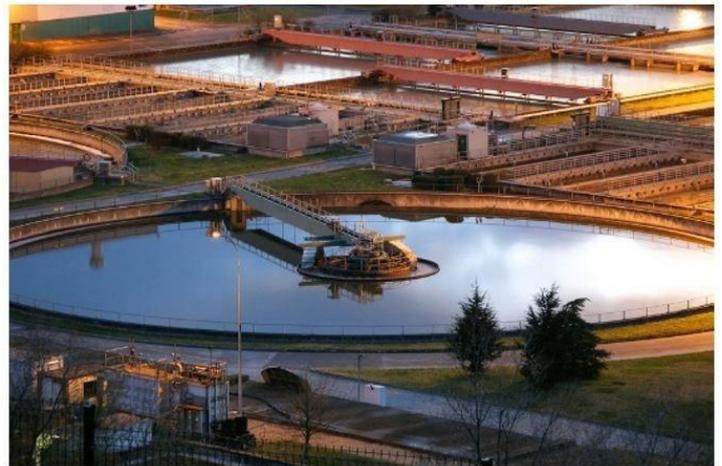


The Gold Standard[®]



The Gold Standard Water Benefit Standard

PoA Guidelines (beta)

1 Background

A programme of activity (PoA) is a group of similar project activities (component projects (CPs)) that undergo a common validation of concept using a common baseline(s) and then can expand over the course of a project's lifetime with additional component projects.

A PoA can be registered to include one or more of the following project types:

- Regular Water Project – CPs for which a Local Stakeholder Consultation has been conducted as per Water Benefit Standard (WBS) requirements before the start date (construction/implementation/real action) of the activity.
- Retroactive Water Project – Accounts for benefits achieved before the date of registration, i.e. right from the start date of the project. However, the absolute crediting period allowed remains unchanged, i.e. the crediting period is effectively just shifted back in time. Projects that include retroactive certificates follow the same certification procedure as a regular project, however may require special scrutiny to determine a project's financial need for the retroactive certificates.
- Ex Ante / Scale-Up Water Project – A scale up project describes a specific subcategory of PoA where a project developer proposes to expand an intervention that is already being applied in the project area without WBS support or comparable financing. Projects in this category use existing running projects as a proof of concept for the project design (in place of the CP described in these guidelines) that is submitted together with a PoA-PDD to register a project. Such projects are eligible for ex-ante crediting through “validated WBCs”. Scale-up projects are not eligible for retroactive certificates.

□

This document provides detailed instructions and guidance specific to the development of a PoA under the WBS. The following steps considered in this guidance identify specific considerations that must be made for PoAs when filling out the project documents and certifying a PoA project when these diverge from the usual process for a single project.

2 Programme Boundary and Timeframe

The boundary of a PoA is defined as the geographical area (e.g. municipality, basin or catchment, region within a country, country or several countries) within which all CPs included in the PoA will be implemented. All applicable regional and national policies and regulations are taken into consideration for each host country within that chosen boundary.

The PoA boundary must be defined in its entirety at the time of registration. The WBS may permit an expansion of the PoA boundary post-registration upon review by the secretariat.

The duration of the PoA is 7 years that may be renewed twice for a maximum duration of 21 years. PoA renewals are subject to demonstration of further financial need and continued eligibility under the WBS. The duration of a CP can have a crediting period with a maximum of 10-years. It must be defined by the entity in the CP at the time of inclusion in the PoA.

Any CP can be submitted for inclusion in the PoA at any time during the duration of the PoA by the project developer. The duration of the crediting period of any CP will be limited to the end date of the PoA regardless of when the CP was added.

3 Methodologies for PoAs

The WBS allows PoAs to use more than one methodology. All methodologies must be introduced in the PoAPDD together with a justification for their use. A real case CP-PDD must be submitted for each methodology used at the time of the initial verification of the programme.

In the case of methodologies using several technologies/measures, each of the technologies/measures included in the programme should be discussed in the PoA-PDD along with the justification of their eligibility and use.

For PoAs, the latest methodology version applicable at the time of first submission to the WBS will be used.

For CPs included in the PoA, they will use the same version of the methodology or methodologies that are defined in the most recent version of the PoA documentation. The use of an updated methodology version is also allowed, after a validation by an auditor, and followed by a registration review by the administrator with respect to the methodology changes.

