing, self-interest, or intimidation.

3. Confidentiality and Openness

GBCI commits to providing access to and disclosure of appropriate and timely information about its verification processes. GBCI also provides access to select project-level details, including project status, unless a project elects to opt-out and remain confidential.

Confidentiality policies are articulated in the relevant agreements between GBCI and participating organizations. The LEED Certification Agreement, section 9, provides an example of how project information is handled by GBCI: <https://www.gbci.org/legal>.

GBCI’s confidentiality expectations are also defined in the contractual agreements held between GBCI and each Review Team.

4. Communication Channels

GBCI’s primary modes of communication with customers are through written correspondence and virtual meetings. GBCI Reviewer communication and guidance are considered binding for the specific project in question, enabling confidence in the process and the outcome.

GBCI does not provide specific advice regarding design, construction, or operational strategies, but instead provides guidance and sets expectations for documentation requirements and the compliance assessment process.

GBCI is well supported by a USGBC Technical Customer Service team, which manages most of the pre-verification customer support and coordinates directly with GBCI Reviewers when needed.

a. Written correspondence

GBCI acknowledges receipt of review-related inquiries within 1 business day and provides a full written response within 2 business days when feasible.

If verification cannot be completed in a fair and objective manner due to inconsistent or missing documentation, GBCI may contact the reporting organization in writing to clarify the issue(s) and allow the verification process to proceed. These communications are reserved for instances where a minor clarification can result in a confident ruling. They will not be utilized in situations that require additional work, design changes, or recalculation from the reporting organization.

b. Meetings

Virtual meetings with GBCI Reviewers are available to customers who have technical questions before submission (program dependent) or who want to discuss assessment outcomes.

Review Teams review technical questions and agendas in advance of meetings and prepare notes and draft responses for discussion.

When feasible, meeting notes with responses to each question are sent to the customer within two business days. If some items require additional research, the meeting notes will indicate the items still under research.

c. Responsiveness to complaints

GBCI's [Certification Challenge Policy](#) and [Review Challenge Policy](#) are integral safeguards for the integrity of GBCI's certification and verification programs. The former offers guidance in cases of intentional or inadvertent misrepresentation, preventing the inappropriate award of verification. Meanwhile, the latter serves as a quality assurance measure, allowing stakeholders to challenge review rulings and uphold the standards of GBCI verification process.

Additionally, GBCI has a process of collecting customer feedback after review, which provides an opportunity for continuous improvement to GBCI's verification process and ensures quality and consistency is maintained.

5. Application Review

The requirements against which a project is evaluated shall be those contained in specified standards and other normative documents.

Applications contain all the necessary information to complete the verification process in accordance with the relevant standard or program. Applications are formulated and submitted by relevant and impartial persons, possessing the necessary technical competence. Applications include documentation packages from the reporting organization and other third-party verification teams, as applicable.

GBCI programs offer multiple rounds of review, including an opportunity for the reporting organization to respond to comments after each round. GBCI communicates the submittal requirements and any needed clarifications clearly and consistently. In some instances, GBCI will conduct virtual meetings to clarify submission questions in addition to written review comments.

For applicable programs, the award decision is made by personnel different from those who carried out the verification execution to ensure that all required steps have been followed correctly and that the evidence supports the findings.

GBCI provides a mechanism for formally appealing certification and verification rulings.

6. Verification methodology

Decisions during assessment are made based on the completeness and accuracy of evidence provided to GBCI and the requirements of the governing standard.

d. Order of Precedent in Decision-Making

GBCI's verification approach follows a clear decision-making hierarchy. This framework ensures that all Reviewers are aligned, and that the verification process remains transparent and consistent.

Reviewers must conduct reviews and assessments based on established technical requirements, ordered by precedent.

- Published standard
- Published addenda to the standard
- Published references within the standard
- Published supplemental guidance to the standard
- Published supplemental guidance to the references
- Supplemental tools, calculators, and forms
- GBCI guidance

Past reviews do not set a precedent for future projects; each project receives a thorough technical review or assessment of the information submitted for the current project. This policy ensures that past oversights are not perpetuated, which could jeopardize the integrity of the applicable program.

e. Automated and Manual Data and Documentation Review

In some instances, GBCI may conduct an automated check by the technology system to confirm the presence and consistency of key data points and claims. The automated checks, the nature of the application, and statistical analysis, when applicable, may inform sampling rates and review scope.

A desk-based review is completed to confirm evidence that is relevant to the performance claim. This potentially includes a wide range of evidence (e.g., the inclusion of required documentation, the completeness and validity of manufacturer claims, and the accuracy of calculations). The Review Team may use publicly available data (such as online mapping tools and product cut sheets) to check submittals that appear to be inconsistent or inaccurate.

f. Consistency

GBCI prioritizes maintaining consistent outcomes, which ensures the trust and predictability necessary to deliver value in the verification process.

- Interactions among submission elements

The Reviewer pays attention to the interactions among submission elements and how data is used in calculations for different purposes. While data may be used in different ways in different circumstances, the fundamental elements should be consistent across the entire submission. Clarifications are requested when inconsistencies are not justified and may lead to uncertainty about achievement.

- Consistency between separate, but related projects

Special attention is paid by Reviewers to ensure that rulings between related projects remain consistent when applicable. When rulings between similar, related projects are inconsistent the Reviewer must be able to articulate the reasoning for the variation in ruling.

g. Levels Of Assurance

GBCI certification and verification programs provide a high quality, limited assurance³ engagement. The program and documentation requirements that GBCI verifies are publicly available, specific, clear, and supported by various tools and calculators utilized by reporting organizations to demonstrate compliance. This allows Reviewers to trust that reporting organizations understand the requirements and intend to meet them. Reviewers can then focus on completeness, complexities, and/or inconsistencies in the reported information. When a submission is incomplete or unclear, a set of Reviewer queries used to render a decision might consist of, but not be limited to, those given below.

