



# Gold Standard<sup>®</sup>

*Climate Security & Sustainable Development*

## **CERTIFICATION PROCESS STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE**

**Version 1.0**

SEPTEMBER 2023

TABLE OF CONTENT

The Step-by-Step Process\_\_\_\_\_3

Project Planning \_\_\_\_\_4

STEP 1 – Stakeholder Consultation & Safeguards \_\_\_\_\_6

STEP 2 – Preliminary Review \_\_\_\_\_7

STEP 3 – Validation by an Independent Third-Party \_\_\_\_\_9

STEP 4 – Design Certification Review\_\_\_\_\_10

Project Monitoring and Reporting \_\_\_\_\_12

STEP 5 – Verification by an Independent Third-Party \_\_\_\_\_13

STEP 6 – Performance Review\_\_\_\_\_14

STEP 7 – Design Certification Renewal (validation) \_\_\_\_\_15

STEP 8 – Design Certification Renewal (Review) \_\_\_\_\_16

Other important information about the certification process\_\_\_\_\_18

TRANSITION PROJECTS\_\_\_\_\_18

DESIGN CHANGE\_\_\_\_\_18

DEVIATIONS \_\_\_\_\_19

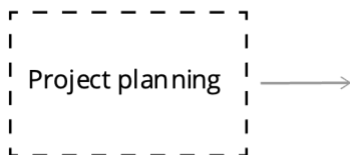
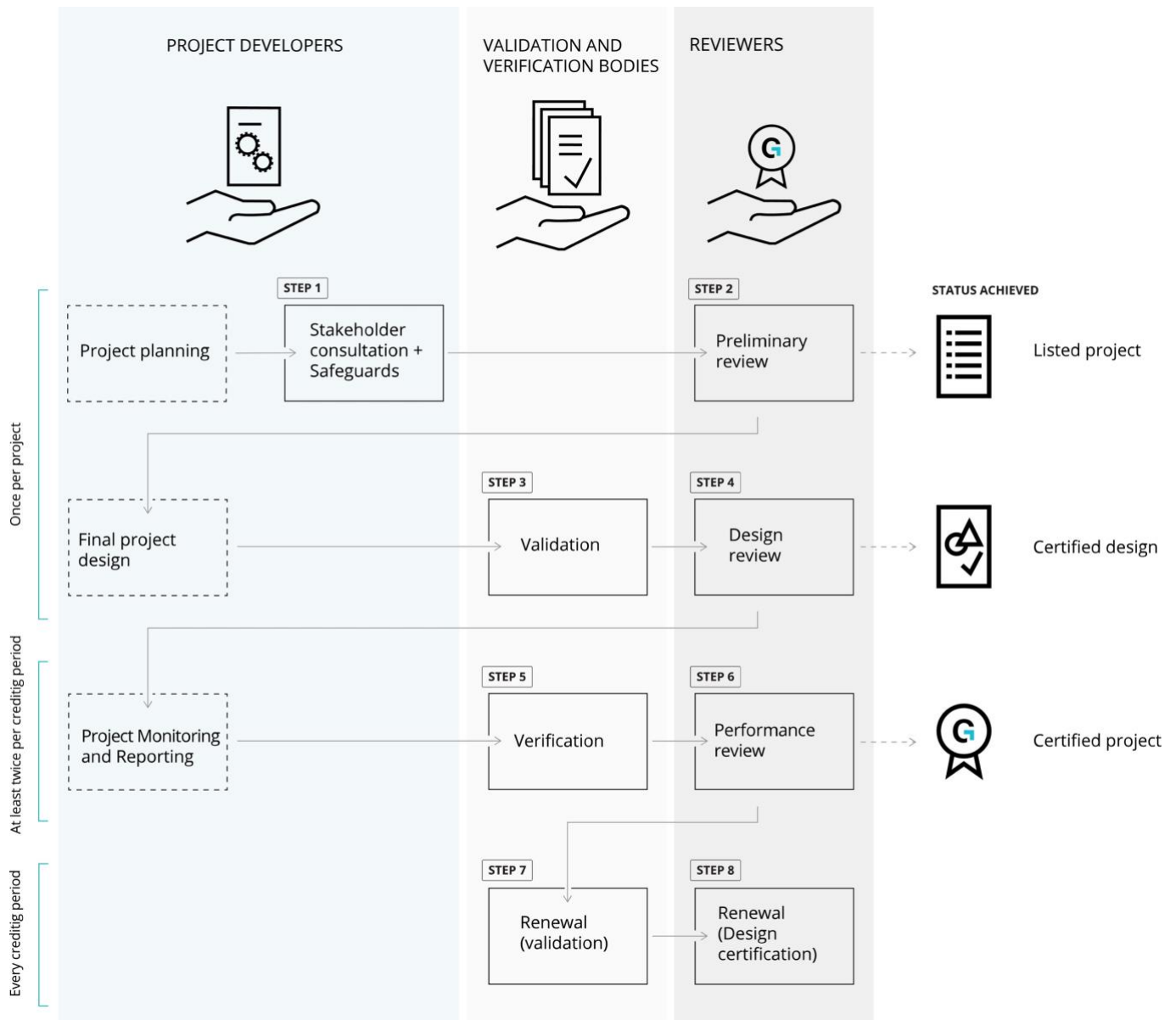
CLARIFICATION REQUESTS\_\_\_\_\_20

