## Item 02 - Revised GSSB Work Program 2017-2019

**November 2017**

**For GSSB approval**

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<td>Meeting</td>
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<td>This paper sets out the revised GSSB Work Program 2017-2019 based on the discussions of the GSSB during the in-person meeting of the GSSB 20-21 September 2017. This paper is presented for approval.</td>
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GSSB Work Program: 2017-2019

Overview

During the calendar years 2017-2019, the Global Sustainability Standards Board (GSSB) will oversee the following priority work areas.

Please note that these priority work areas are not listed in order of importance and the work program is subject to change based on emerging priorities and budget allocation.

Priority work areas

24 a) Review GRI Standards on a regular basis
25 b) Develop additional topic-specific Standards on a regular basis
26 c) Develop sector-specific content
27 d) Issue authoritative interpretations and guidance
28 e) Participate in initiatives and projects to improve the quality of reporting
29 f) Develop new guidance for specific groups of reporters
30 g) Collaborate with key partners to reduce the reporting burden and increase the uptake of the GRI Standards
31 h) Provide technical input on programs, products and services developed by GRI
32 i) Carry out monitoring on the use of GRI Standards and emerging reporting practice
Description of priority work areas

a) Review GRI Standards on a regular basis (commencing Q1 2017)

The GSSB is committed to reviewing a portion of the Standards on an annual basis. Depending on Standards Division resources available, between 4-6 Standards will be prioritized for review in 2017, with a similar number reviewed in 2018 and 2019.

Priority areas will be identified by the GSSB based on stakeholder feedback through the GSSB’s public consultations, as well as research carried out by the Standards Division and third parties. The GSSB will publish a schedule for the review of Standards on an annual basis between 2017-2019.

Following the GSSB’s Due Process Protocol, a Project Working Group or Ad-hoc Technical Committee will be formed to lead the review process for each Standard to be reviewed. These groups will provide technical expertise to help ensure that the review and any subsequent revisions reflect best practice in sustainability reporting and recent content developments, and align with authoritative intergovernmental instruments where applicable.

As part of the review process, the GSSB will establish expert networks, with the aim of maintaining these networks beyond the lifetime of the initial review project. The networks will have a dual purpose: 1. Draw attention to the GRI Standards and the related engagement opportunities; 2. Assist the GSSB in assessing the need for further updates to topic-specific Standards in the future.

The expert networks will not have the status of a Project Working Group or Ad-hoc Technical Committee as described in the Due Process Protocol.

Before the start of each calendar year, an annual schedule for Standards to be reviewed will be published on the GSSB website.

The GSSB will also evaluate the need for an omnibus exposure to address language and unintended consequences that affect more than one Standard in 2018.

b) Develop additional topic-specific Standards on a regular basis (commencing Q2 2017)

When the GSSB has identified content that requires an additional Standard, the Standards Division will undertake this work in line with the Due Process Protocol. New Standards might be required in order to cover additional sustainability topics, or to reflect changes in the structure of the GRI Standards.

Depending on Standards Division resource capacity, the GSSB expects to begin development of 1-2 new Standards on an annual basis. In some cases, new content or topic areas may be merged in with the review of an existing Standard.

Priority areas will be identified by the GSSB based on feedback from stakeholders during public consultations, research carried out by the Standards Division and third parties, and the outcomes of the development of new sector-specific content.
The GSSB will publish a schedule for the development of new Standards, on an annual basis, from 2017 to 2019.

c) Develop sector-specific content (start in 2018)

The GSSB will develop sector-specific content to augment the GRI Standards, in order to meet the need for globally-authoritative content on the sector level. This content will be developed through an independent multi-stakeholder process. The offering will identify likely material topics for each sector. This work will also help to identify topics with the potential to be developed as GRI Standards in future.

The timeline to begin this work depends on securing adequate resources. The number of sectors covered will depend on the system used for classifying sectors, to be decided in the early phases of the work.

d) Issue authoritative interpretations and guidance (ongoing)

The GSSB will enable all interested stakeholders to submit questions and feedback about the application of the GRI Standards through dedicated channels. Where needed, the GSSB will develop FAQ or interpretation documents, or provide additional guidance to address issues identified by users of the GRI Standards. This work area will include:

- continuing to operate the ‘Guidelines inbox’ service for users of the G4 Guidelines, while valid; and responding to technical queries related to the use of the GRI Standards;
- developing a specific process for answering and tracking questions of interpretation related to the GRI Standards, including making the interpretations publically available and communicating them to all affected parties.

e) Participate in initiatives and projects to improve the quality of reporting (ongoing)

The GSSB will reserve capacity to play a proactive role in improving the quality of reporting using the GRI Standards including considerations such as the strength of governance, the consistency of reports with wider information and the provision of external professional services reports. This work area aims to strengthen trust in reported information, and therefore the credibility of the GRI Standards themselves.

The issue of quality will become even more important in the future, with policy makers and regulators evaluating the outcomes of their initiatives, and the increased use of reported information in internal and external decision-making processes.

Investing resources to identify credibility and trust mechanisms, and their implications, is a critical step for the GSSB to safeguard the GRI Standards’ credibility and robustness.

The GSSB will continue to engage in the Corporate Reporting Dialogue and will continue discussions with the IAASB, WBCSD and other institutions.
f) Develop new guidance for specific groups of reporters (commencing 2017)

The GSSB will continue to evaluate the need for new guidance for engaging high-priority groups of new reporters.

The GSSB will further prioritize these groups based on input from ongoing stakeholder engagement, international developments, and the strategic priorities of the GSSB. Any new reporting resources developed will have to balance the benefits of accessibility for new reporters (i.e., lower barriers to entry) with maintaining the credibility of the GRI Standards, ensuring they are not undermined by the perception of easier offerings.

g) Collaborate with key partners to reduce the reporting burden and increase the uptake of the GRI Standards (ongoing)

The GSSB will manage existing strategic partnerships and proactively engage with new partners where applicable.

Priority organizations to engage with, as identified through initial stakeholder consultation on this Work Program, include the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD), the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC), Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, SHIFT and the Sustainability Standards Accounting Board (SASB).

This work area will include:

- regular communication and engagement;
- carrying out a scoping exercise to identify strategic opportunities to better align the GRI Standards with other reporting instruments, with the aim of reducing the reporting burden and enabling more harmonized reporting;
- updating selected ‘linkage documents’ to align with the new GRI Standards, and assessing the need for additional linkage documents.

h) Provide technical input on programs, products and services developed by GRI (ongoing)

The GSSB will review programs, products and services developed by GRI that reference or build on the contents of the GRI Standards. This includes, for example, training materials, presentations, and services for reporters. The aim of this work is to ensure the quality and consistency of technical content in any materials that reference the GRI Standards.
i) Carry out monitoring on the use of GRI Standards and emerging reporting practice (ongoing)

The GSSB will reserve capacity to review emerging reporting practice. This monitoring work will help the GSSB better understand how the GRI Standards are applied in practice, and highlight areas for future review or updating.

The GSSB will explore possibilities to partner with third parties for its ongoing monitoring activities.