Reviewer Queries for Managing Uncertainty

DATA QUALITY

- Can the original source of information be identified? (i.e., Is this a construction document (part of the contract documents) as opposed to a submission document generated by a consultant?)
- Is there support for assumptions or complex calculations?
- Is evidence available attesting to accuracy within acceptable margins of error and timeliness?

ACCURACY

- Are data measurement techniques and bases for calculations adequately described, and can they be replicated with equivalent results?
- Is the margin of error for quantitative data small enough not to substantially influence the ability to reach appropriate and informed conclusions?
- Is there an indication of which data has been estimated and the underlying assumptions and techniques used to produce the estimates, or where that information can be found?

COMPLETENESS AND COMPARABILITY

- Can the results be compared to that of industry peers or comparable projects?
- Can any significant variation in the project boundary, scope, length of reporting period, or information covered in the submission be identified and explained?
- Are generally accepted protocols for compiling, measuring, and presenting information used?

³ Limited assurance means the verification process assesses the data against specified criteria to ensure its accuracy and reliability. The Reviewer performs procedures to obtain a moderate level of assurance that the data is free from material misstatement, but it does not provide absolute assurance. The scope of a "limited assurance" verification includes reviewing documentation, conducting additional inquiries as needed, and performing analytical procedures to assess the reliability of the reported data.

h. Review of Alternative Approaches (where available)

Some standards (such as LEED) allow for alternative paths to compliance, both published and unpublished. GBCI reviews alternative approaches to compliance (documentation or strategies that deviate from published requirements) in various circumstances.

- Published alternative approaches are reviewed according to the stated performance criteria and documentation requirements. In some instances, the Review Team must establish whether the alternative approach is applicable to the project.
- When an *unpublished*, alternative approach is submitted, the Review Team must establish if this new and unique way of demonstrating compliance meets the same intent and level of rigor as the published criteria and if the documentation sufficiently supports the claims. A review of some alternative approaches may require an additional fee. Review Teams keep an open mind and consider these unpublished alternative approaches on a case-by-case basis. An explanation of why the project cannot meet the published requirements is taken into consideration. Review Teams also consider the overall quality of the alternative approach submission, the equivalency, and the quality of the whole project submission.

i. Review Commentary

Review comments are written in accordance with GBCI technical writing standards and are compiled into a report. See section 8 regarding Certification/Verification Reporting.

j. Review Timeliness Expectations

Barring any extenuating circumstances, Reviewers are required to return 100% of reviews on time to the reporting organization based on the published anticipated return date.

7. Quality Management Systems (QMS)

k. Quality Assurance (QA)

GBCI's Quality Assurance program is built upon a foundation of recruiting highly qualified experts globally. Proficiency is ensured through rigorous training programs, access to essential resources, and refined Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Comprehensive new reviewer training programs extend up to 12 months or more, emphasizing technical excellence and adherence to established protocols.

Additionally, each Review Team documents written standards and processes that govern their operations, informed by ISO/IEC 17065, "Conformity assessment -- Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes, and services" or ISO/IEC 17029 "Conformity assessment — General principles and requirements for validation and verification bodies", as applicable.

Review Teams are obligated to conduct reviews and customer service activities with technical rigor and procedural consistency, adhering to the requirements outlined in GBCI Certification policies and procedures. Conformity mechanisms are in place to assist Review Teams with this responsibility.

I. Quality Control (QC) and Assessment

GBCI assigns quality control tasks to every review based on several factors such as project parameters, historical performance, and experience level of the Review Team. Quality control tasks can vary in depth and breadth to ensure appropriate oversight. Quality metrics and performance expectations are outlined clearly in the relevant contractual agreement between GBCI and each Review Team.

- Quality metrics

GBCI regularly monitors the work provided by Reviewers to ensure consistency, high quality, and a positive customer experience. QC evaluations are completed for each QC activity. Additionally, submission quality assessments are completed based on the specific program parameters.

GBCI assesses individual program elements (e.g., prerequisites, credits, measures, features, etc.) to identify both quality issues and commendable work. This assessment allows GBCI to identify areas of concern, cross-training opportunities, and highlight best practices.

- Performance expectations

Overall Reviewer quality is evaluated periodically by a rating system or program. Evaluations are further broken down by content category.

Review Teams who have room for improvement and/or are not meeting expectations are subject to higher assessment rates.

Review Teams not meeting expectations are subject to corrective action and are closely monitored to ensure improvement.

m. Audits

In addition to in-line quality control, GBCI conducts audits of reviewers' work. These audits encompass both ad hoc investigations prompted by customer inquiries and limited scheduled assessments.

Customer service responses undergo periodic audits to evaluate the accuracy, clarity, customer-centric approach, responsiveness, and the rate of first-contact resolution. These audits ensure consistency in service delivery and adherence to established standards.

Furthermore, GBCI employs a customer experience survey to gather direct feedback, facilitating the investigation of customer concerns, monitoring service quality, and addressing any knowledge gaps among Reviewers.

8. Certification/Verification Decision and Reporting

n. Contents of reports

At the end of the verification process, GBCI issues a Report specific to the claims being verified. The Report includes, at a minimum:

- Name of the certifying body (GBCI)
- Project name
- Scope of verification
- Specific performance metrics as applicable
- Claims being verified
- Date that certification or verification is granted

o. Validity Periods

Certification and Verification statement validity dates vary by program and are publicly available. Please consult the applicable program guide for details.