4 Project Documentation

For a PoA, in addition to the PoA-PDD, a PDD is required for each CP.

The PoA Key Programme Information ([section 4.1 in the PoA-PDD](#)) addresses the following points.

- (a) Names of component projects (CP)
- (b) Methodology being used (if applicable for PoA)
- (c) Primary PoA activities
- (d) Boundary of the PoA to define the area of influence.
- (e) Name and size of watersheds in area of influence
- (f) Organisations that are involved in the PoA (project participants)
- (g) Communities involved in the PoA
- (h) Name of water service provider, water source and predicted annual volume (m³) used (where applicable)
- (i) Time frame for the PoA (duration and certification)
- (j) Number of (predicted) WBCs based on scale of PoA
- (k) Financial structure (sources of capital expenditure and operational expenditure funds over project crediting period or project asset life cycle).

5 Baseline and Monitoring Methodology

Methodology

Reference of Methodology
...

Applicability of Methodology
...

Establishment and Description of Baseline Scenario
...

Demonstration of Financial Needs
...

Explanation of Methodological Choices
...

Monitoring Plan

 Data and Parameters to be monitored **on site**
(Copy this table for each piece of data and parameter.)

Data / Parameter:	
Data unit:	
Description:	
Source of data:	
Description of measurement methods and procedures to be applied:	
Monitoring frequency:	
QA / QC procedures to be applied:	
Purpose of data:	
Additional comment:	

Data and Parameters to be monitored **off** site

(Copy this table for each piece of data and parameter.)

Data / Parameter:	
Data unit:	
Description:	
Source of data:	
Description of measurement methods and procedures to be applied:	
Monitoring frequency:	
QA / QC procedures to be applied:	
Purpose of data:	
Additional comment:	

6 Sustainability Assessment

6.1 Watershed Risk Assessment

Project developers submitting a PoA for Water Benefit Standard registration will conduct the 'Watershed Risk Assessment' at the CP level, unless a convincing case is provided as to why this can be conducted at the PoA level only. This must be approved by the auditor and Gold Standard administrator. In such a case, risks with respect to the relevant safeguarding principles will be identified at the programme level and future activities can only be included in the programme if they are in line with the 'Watershed Risk Assessment' compliance criteria defined in the PoA-PDD. In this case, the PoA-PDD would contain 'Watershed Risk Assessment' criteria per type of activity, defined at the programme level.

The following points will be addressed by the Watershed Risk Assessment at the programme level.

1. Is the programme's physical area of influence (e.g. basin, watershed) in a water stressed or water scarce region?

The programme is required to provide evidence of the over stress of the basin in which it operates and demonstrate that it's consumption of water is negligible compared to the overall availability of water within the basin.

2. Will the PoA exacerbate and therefore contribute to any negative impacts to the natural pattern of the watershed(s) such as high seasonal flow variability, flooding potential, lack of aquatic connectivity, drought, or climate change?

The risk of the programme negatively impacting the catchment shall be assessed and addressed to ensure its ongoing, long-term viability and impact on surrounding social-economic and environmental assets

3. Does the PoA area and its 25 km radius contain largely intact or High Conservation Value (HCV) ecosystems, landscapes, key biodiversity areas, or sites, e.g. Ramsar wetlands, World Heritage Areas, 'wilderness' areas, free-flowing rivers, unique or species-rich areas, threatened or endangered species, migratory species as defined by treaties and national authorities or areas of natural cultural significance? If yes, the risk of the programme negatively impacting the catchment and risks impacting programme success shall be assessed and addressed to ensure its ongoing, long-term viability and impact on surrounding HCV and ecological assets.

4. Is the PoA area of influence likely to undergo significant socio-economic or environmental change during the issuance period?

If yes, the risk of the programme negatively impacting the catchment and risks impacting programme success shall be assessed and addressed to ensure its ongoing, long-term viability and impact on surrounding social-economic and environmental assets.

5. Is the PoA area of influence likely to impact environmental water flows required to sustain freshwater and estuarine ecosystems and the human livelihoods and well-being that depend on these ecosystems? The programme is required to ensure that daily flow variations (including the projects' existing impacts) are less than 20%.
 - Where there is a 'yes' response the risk shall be neutralised. The developer shall demonstrate that the PoA has a positive impact or will be continually enhanced for the duration of the programme.
 - All 'yes' responses shall show that mitigation measures have been put in place and monitored under the '[6.3 Sustainability Monitoring Plan](#)' of the PDD. Monitoring shall commence with the start of the crediting period.

