TECHNICAL GOVERNANCE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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~~INTRODUCTION~~SUMMARY

This document sets out the principles that guide all Gold Standard technical developments. It is overseen by the Gold Standard Technical Governance Committee (TGC) and administered by the Gold Standard Secretariat. The document is intended to be publicly available to all Gold Standard stakeholders.

The Guiding Principles reflect the vision and mission of Gold Standard[1][V1] but are also designed to meet the ISEAL Alliance codes[2]. The rationale for compatibility is explained within the document.

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[1] https://www.goldstandard.org/our-story/what-we-believe

[2] http://www.isealalliance.org/defining-credible-practice/iseal-credibility-principles

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GOLD STANDARD TECHNICAL GOVERNANCE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

There are seven Guiding Principles that govern the way Gold Standard carries out and administers all technical developments. These are summarised in figure 1, below. This section describes the purpose and broad approach for each Guiding Principle:

Figure 1 – Gold Standard Technical Governance Principles

1. INDEPENDENCE

PRINCIPLE: All Gold Standard developments, including standards setting, development of tools and guidance, assurance and oversight and governance shall be governed and decided upon independently and impartially.

IN PRACTICE: This means that:
a. Independent technical governance bodies are established to take all technical decisions and approve standards, tools, guidelines and structures and procedures.
b. A robust Conflict of Interest policy shall be implemented at all times.
c. Assurance shall depend upon competent, independent third-party individuals or organisations.
d. Assurance providers shall be subject to independent oversight and performance management.
e. Funders of new developments shall not have undue influence or casting vote over any decision or certification.

1.2. TRANSPARENCY AND INCLUSIVITY

PRINCIPLE: The approach to, and outcomes of governance and decision making for all Gold Standard technical developments shall be transparent. Stakeholders shall be represented in technical governance and can participate in developments and assurance.

IN PRACTICE: This means that :

a. Gold Standard shall publish the Guiding Principles, Standards Setting Procedures, Grievance Procedures, Assurance and Oversight Procedures and relevant Terms of Reference to the Gold Standard website.
b. For major new developments and updates, Gold Standard shall publish a notification and appropriate rationale to its website and notify stakeholders early in the development. Feedback shall be sought from stakeholders at this early stage as appropriate.
c. Technically focused public consultations shall be undertaken for new developments and major updates. Gold Standard shall take active steps to engage with stakeholders during consultation periods.
d. Technical decisions and supporting rationale shall be published to the Gold Standard website.
e. Decision making committees and working groups shall aim to include representatives of key stakeholder groups, experts and a cross section of gender and geographic user groups.
f. Assurance and oversight decisions shall be made available to Gold Standard stakeholders for comment.

2.3. CONSISTENCY AND ACCURACY

PRINCIPLE: Technical governance shall ensure the consistency of rationale and detail and the accuracy and veracity of claims arising from the use of the standard and assurance.

IN PRACTICE: This means that

a. The approach to technical governance shall include the cross-referencing and involvement of members and stakeholders from various aspects to ensure overall consistency.
b. The truthfulness, accuracy and verifiability of claims arising shall be a core consideration of new standards and methodologies as well as major updates.

3.4. RIGOROUS AND EXPERT LED

PRINCIPLE: Gold Standard technical governance shall be expert-led and focus on quality of outcome (for standards and methodologies) or on accuracy (for assurance and oversight).

IN PRACTICE: This means that

a. Gold Standard shall convene experts to govern and decide upon all technical developments. Where necessary, experts from outside the existing Gold Standard network shall be approached to join such groups and committees.

b. The Gold Standard Secretariat shall recognise the limitations of its technical expertise and supplement this as required.

c. For the development of standards and methodologies, best practice and quality of outcome shall be a core consideration, considering the views of stakeholders and matters of practicality as required.

d. For the development of assurance and oversight procedures, the accuracy and veracity of claims arising shall be a core focus, as well as quality of performance of those responsible for audit.

4.5. EFFICIENCY

PRINCIPLE: With particular consideration for Project Developers and Gold Standard funders, the approach to technical governance shall be as efficient as practicable. The approach taken shall be relevant and appropriate and mindful of stakeholder requirements.

IN PRACTICE: This means that-
The governance approach shall be flexible and able to convene structures (in line with the Guiding Principles) that can resolve issues and take decisions promptly and efficiently.

a. Duplication of governance shall be avoided. Authority may be delegated to Working Groups, Committees and Secretariat as deemed appropriate.

b. Duplication of the work of other standards shall be avoided. An environmental scan of other standards work shall be conducted for the development of new standards and methodologies. Where appropriate, a coordination or recognition of other standards work shall be explored.

