Gold Standard

Climate Security & Sustainable Development

CERTIFICATION PROCESS STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Version 2.0

DECEMBER 2O24

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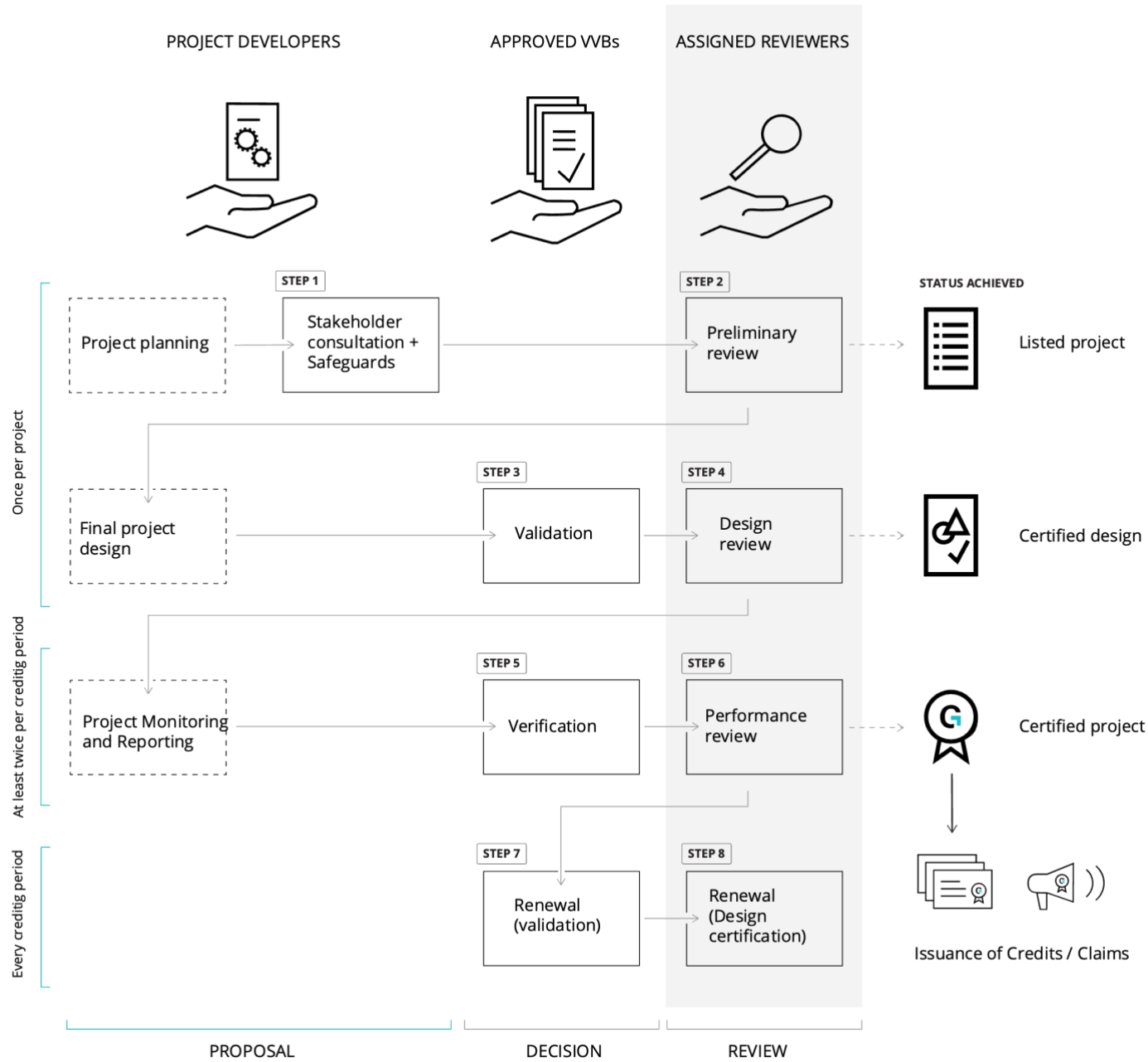
THE STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