## THE STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

The certification process under Gold Standard for the Global Goals is set-up to help you design your project for maximum positive impact. The application of conservative and considered methodologies ensures accurate quantification of impact, a unique approach to stakeholder inclusivity helps support long term project success, and the assurance process uses approved third-party validation and verification bodies (VVBs) to audit the projects and ensure verified impacts - resulting in high quality projects with credible claims that can attract premium prices.

View video by clicking on the image, an internet connection is required.





## PROJECT PLANNING

Project planning is a key stage of any climate and development initiative. Before embarking on the Gold Standard certification process project developers are encouraged to review the [relevant methodologies](#), [standard documentation](#) and [terms of use](#) to check that the



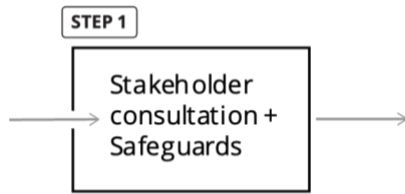
project meets the Gold Standard for the Global Goals principles and requirements and could be eligible for Gold Standard certification.

BEFORE THE PROJECT STARTS, PROJECT DEVELOPERS SHOULD

1. Identify if there is an applicable methodology for the proposed project.
  - a. View the [mitigation and removals options](#) for a high-level overview of feasible scopes (both current and upcoming) under Gold Standard for the Global Goals.
  - b. For a more detailed review the [methodology tool](#) can be used to find eligible and available methodologies for Gold Standard for the Global Goals
  - c. For new technologies, measures and/or interventions, where a methodology is not yet available, there is a [methodology approval procedure](#). Initial ideas, both for brand new methodologies or methodology revisions, can be submitted to check eligibility using the [concept note template](#). Submissions should be emailed to [methodology@goldstandard.org](mailto:methodology@goldstandard.org).
2. Once you have found your methodology, the next step is to check project eligibility within the [Principles & Requirements](#) and the relevant [Project Activity Requirements](#).
3. For projects that plan to issue Gold Standard carbon credits, additional requirements are located in the [GHG emission reductions and sequestration product requirements](#).

*NOTE: projects need to apply the latest version of the methodology and any applicable tools at the time of first submission (preliminary review). For transition projects please refer to [Annex B](#) of the product requirements for more information.*

4. Confirm the basic project design and assess against [Gold Standard safeguarding principles](#).
5. Start to prepare a document that summarizes the key project information, including initial estimates for the climate and sustainable development impacts.