6.2 Sustainability Assessment

Project developers submitting a PoA for registration will conduct the detailed 'Sustainability Assessment' at the project equivalent level, unless convincing justification as to why this could be conducted at the PoA level only. This must be approved by the auditor and Gold Standard administrator. In such a case, future activities are included in the programme only if they are in line with sustainable development compliance criteria defined in the PoA-PDD. In this case, the PoA-PDD would contain a 'Sustainability Assessment' per type of activity, defined at the programme level.

The following indicators are to be defined at the programme level.

1. Human rights and socio-economic situation

- 1.1 Universal access to water resources and infrastructure are assured by the PoA.
- 1.2 Legal rights, customary rights, special cultural, ecological, economic, religious or spiritual significance of indigenous peoples and local communities are assured by the PoA.

2. Working conditions

- 2.1 Workers shall be able to establish and join labour organizations.
- 2.2 Working agreements with all individual workers shall be implemented.
- 2.3 The project will uphold the ILO Fundamental Conventions.
- 2.4 Workers shall be informed in a workshop about their rights according to the 8 ILO Fundamental Conventions
- 2.5 There shall be no child labour. Excepted are children for work on their families' property as long as:
 - (a) their compulsory schooling (minimum of 6 schooling years) is not hindered, AND
 - (b) the tasks they perform do not harm their physical and mental development.
- 2.6 Workers below the age of 18 year shall not work during night hours.
- 2.7 Workers shall:
 - (a) be compensated for their overtime, AND
 - (b) not work in excess of 48 hours per week on a regular basis, AND
 - (c) have an annual leave of at least 10 days per year, not including sick and casual leave.
- 2.8 A health insurance scheme for workers is provided.
- 2.9 The following forms of discrimination shall not be tolerated:
 - (a) gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or any other basis, OR
 - (b) physical and mental punishment and coercion, OR
 - (c) sexual harassment.
- 2.10 The project owner should not be involved in corruption and shall comply with anti-corruption legislation where this exists.

2.11 The project owner shall publicise a commitment not to offer or receive bribes in money or any other form of corruption.

2.12 For workers there shall be:

- (a) provisions for first aid, AND
- (b) provisions for the safe transport of workers, AND
- (c) provisions for timely evacuation of workers to an adequately equipped medical facility in case of serious accident, AND
- (d) provisions for the safe transport, storage, handling and application of fertilisers and pesticides regarding human health and the environment, AND
- (e) if workers stay in camps for a longer period of time, measures shall be provided to ensure that conditions for accommodation and nutrition comply at least with those specified in the ILO Codes of Practice.

2.13 Workers shall have job-specific training to safely implement the project activities.

2.14 Workers shall appoint an individual to have overall responsibility for 'Health & Safety' at the worksite.

This individual shall have demonstrated expertise, skills or experience in medical treatment

2.15 Workers shall have safe protective equipment, tools and machinery appropriate for their work. Hazardous work shall not be carried out by people that have:

- (a) mental handicaps, AND
- (b) chronic, hepatic or renal diseases (work with heavy machinery excepted), AND
- (c) respiratory diseases, AND
- (d) are between 15 and 18 years old, AND (e) pregnant or nursing women.

2.16 Workers handling pesticides, fertilizers or other harmful substances to human health on a regular basis are examined by a doctor once per year.

3. Food security

3.1 Food security and human health of local community surrounding the area of influence shall not be negatively affected by the PoA.

4. Water security

4.1 All potentially polluting substances, relevant to the water system of the area of influence, are identified.

5. Air quality

5.1 All sources of waste and waste products shall be identified and classified. Waste products include amongst others:

- (a) chemical wastes, AND
- (b) containers, AND
- (c) fuels and oils, AND
- (d) human waste, AND
- (e) rubbish (including metals, plastics, organic and paper products), AND (f) abandoned buildings, machinery or equipment.