The certification process under Gold Standard for the Global Goals (GS4GG) is set-up to help project developers design initiatives for maximum positive impact. The application of conservative and considered methodologies ensures accurate quantification of impact, a unique approach to stakeholder inclusivity supports long term project success, and the assurance process, overseen by Gold Standard, 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:

PROJECT DEVELOPERS   APPROVED VVBs   ASSIGNED REVIEWERS

Once per project

STEP 1
Project planning → Stakeholder consultation + Safeguards

STEP 2
Preliminary review

STATUS ACHIEVED
Listed project

STEP 3
Final project design → Validation

STEP 4
Design review

Certified design

At least twice per crediting period

STEP 5
Project Monitoring and Reporting → Verification

STEP 6
Performance review

Certified project

Every crediting period

STEP 7
Renewal (validation)

STEP 8
Renewal (Design certification)

Issuance of Credits / Claims

PROPOSAL   DECISION   REVIEW

Project planning →

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 therefore 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.

2. Once the methodology has been identified, the next step is to check project eligibility within the Principles & Requirements and the relevant Project Activity Requirements. Find more information on how the GS4GG standard documents are structured.

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 summarises the key project information, including initial estimates for the climate and sustainable development impacts.
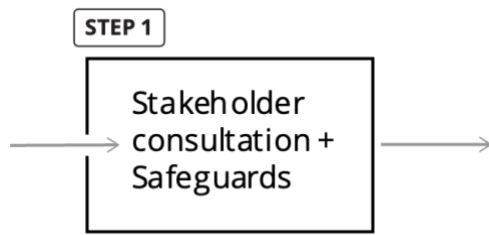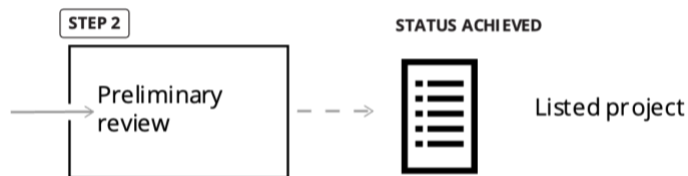
STEP 1: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION & SAFEGUARDS

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 are available to provide further support and practical examples to project developers when applying the requirements.

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STEP 2: PRELIMINARY REVIEW

Once the stakeholder consultation process has been completed, a project will have 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 Gold Standard will review the draft documentation submitted. The Gold Standard may request clarifications if/where required.

Projects must:

- Submit the Preliminary Review Request Form

- Submit a Stakeholder Consultation Report (draft)

- Submit signed GS4GG Cover Letter

- Submit signed Gold Standard Terms & Conditions

- Pay the fee for the Preliminary Review

Documents are submitted by creating and submitting a request for 'Preliminary Review' within the Gold Standard Assurance Platform.

A login for the Assurance Platform is automatically set-up and provided when an account is opened on the Gold Standard Impact Registry. For existing projects, you can request access to the Assurance Platform by submitting the Assurance Platform Access Form.

Assurance Platform Manuals have been developed to provide more information on how to use the platform, including how to upload documentation and submit for review.

TOP TIP: *Make sure to open a Registry Account in plenty of time to avoid any delays in submitting the required documentation.*

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

Fee: View the relevant details on the Gold Standard Fee Schedule.

TIMELINE

- Reviews are to be scheduled and managed by Gold Standard. The timeline is 4 weeks. View the Principles and Requirements Section 5 for more detailed information on the Preliminary Review and its timelines.
- Review Response Timelines: Completeness check responses from project developers are due within two weeks. Missing these deadlines will result in request rejection, requiring a new review request to be submitted. This review request will not incur an additional payment.

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PRELIMINARY DESIGN APPROVAL

Approval of the Preliminary Review by a Gold Standard 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.

FINAL PROJECT DESIGN:

Project developers are required to pull together all the documentation, assessments, impact estimates and any other additional evidence or information required to submit the project for validation with Gold Standard approved Validation and Verification Body (VVB).