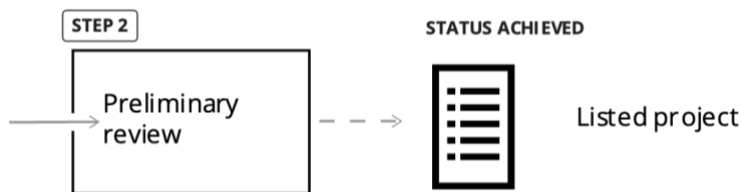
## STEP 1 – STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION & SAFEGUARDS

Once project planning has been completed and a summary of the key project information is developed. Projects can start the stakeholder consultation process.

Stakeholder consultations and meaningful engagement with those who may be affected by a project is an essential element for ensuring the success and sustainability of a project. As part of the Gold Standard certification process projects must hold a Stakeholder Consultation Meeting following these [requirements](#). Additional [guidelines](#) have been developed to provide support and practical examples to project developers when applying the requirements.

View video by clicking on the image, an internet connection is required.





## STEP 2 – PRELIMINARY REVIEW

Once the stakeholder consultation process has been completed a project will have all the necessary documentation to move onto a Preliminary Review.

The Preliminary Review considers whether a project has the potential to conform to the Gold Standard Requirements and may therefore progress to listed status. To reach this decision a review of the draft documentation submitted will be completed by the certification body, SustainCERT. The reviewer may request clarifications if/where required.

### PROJECTS MUST

- Submit the [Preliminary Review Request Form](#)
- Submit a [completed Stakeholder Consultation Report](#)
- Submit [signed GS4GG Cover Letter](#)
- Submit [signed Gold Standard Terms & Conditions](#)
- [Pay the fee for the Preliminary Review](#)

Documents are submitted and reviews are booked via SustainCERT. Please email [help@sustain-cert.com](mailto:help@sustain-cert.com) for more information.

*TOP TIP: Make sure you've [opened a Registry Account](#) in plenty of time to avoid any delays in scheduling a review and submitting your documentation*

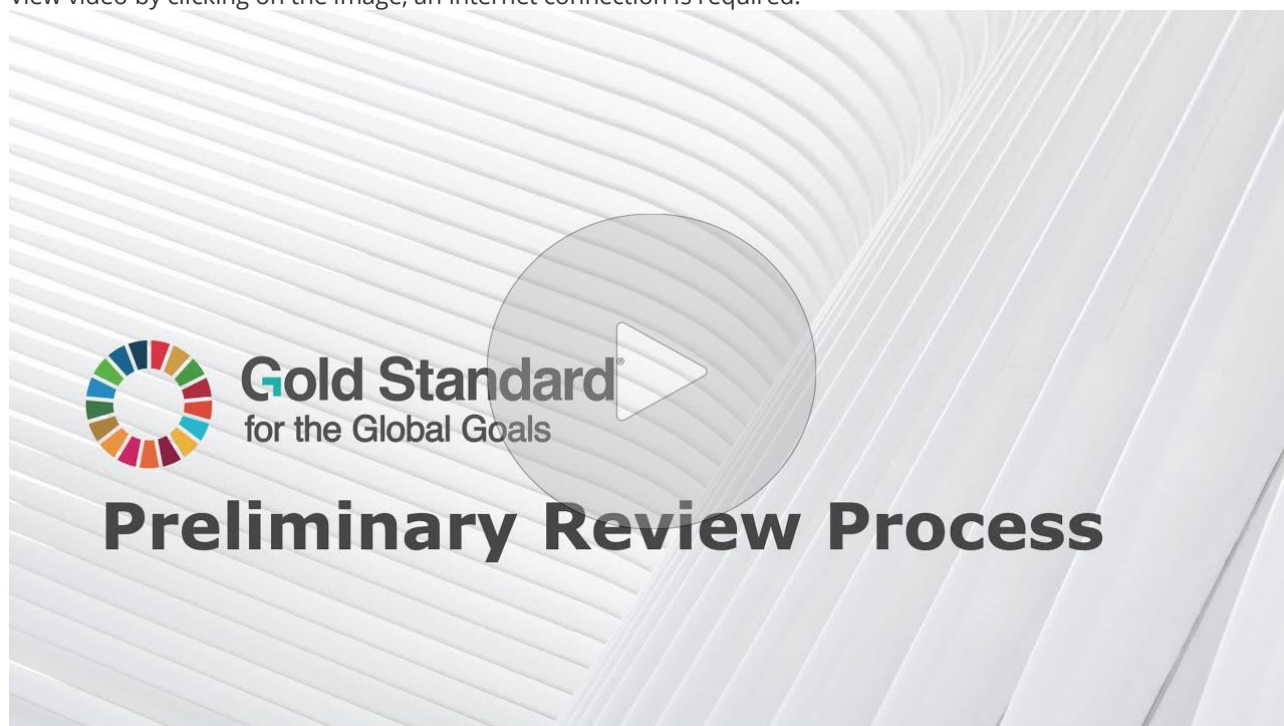
*TOP TIP: Ensure all documents are fully completed and submitted in time to pass the 'completeness check' to avoid any unnecessary delays.*