5.6. CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND INNOVATION

PRINCIPLE: Gold Standard shall continuously review and improve its standards, tools, guidance, assurance and oversight approaches and governance.
A culture of innovation shall be encouraged, allowing for openness to new ideas and solutions and testing with stakeholders and projects.

IN PRACTICE: This means that-

a. Gold Standard shall develop and implement a quality plan for its standards, tools, methodologies, assurance and oversight procedures and governance. This shall involve the planned, regular review and update of key documentation and procedures.

b. Gold Standard shall be receptive to new ideas and innovations from its stakeholders

c. Gold Standard allows for the testing of new approaches in a pilot format, communicating transparently to stakeholders where this is the case.

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6.7.   SUSTAINABILITY

PRINCIPLE: All governance decisions are taken with the Gold Standard Vision and Mission in mind.

IN PRACTICE: This means that-

a. All members of the Gold Standard governance community shall sign up to Terms of Reference that refer to the Vision and Mission. All governance Terms of Reference and procedures shall also refer to the Vision and Mission.
b. The new development or update of all standards, tools, methodologies, assurance and oversight and governance shall be justifiable against the Vision and Mission.
c. All Gold Standard work products shall be developed with the long term financial sustainability of the organisation in mind.

COMPATIBILITY WITH ISEAL

Gold Standard technical governance is designed to be fully compatible with the ISEAL Credibility Principles. This section briefly describes the two sets of principles in order to explain how this is achieved:

ISEAL CREDIBILITY PRINCIPLE	GOLD STANDARD PRINCIPLE
1. Sustainability Standards scheme owners clearly define and communicate their sustainability objectives and approach to achieving them. They make decisions that best advance these objectives.	See Principle - 7 SUSTAINABILITY7 – Sustainability
2. Improvement Standards scheme owners seek to understand their impacts and measure and demonstrate progress towards their intended outcomes. They regularly integrate learning and encourage innovation to increase benefits to people and the environment.	See Principle 6 – CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND INNOVATIONContinuous Learning and Innovation
3. Relevance Standards are fit for purpose. They address the most significant sustainability impacts of a product, process, business or service; only include requirements that contribute to their objectives; reflect best scientific understanding and relevant international norms; and are adapted where necessary to local conditions.	See Principle 5 –EFFICIENCY Efficiency and 7 – SUSTAINABILITYSustainability

4. Rigour

All components of a standards system are structured to deliver quality outcomes. In particular, standards are set at a performance level that results in measurable progress towards the scheme's sustainability objectives, while assessments of compliance provide an accurate picture of whether an entity meets the standard's requirements.

See Principle 4 – RIGOROUS AND EXPERT LED~~Rigorous and Expert Led~~

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5. Engagement

Standard-setters engage a balanced and representative group of stakeholders in standards development. Standards systems provide meaningful and accessible opportunities to participate in governance, assurance and monitoring and evaluation. They empower stakeholders with fair mechanisms to resolve complaints.

See Principle 2 – TRANSPARENCY AND INCLUSIVITY~~Transparency & Inclusivity~~

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6. Impartiality

Standards systems identify and mitigate conflicts of interest throughout their operations, particularly in the assurance process and in governance. Transparency, accessibility and balanced representation contribute to impartiality.

See Principle 1 – INDEPENDENCE~~Independence~~

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7. Transparency

Standards systems make relevant information freely available about the development and content of the
standard, how the system is governed, who is evaluated and under what process, impact information and the various ways in which stakeholders can engage.

See Principle 2 – TRANSPARENCY AND INCLUSIVITY~~Transparency & Inclusivity~~

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8. Accessibility

To reduce barriers to implementation, standards systems minimise costs and overly burdensome requirements. They facilitate access to information about meeting the standard, training, and financial resources to build capacity throughout supply chains and for actors within the standards system.

See Principle 2 – TRANSPARENCY AND INCLUSIVITY~~Transparency & Inclusivity~~

9. Truthfulness Claims and communications made by actors within standards systems and by certified entities about the benefits or impacts that derive from the system or from the purchase or use of a certified product or service are verifiable, not misleading, and enable an informed choice.	See Principle 3 – CONSISTENCY AND ACCURACY~~Consistency & Accuracy~~
10. Efficiency Standards systems refer to or collaborate with other credible schemes to improve consistency and efficiency in standards content and operating practices. They improve their viability through the application of sound revenue models and organisational management strategies.	See Principle 5 – EFFICIENCY~~Efficiency~~ and Principle 7 – SUSTAINABILITY~~Sustainability~~

Document History

Version	Date	Description
2.0	XX/MM/2021	Editorial changes and reference update
1.0~~1.0~~	July 2017~~Mm/dd/yyyy~~	~~Iciwbic~~ [AG2]Initial adoption

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¹~~https://www.goldstandard.org/our_story/what_we_believ~~