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 a Gold Standard approved Validation and Verification Body (VVB), appointed by the project developer. This step may consist of a field visit 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 Gold Standard approved Validation and Verification Body to carry out validation.

- 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 developing a Programme of Activities and all relevant supporting documentation for VVB validation, including:

    o A Safeguarding Principles Assessment to demonstrate that the project does no harm – submitted as part of the digital SDG Impact Tool.

    o 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.
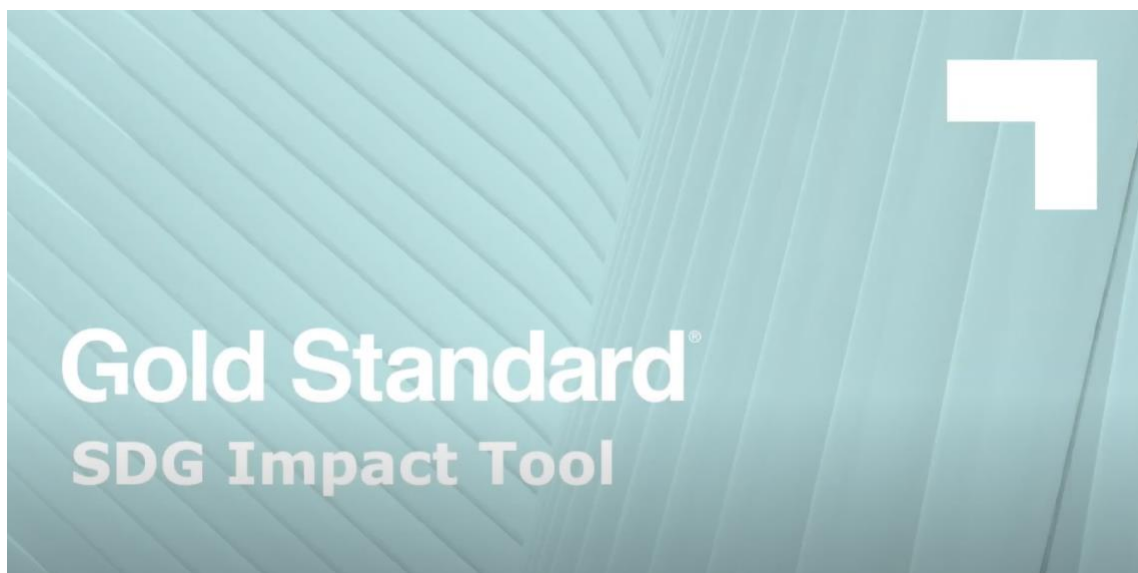
Once the VVB has completed the validation, the VVB will upload the final validation report and any other relevant documentation directly into the Assurance Platform. On submission of the documents, the Gold Standard Assurance and Review Management (ARM) Team will conduct a completeness check and notify the VVB and Project Developer the documents are ready for design review.
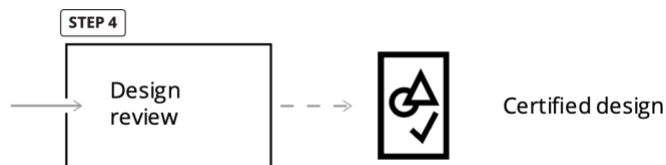
Assurance Platform Manuals have been developed to provide more information on how to use the platform, including how to submit documentation for validation.

Timeline:

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

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STEP 4
Design review ---> Certified design

STEP 4: DESIGN CERTIFICATION REVIEW

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

Once the third-party validation has been completed the VVB will upload the validation report and any other relevant documentation onto the Assurance Platform and submit for Design Certification. Gold Standard will conduct a completeness check and then initiate the global consultation - which will run for two weeks in parallel with the design review - and assign an expert to conduct a quality check of the project documents and validation report to ensure the accuracy, consistency and compliance of the project. Review findings are submitted to the GS-VVB and Project Developer through the platform. The GS-VVB will review these findings and, if applicable, make any necessary changes to the certification decision and submit to Gold Standard.