**FEES** View the relevant on the [Gold Standard Fee Schedule](#).

## TIMELINE

- Review dates are to be scheduled with SustainCERT. As an approximate guideline a simple ‘Completeness Check Review’ can take as little as 14 days from submission of documents and payment of the fee. The timeline is 4 weeks for a more extensive review, (i.e., for new project types, methodologies, or products, or for projects applying the land use and forestry Activity Requirements). View the [Principles and Requirements Section 5](#) for more detailed information on the Preliminary Review and its timelines.

View video by clicking on the image, an internet connection is required.



## PRELIMINARY DESIGN APPROVAL



Approval of the Preliminary Review by SustainCERT results in **“GOLD STANDARD PROJECT LISTED”** status - making the project publicly visible in the Impact Registry, enabling promotion of the project as per the claims guidelines and giving the project the green light to proceed to validation.





## STEP 3 – VALIDATION BY AN INDEPENDENT THIRD-PARTY

To apply for Gold Standard certification, projects need to demonstrate compliance with Gold Standard for the Global Goals principles and requirements.

Validation that a project meets these principles and requirements is done through an independent assessment conducted by an approved validation and verification body ([VVB](#)), appointed by the project developer. This step consists of a field visit and/or a desk-based review and provides impartial confirmation that the project's design and monitoring system is in line with the GS4GG Requirements and that the project can indeed achieve the expected impact. Validation must be successfully completed within two years of the date of 'listing' the project.

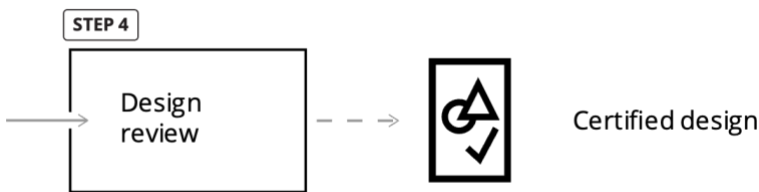
TO UNDERTAKE A THIRD-PARTY VALIDATION, PROJECTS MUST

- Have “Gold Standard Project Listed” status
- Identify, contract and pay an eligible VVB to carry out validation - [Find an approved VVB](#)
- Submit to the VVB fully completed estimates of the climate and sustainable development impacts for at least 3 SDGs, including SDG13 Climate, via the digital [SDG Impact Tool](#).
- Provide the VVB with a fully completed [Project Design Document \(PDD\)](#) or the relevant [POA](#) and/or [VPA design document](#) if you are doing a Programme of Activities and all relevant supporting documentation for VVB validation, including:
  - A Safeguarding Principles Assessment to demonstrate that the project does no harm
    - submitted as part of the digital SDG Impact Tool.
  - Monitoring Plan, to show how the project's impact can be credibly and conservatively monitored, reported on, and verified throughout the project's lifetime. Exports from the digital SDG Impact Tool can be used, where relevant, to complete the information in the monitoring plan.
-

TIMELINE

— Validation timelines are to be scheduled with the contracted VVB directly.

View video by clicking on the image, an internet connection is required.



**STEP 4 – DESIGN CERTIFICATION REVIEW**

The Design Review is a final check of the documentation after a positive validation is given by the Gold Standard approved VVB. On approval, the project will appear as ‘Design Certified’ in the Gold Standard Impact Registry.