5.2 Fertilizers shall be avoided, or their use shall be minimised and justified.

5.3 Chemical pesticides shall be avoided, or their use shall be minimised.

5.4 Biological control agents shall be avoided, or their use shall be minimised and justified.

5.5 The PoA shall not impact negatively on indoor or outdoor air quality.

5.6 All greenhouse gas emissions shall be documented and identified.

7 Stakeholder Consultation Process

Stakeholder consultations must happen at both the PoA level and CP level (specific consultations) unless convincing justification is provided in the project documentation as to why consultation at the CP level is not necessary, and approval is granted by the Gold Standard administrator at the registration stage, following a favourable opinion by the auditor.

Stakeholder consultations at the activity level must take place in a two-step process, i.e. the Local Stakeholder Consultation (LSC) meeting and the Stakeholder Feedback Round (SFR). For regular activities, at least one live meeting shall be conducted between the project developer and the stakeholders during the LSC, and, for retroactive activities, a live meeting may need to be held for the SFR depending on the outcome of the pre assessment or an auditor's request in case of fast-tracking.

A single LSC live meeting can be organized for several CPs as long as convincing justification is provided in the PDD and approved by the administrator, e.g. the activities are close enough to each other in location and time (start of construction/implementation within the same 2 years), similar socio-economic situations, identical activity or technology, etc.

The project developer will use the PoA Local Stakeholder Consultation Template for this process and will give at least a month's notice to stakeholders invited to attend the meeting. A Stakeholder Feedback Round must then be conducted at the programme level.

8 Financial Need for PoAs

Financial need must be demonstrated at both the PoA level and the CP level unless the project developer provides convincing justification, validated by an auditor and approved by the WBS, as to why this can be conducted at the programme level only.

Programme level financial need is required to ensure that the programme being implemented is credible, and to ensure more confidence in the expected water volume conserved, supplied or purified from the programme.

A PoA meets financial need if it can be demonstrated that in the absence of water finance:

1. the proposed voluntary measure would not be implemented, or
2. the mandatory policy/regulation would systematically not be enforced and that non-compliance with those requirements is widespread in the country/region, or
3. the PoA will lead to a greater level of enforcement of the existing mandatory policy/regulation or to a greater level of adoption of an existing voluntary scheme. This will constitute the demonstration of financial need of the PoA as a whole.

Whenever the demonstration of financial need at only the programme level is permitted, the justification for financial need must be identified for the inclusion of future CPs.

In the case of scale up projects, a credible detailed scale up plan over the first 7 years of the project after registration must be included with the financial need assessment. This plan must conservatively demonstrate the number of WBCs that shall be developed over the 7-year time period across the entire PoA and must be approved by the auditor and administrator for the issuance of “validated WBCs”.

9 Use of the Registry for PoAs

To develop an PoA under the WBS, an account must be opened in the Registry. The PoA and its corresponding CPs will be managed via this account as follows:

- The project developer of the PoA opens an account in their name in the Registry;
- A PoA entry is created under this account with a unique ID. All relevant PoA level documents required at the registration step will be uploaded to this ID;
- An entry per CP is created each with its own unique ID in the developer account regarding the issuance of the certificates. All documents relevant to a component project will be uploaded to its registry entry;
- The name of each CP must have a prefix that links it to the relevant PoA.

10 Programme Registration

The registration process takes place at the PoA level, therefore both the PoA and at least one individual CP must be registered with the Gold Standard initially. As new CPs are developed, these must also be registered with the Gold Standard.

11 Initial Programme Verification

Project developers shall submit to an auditor the following documentation for first verification:

- A completed **PoA-PDD** prior to registration review. Generic information on baseline and monitoring must be provided for each one of the different methodologies or technologies/measures in the case of a methodology allowing for multiple technologies to be considered.
- A completed **CP-PDD** based on the application of the PoA to a real case activity, for each one of the different methodologies or technologies/measures considered. This must be completed prior to registration.

New CP Project Inclusion

WBS Project inclusion will be based on a compliance check completed by the auditor with respect to the inclusion criteria defined in the PoA-PDD in cases where the Sustainability Assessment is conducted at the PoA level only. The auditors shall take into account the following while preparing the Inclusion Report:

1. Geographic boundary of the activity and whether it is within the boundary of the PoA set at the time of registration
2. Financial need criteria is being met as defined in the registered PoA Document
3. The activity is in line with the baseline scenario(s) identified in the PoA Document
4. Calculations for water volume conserved, supplied or purified are in accordance with the procedures defined in the registered PoA-PDD
5. The monitoring plan of the activity is designed as per the applied methodology and in accordance with the PoA-PDD
6. In the case of the Sustainability Assessment being done at the PoA level, it must be checked if the monitoring plan follows the PoA-PDD.