To initiate the design review, projects must:

- Have a positive validation opinion from an approved VVB

- Ensure the VVB submits the Final Validation Report, alongside the VVB-approved Project Design Document (PDD), SDG Impact Tool, and all relevant supporting documentation to the Gold Standard Assurance Platform.

- 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 Gold Standard. They last for a minimum of 4 weeks and are concluded when all Corrective Action requests (CARs)/Clarification Requests (CLs) are successfully closed.
- Review Response Timelines: Project developers and VVBs must meet specific deadlines when responding to CARs, CLs, and observations. Completeness check responses are due within two weeks, while responses to design reviews are due within six weeks. Missing these deadlines will result in request rejection, requiring a new review request to be submitted. This review request will not incur an additional payment.
- 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.

KEY CRITERIA CHECKED:

- 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 CERTIFIED DESIGN**" 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.

 Certified design
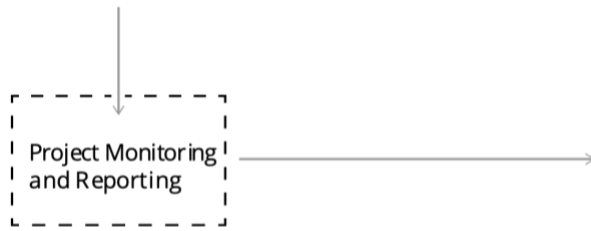
PROJECT MONITORING AND REPORTING

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 to Gold Standard Assurance Platform in years when verification does not occur

- Prepare a Monitoring Report for verification to request issuance of impact statements and/or products and submit to Gold Standard Assurance Platform

STEP 5: VERIFICATION BY AN INDEPENDENT THIRD-PARTY

Verification of the project activity involves an independent assessment conducted by an accredited and Gold Standard approved 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 GS approved VVB](#) to carry out verification

- Provide to the VVB a fully completed Monitoring Report (MR) and all relevant supporting documentation for VVB verification via the Gold Standard Assurance Pplatform

Once the VVB has completed the verification, the VVB will upload the final verification report and any other relevant documentation directly into the [Assurance Platform](#). On submission of the documents, the Gold Standard Assurance and Review Management (ARM) Team will conduct a completeness check and notify the VVB the documents are ready for performance review.

[Assurance Platform Manuals](#) have been developed to provide more information on how to use the platform, including how to submit documentation for verification.

TIMELINE

- Verification timelines are to be scheduled with the contracted VVB directly. Verification ends when the VVB submits a positive verification report to the Assurance Platform.

- 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.
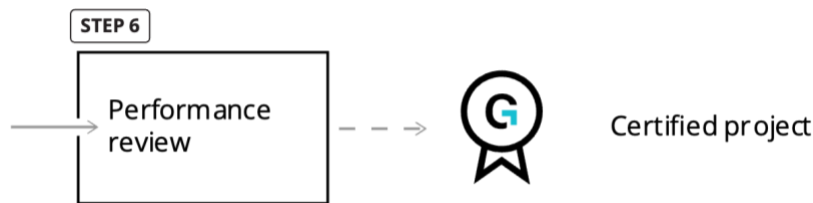
STEP 6: PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The Performance Review is a quality check of the documentation after a positive verification is given by the Gold Standard approved VVB. On approval, the project will appear as a 'Certified Project' in the Gold Standard Impact Registry.

Once the third-party verification is completed, the VVB will upload the verification report and any other relevant documentation onto the assurance platform. Gold Standard will conduct a completeness check and then initiate the global consultation - which will run for two weeks in parallel with the performance review - and assign an expert to conduct a quality check of the project documents and verification report to ensure the accuracy, consistency and compliance of the project. Review findings are submitted to the GS-VVB and the project developer through the platform. The GS-VVB will review these findings and, if applicable, make any necessary changes to the certification decision and submit directly to Gold Standard. Gold Standard will issue the certification outcomes, including carbon credits where relevant, into the Gold Standard Impact Registry based on the decision provided by the GS-VVB.