Once the third-party validation has been completed, the documents are submitted to the SustainCERT app for design review. Clarifications and resolutions of corrective actions may be requested as/where required.

#### TO INITIATE THE DESIGN REVIEW, PROJECTS MUST

- Have a positive validation opinion from an approved VVB
- Ensure project developer submits the VVB-approved Project Design Document (PDD), SDG Impact Tool, and all relevant supporting documentation
- Ensure VVB submits the Final Validation Report
- Pay the fee for Design Review. View the [Gold Standard Fee Schedule](#) for an overview of the fees.

*TOP TIP: Ensure all documents are fully completed and submitted in time to pass the 'completeness check' to avoid any unnecessary delays.*

#### TIMELINE

- Project design reviews are managed and scheduled by the certification body, SustainCERT. They last for a minimum of 4 weeks from the date of the booked review on condition that all documents are submitted, and the payment of the fee is received. They are concluded when all Corrective Action requests (CARs)/Clarification Requests (CLs) are successfully closed.
- The date of 'Design Certification' is the last day of the 4-week Design Review period, even if the design review is concluded after this.

The validation and design review checks that:

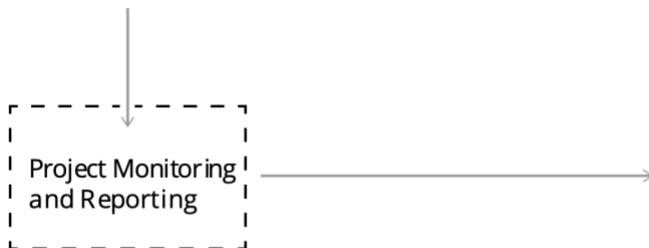
- Safeguards are covered by the project design
- Stakeholder inclusive design
- Robust monitoring plan
- Credible baseline and additionality
- Credible estimation of climate and sustainable development impacts

## DESIGN CERTIFICATION

Approval results in “**GOLD STANDARD DESIGN CERTIFIED**” status.



This means that documentation, including the PDD, Monitoring + Reporting Plan and final Validation Report are made public. The project can be promoted according to the claims guidelines and project becomes eligible to move forward to Performance Certification.

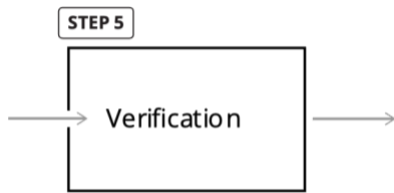


## PROJECT MONITORING AND REPORTING

The Project Developer implements the project and its monitoring system according to the certified project design.

PROJECTS MUST:

- Monitor the project's safeguards and impacts according to the certified monitoring plan
- Continuously engage with stakeholders
- Submit [Annual Reports](#) in years when verification does not occur
- Prepare a [Monitoring Report](#) for verification to request issuance of impact statements and/or products



## STEP 5 – VERIFICATION BY AN INDEPENDENT THIRD-PARTY

Verification of the project activity involves an independent assessment conducted by an accredited validation and verification body ([VVB](#)), appointed by the project developer. This consists of a site visit and/or desk-based review and provides independent confirmation that the project and its impacts are in line with the Gold Standard Requirements and relevant methodology(ies).

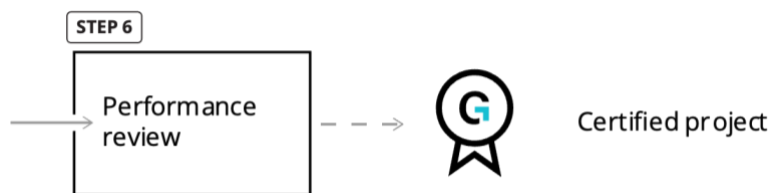
TO INITIATE THE VERIFICATION, PROJECTS MUST

- Have “Gold Standard Design Certified” status
- Identify, contract, and pay an eligible VVB to carry out verification.
- Provide a fully completed Monitoring Report (MR) and all relevant supporting documentation for VVB verification

TIMELINE

- Verification timelines are to be scheduled with the contracted VVB directly. Verification ends when the VVB submits a positive verification report
- Verification must occur at least once during the five-year certification cycle with the first verification completed within two years of the project implementation date or design certification date, whichever is later.
- For agriculture activities, the first verification shall be completed either within two years of project start date or Project Design Certification, whichever is later.