Site visit requirements during CP project inclusion

The project developer shall provide details of the approach chosen for site visits in view of the inclusion of future activities in the PoA documents. The project developer shall take into consideration the fact that the site visit by the auditor is required every time a new technology/methodology is introduced into the programme (if not completed at the time of registering the programme).

The administrator can mandate site-visits in the context of a pre-assessment if a specific risk is identified.

12 Programme Performance Verification

The project developer will submit monitoring reports for all the activities for which request of issuance is intended.

In the case of sampling verification, the auditor will select activities for verification as per the statistically sound sampling plan defined in the [PoA-PDD](#), conduct site visits for all selected activities and deliver a verification report to the Gold Standard.

The approach chosen for the sampling verification shall be discussed in detail in the PoA-PDD. The project developer will take into account the following factors, among others, while defining the approach for verification in the PoA-PDD:

1. Risks related to the type(s) of project activity
2. Risks related to non-identification of certain water-use
3. Risks related to double counting
4. Uncertainty with respect to the data monitored etc.
5. Different monitoring periods for activities requesting issuance, which may lead to sampling verification not being compatible (any period for which the water volume conserved, supplied or purified must be covered by verification). For instance, for a set of activities requesting issuance but having different monitoring periods, it may not be possible to choose a sample and all activities may need to be systematically verified.

The auditor will check the appropriateness of the sampling approach (including approach proposed for site visits) as part of the initial verification report, and the administrator shall assess and approve the approach at the time of PoA registration review.

The administrator initiates a 3-week review period for all activities and systematically reviews activities that have been selected for verification. The Water-TAC and NGO Supporters may also raise requests for clarification and corrective action as well. All requests must be addressed in a satisfactory way for the verification to be approved and for issuance to proceed.

For activities that are not verified by an auditor, spot-checks based on a target-random approach are conducted by the Gold Standard, which would conduct a 3-week review for selected activities.

Multiple auditors may be contracted within the same programme to verify different activities. In case of the choice of sampling verification, each one of the auditors involved in the verification will comply with the sampling approach defined in the PoA-PDD.

13 Issuance

After the Gold Standard review period, the validated and verified WBCs are issued upon payment of the fee into the project owner's Gold Standard Registry account.

The issuance of retroactive WBCs shall not exceed 2 years from the date of project registration.

In the case of scale up projects, the following applies.

1. The projects must provide evidence of real, physical action start of construction or implementation on the ground.
2. 50% of the issued validated WBCs shall be transferred into The Gold Standard Water Compliance Buffer. The transfer is distributed pro rata according to the vintage years.
3. The issuance of validated WBCs will continue only for the lifetime of the projects implemented or crediting period, whichever is shorter.
4. Validated WBCs will only be issued for those projects that are being constructed or implemented

After third-party certification, where the effective water benefits are verified, the validated WBCs are converted into verified WBCs, which are issued into The Gold Standard Registry.

14 Liability and Risk Mitigation for Non-Performing Projects

For PoAs, the liability lies with the project developer.

Whenever an erroneous CP is identified within the PoA by the auditors or the administrator at the time of verification, issuance remains on hold for the erroneous activity(ies). Remaining activities in verification, as well as in sampling verification that have actually been verified can proceed to issuance. All activities that have not actually been verified due to the choice of sampling verification must also be put on hold until the issue is resolved.

Whenever a CP is found to be erroneously included in the PoA and has already been issued credits, the project developer will within 60 calendar days after receiving notification of non-compliance:

- Compensate issued validated WBCs with verified WBCs from the same project in the case of a scale up project; OR
- Compensate issued validated or verified WBCs with WBCs bought from other projects.

Whenever a verified CP is found not to be delivering in accordance with the registered PoA (e.g. the CP is no longer operating), but certificates have already been issued to that PoA, the project developer shall within 60 calendar days after receiving notification of non-compliance:

- Compensate issued validated WBCs with verified WBCs from the same project in the case of a scale up project; OR
- Compensate issued validated or verified WBCs with WBCs bought from other like projects with similar regional characteristics and co-benefits.