To initiate the performance review, projects must:

- Have a positive verification opinion from a VVB

- Ensure VVB submits the Final Verification Report, VVB approved Monitoring Report and all relevant supporting documentation to the Gold Standard Assurance Platform.

- 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 Gold Standard. 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.
- Review Response Timelines: Project developers and VVBs must meet specific deadlines when responding to CARs, CLs, and observations. Completeness check responses are due within two weeks, while responses to performance reviews are due within six weeks. Missing these deadlines will result in request rejection, requiring a new review request to be submitted. This review request will not incur an additional payment.

KEY CRITERIA CHECKED:

- 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.

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.
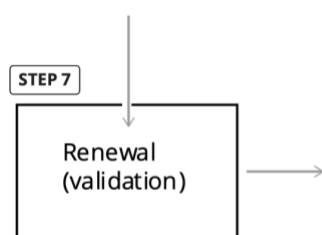
STEP 7: DESIGN CERTIFICATION RENEWAL (VALIDATION)

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.

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 Gold Standard approved Verification and Validation Body to carry out validation

— Re-submit to the VVB an updated SDG Impact Tool, Project Design Document (PDD) and all relevant supporting documentation for VVB re-validation

Once the VVB has completed the re-validation, the VVB will upload the validation report and any other relevant documentation directly into the Assurance Platform. On

submission of the documents, the Gold Standard ARM Team will conduct a completeness check and notify the VVB the documents are ready for review.

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

Renewal
(Design
certification)
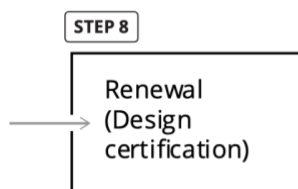
STEP 8: DESIGN CERTIFICATION RENEWAL (REVIEW)

Once the third-party validation for design certification renewal the VVB will upload the final documents to the Assurance Platform. Gold Standard will conduct a completeness check and then initiate the global consultation - which will run for two weeks in parallel with the design certification renewal - and assign an expert to conduct a quality check of the project documents to ensure the accuracy, consistency and compliance of the project. Review findings are submitted to the GS-VVB through the platform. The GS-VVB will review these findings and, if applicable, make any necessary changes to the certification decision and submit directly to Gold Standard.

To initiate the review for design certification renewal, projects must:

— Have a positive validation opinion from VVB

— Ensure VVBs submit the Final Validation Report, a VVB-approved updated Project Design Document (PDD), updated SDG Impact Tool, and all relevant supporting documentation to the Gold Standard Assurance Platform.

— Pay the Design Certification Renewal Review Fee. See full Gold Standard fee schedule for more details.

TIMELINE

— Review Response Timelines: Project developers and VVBs must meet specific deadlines when responding to CARs, CLs, and observations. Completeness check responses are due within two weeks, while responses to crediting period renewal (design certification renewal) review are due within six weeks. Missing these deadlines will result in request rejection, requiring a new review request to be submitted. This review request will not incur an additional payment.

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. The relevant documents and templates are available for review 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 GSIQ. 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 a Gold Standard approved VVB to carry out validation
- Pay the Design Change Review Fee. See full Gold Standard fee schedule for more details.

For the review the following documentation must be submitted to the Gold Standard Assurance Platform by submitting a Request for a Design Change:

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

TIMELINE

— Review Response Timelines: Project developers and VVBs must meet specific deadlines when responding to CARs, CLs, and observations. Completeness check responses are due within two weeks, while responses to design change reviews are due within six weeks. Missing these deadlines will result in request rejection, requiring a new design change review request to be submitted. This review request will not incur an additional payment.

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 and GS approved VVB to provide an opinion

— Submit to Gold Standard the Deviation Request Form and all relevant supporting documentation to deviations@goldstandard.org. The request will be reviewed by the Gold Standard Secretariat 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. The submission will be reviewed by the team and a resolution will be provided within 10 working days.

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.