## STEP 6 – PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Once the third-party verification is completed, the documents are submitted to the certification body for performance review. Clarifications and resolutions of corrective actions maybe requested as/where required.

TO INITIATE THE PERFORMANCE REVIEW, PROJECTS MUST

- Have a positive verification opinion from a VVB
- Ensure PD submits the VVB approved Monitoring Report and all relevant supporting documentation
- Ensure VVB submits the VVB Final Verification Report
- Pay the fee for performance review. See full Gold Standard fee schedule for more details.

*TOP TIP Ensure all documents are fully completed and submitted in time to pass the 'completeness check' to avoid any unnecessary delays.*

### TIMELINE

- Project performance reviews are managed and scheduled by SustainCert. They last for a minimum of 3 weeks from date of review, unless otherwise stated in the methodology or Activity Requirements, and are concluded when all Corrective Action requests (CARs)/Clarification Requests (CLs) are successfully closed.

The verification and performance review checks:

- Adherence to safeguards
- Adherence to stakeholder inclusivity
- Climate and sustainable development impact achieved

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATION

Approval results in “**CERTIFIED GOLD STANDARD PROJECT**” status.



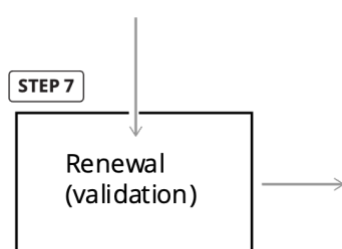
Once a project has received ‘Certified Project Status’ it can choose to issue Gold Standard certified products (including carbon credits) and/or impact statements.

## FEES

View the Gold Standard Fee schedule for information on issuance fees for first year of issuance and subsequent years by fee model (i.e., CASH or Share of proceeds).

## CLAIMS

Claims guidelines assist project developers, fund managers, partners, supporters, purchasers and claimants of certificates/credits and investors in communicating accurately and appropriately about the certification status of projects and funds as well as climate and development impacts derived from Gold Standard-certified projects, programmes and funds.



## STEP 7 – DESIGN CERTIFICATION RENEWAL (VALIDATION)

To maintain Gold Standard Certified Project status beyond five years, a project must undergo Design Certification Renewal. To renew a project’s certified design, it needs to apply the newest versions of the methodologies, tools and standard documents, demonstrate ongoing finance need, redefine the baseline scenario, and update its monitoring system accordingly. These updates are then validated by a third-party approved Validation and Verification Body.

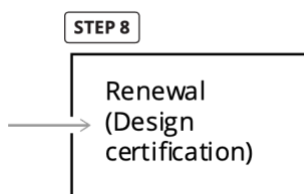
For agriculture activities, unless otherwise stated in the applicable Impact Quantification Methodology, the crediting period is a non-renewable, fixed 10-year period. This step is therefore not applicable.

#### PROJECTS MUST

- Have “Gold Standard Design Certified” status
- Update the project design and monitoring plan, applying the newest version of relevant methodologies, tools and standard requirements
- Identify, contract and pay VVB to carry out validation - [Find an approved VVB>>](#)
- Re-submit to the VVB an updated SDG Impact Tool, Project Design Document (PDD) and all relevant supporting documentation for VVB re-validation

#### TIMELINE

- Validation timelines are to be scheduled with the contracted VVB directly.
- A renewal opinion shall be submitted by a VVB no later than the last date of the current certification cycle. A delay in completion of revalidation shall result in a reduction of issued products/impact statements.



## STEP 8 – DESIGN CERTIFICATION RENEWAL (REVIEW)

Once the third-party validation for design certification renewal has been completed, the documents are submitted to the certification body for review. Clarifications and resolutions of corrective actions maybe requested as/where required.

For agriculture activities, unless otherwise stated in the applicable Impact Quantification Methodology, the crediting period is a non-renewable, fixed 10-year period. This step is therefore not applicable.

TO INITIATE THE REVIEW FOR DESIGN CERTIFICATION RENEWAL, PROJECTS MUST

- Have a positive validation opinion from VVB
- Ensure VVBs submit a VVB-approved updated Project Design Document (PDD), updated SDG Impact Tool, and all relevant supporting documentation
- Ensure VVBs submit the Final Re-Validation Report
- Pay the Design Certification Renewal Review Fee. See full [Gold Standard fee schedule](#) for more details.

## OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

### TRANSITION PROJECTS

Eligible projects can transition from other standards to Gold Standard for the Global Goals. More information, including the eligibility criteria, requirements and procedures, are included in [ANNEX B of the GHG Emission Reduction and Sequestration Product Requirements](#) and guidance is available in [Transition Procedure for Transitioning Projects from Other Standards to Gold Standard for the Global Goals](#). You can find the relevant documents and templates in the [Project Transition Page](#).

### DESIGN CHANGE

Once a project design is certified, it must be implemented as described in the Project Design Document. Any significant, permanent changes or corrections, including of project size, installed capacity, methodology used, crediting period start date, etc. must be submitted for review and re-certification in the form of a formal request for a design change.

The procedure for a design change doesn't apply to temporary deviations. There is a [deviation process](#) to support these short-term amendments.

To submit a request for a design change project developers need to follow the requirements outlines in [Annex A of the Principles and Requirements](#).

The template for submitting a design change is located in the Design Document templates (i.e. [PDD](#) | [PoA DD](#) | [VPA DD](#)). Design changes are submitted to the certification body. Upon receipt of the formal request for a design change and once payment of the design change fee has been received a review is conducted.



## TO INITIATE A DESIGN CHANGE, PROJECTS MUST

- Complete Annex 4 of the relevant Project Design Document, including justification of the impact of the design change on the project's additionality, eligibility, safeguards, and estimated impact.
- Conduct a stakeholder consultation, if necessary
- Update the Project Design Document
- Identify, contract and pay VVB to carry out validation - [Find an approved VVB>>](#)
- Pay the Design Change Review Fee. See full [Gold Standard fee schedule](#) for more details.

For the review the following documentation must be submitted:

- A VVB-approved Design Change Request Form
- An updated Project Design Document (PDD)
- Updated SDG Tool
- All relevant supporting documentation
- A final Validation Report

## DEVIATIONS

If a project is temporarily unable to comply with the certified monitoring plan, or with specific deadlines, it may apply for an exception for a given process or monitoring period. Such deviations are granted on a project-by-project basis on the discretion of the Gold Standard Technical Advisory Committee or based on precedents already reviewed and published.

The procedure for submitting a [deviation request](#) is outlined in the [Deviation Approval Requirements and Procedures](#). The deviation request form and the full list of [published deviations](#) can be viewed online.

Project developers seeking permanent changes to a registered project activity need to follow the [Design Change Approval Process](#).

## TO INITIATE A DEVIATION REQUEST, PROJECTS MUST

- Fill out a [Deviation Request form](#), including justification of the need for the deviation and a proposed alternative ensuring conservative outcomes
- If necessary identify, contract and pay an eligible VVB to provide an opinion - [Find an approved VVB>>](#)
- Submit to SustainCert the Deviation Request Form and all relevant supporting documentation. The request will be initially reviewed by SustainCert to check for precedents – if none exist it will be passed to Gold Standard Secretariat for review and elevated to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), if required.

## CLARIFICATION REQUESTS

To seek clarifications or an interpretation of the Gold Standard for the Global Goals requirements, fill-in the [clarification request form](#) and submit to [help@goldstandard.org](mailto:help@goldstandard.org). The submission will be reviewed by the team and a resolution will be provided within 10 working days. Please note that Gold Standard cannot give advice on project eligibility or how to best structure a project to meet requirements.

This process has been developed to formalise and expedite the process for answering queries and questions received daily. In time, resolved clarification requests deemed useful to other stakeholders will be made publicly available on the Gold Standard for the Global Goals website.