



Barbara Strozziiaan 336
1083 HN Amsterdam
The Netherlands
biodiversity@globalreporting.org

GRI Topic Standards project for biodiversity

Biodiversity Technical Committee terms of reference

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Contact

Email: biodiversity@globalreporting.org

Terms of reference

These terms of reference outline the mandate of the technical committee for the GRI Topic Standards project for biodiversity (Biodiversity Technical Committee), including its selection and appointment, primary objectives, and time commitments.

Background

The Global Sustainability Standards Board (GSSB), GRI's independent standard-setting body, has identified the review of *GRI 304: Biodiversity 2016* as a priority project for commencement in 2021.

The objective of sustainability reporting using the GRI Standards is to provide transparency on how an organization contributes or aims to contribute to sustainable development. The GRI Standards enable an organization to publicly disclose its most significant impacts on the economy, environment, and people, including impacts on human rights and how the organization manages these impacts.

The primary objective of this GRI Topic Standards project for biodiversity is to develop a Topic Standard that enables an organization to publicly disclose its most significant impacts on biodiversity and how the organization manages these impacts to improve the global comparability and quality of reported information on these impacts. The review of *GRI 304: Biodiversity 2016* will bring the content of this Standard in line with internationally agreed best practices and relevant authoritative intergovernmental instruments and with recent developments in the field of biodiversity. The review will follow the [GSSB Due Process Protocol](#).

See the [project proposal](#) for more information.

Mandate of the Biodiversity Technical Committee

Topic Standards are developed using multi-stakeholder expertise, authoritative intergovernmental instruments, and other relevant evidence. The Biodiversity Technical Committee is to contribute their expertise to the revision of the Topic Standard for biodiversity. The overall work of the Biodiversity Technical Committee should support sustainability reporting as promoted by the GRI Sustainability Reporting Standards (GRI Standards), which is to provide transparency on how an organization contributes or aims to contribute to sustainable development.

Scope of work

The Biodiversity Technical Committee (TC) will be responsible for reviewing *GRI 304: Biodiversity 2016* for the consideration of the GSSB.

The TC will provide recommendations and is tasked with:

- revising the existing 'Background context' information within *GRI 304*;
- developing the topic management disclosures, considering contents in the existing management disclosures section within *GRI 304*, including:
 - developing new requirements, recommendations, and guidance.
- ensuring the revised management disclosures are compatible for organizations to use together with [GRI 3: Material Topics 2021](#).
- developing topic disclosures for biodiversity, building on the existing topic disclosures (along with their related reporting requirements, recommendations, and guidance) including:
 - revising the existing content;
 - developing new disclosures, requirements, recommendations, and guidance to address areas not currently covered by the Standard.

- revising and updating the existing Bibliography related to biodiversity.
- revising existing definitions in the [GRI Standards Glossary](#) and, where applicable, developing new ones.
- identifying which GRI Sector Standards content related to biodiversity should be revised to ensure alignment and consistency with the revised Topic Standard for Biodiversity.

The TC will also be responsible for proposals to delete existing content, where applicable. This may be the case when content is outdated or not valid for reporting an organization's impacts on biodiversity. The TC may also provide recommendations on considerations that may be relevant to other GRI Topic Standards. Changes to the overarching GRI system of Standards, like the 'in accordance criteria', are not within the remit of the TC.

Responsibilities of other parties

The Standards Division is responsible for:

- overall project management and ensuring compliance with the [GSSB Due Process Protocol](#);
- facilitating, providing logistical support, and preparing materials for TC meetings;
- maintaining an online collaboration platform for the TC;
- engaging with the GSSB and other GRI Governance bodies;
- engaging with other experts and interested parties in a peer review and on an as-needed basis;
- coordinating public exposure of the draft Topic Standard, including collecting and summarizing feedback for consideration by the TC;
- undertaking research to support the development of the Topic Standard; and
- drafting the content of the Topic Standard.

The Standards Division will draft the Topic Standard and other relevant deliverables in accordance with the recommendations of the TC and in accordance with template and house rules for terminology, style, and presentation. The Standards Division will also be responsible for editing the stylistic and grammatical presentation of the deliverables to ensure consistency with existing GRI documents.

The GSSB votes on the approval of the final draft Topic Standard for public exposure and the final content of the Topic Standard. The GSSB will review the draft contents and may ask the TC to conduct further research and/or develop the draft recommendations. TC members should be committed to supporting the revision of draft contents and the development of these contents. Further information on the role and authority of the GSSB can be found in the [GSSB Due Process Protocol](#).

Additional considerations

The revision of *GRI 304* is to be carried out within the existing structure and template of the GRI Topic Standards, including preserving the hierarchy, coherence, and implementation approach of the GRI Standards as outlined in [GRI 1: Foundation 2021](#).

The Standards Division will provide the TC with a template structure to refer to in revising the content.

The TC should ensure that the revised Topic Standard applies to organizations of any size, type, sector, or geographic location; and that it reflects and supports the best practice of biodiversity management reporting while remaining accessible and practicable for a global user base.

The TC should aim to develop disclosures (and related methodologies) that are clear, consistent, and focused on the measurement and reporting of impacts on biodiversity.

The TC should seek to revise content in line with international authoritative instruments and other relevant standards and developments.

The TC should aim to develop topic descriptions that are clear, consistent, and focused on impacts from a sustainable development perspective. Content should also seek to be in line with key authoritative inter-governmental instruments (such as instruments of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and the OECD) and consider the content of other business and human rights reporting frameworks.

The discussions of the TC are confidential, but any recommendations made by the TC to the GSSB will be publicly available in accordance with the [GSSB Due Process Protocol](#).

GRI will hold the copyright of any deliverables associated with the project.

Composition of the technical committee

It is anticipated that the technical committee (TC) will have up to 15 members. The TC will aim to have at least one person drawn from each of the stakeholder constituencies on which the membership of the GSSB is based: business enterprises, investment institutions, labor, civil society, and mediating institutions.

In addition, geographical, gender, and cultural diversity will be considered. There can only be one representative per organization in the TC.

Table 1: Descriptions of stakeholder constituencies represented on the TC

Business enterprise	<p>a) An enterprise (other than a mediating or investment institution) that has been established in order to generate a profit for the benefit of its investors or owners; or</p> <p>b) An organization representing the collective interests of those falling into category 'a'.</p>
Investment institution	An enterprise that is primarily concerned with the direct or indirect, long-term investment of funds in business – including, but not limited to, asset owners, asset managers, development banks, exchanges, rating agencies, and market information brokers.
Labor	An organization established independently of employers and governments to represent the interests of workers.
Civil society	An organization established in order to promote or secure a public good relating to sustainability (environmental, social, and governance) and that does not fall into any of the categories defined above.
Mediating institution	An individual or organization that provides goods and/or services associated with the reporting process and derives benefit from doing so.

A GSSB sponsor(s) may join TC meetings.

Selection criteria

In accordance with the [GSSB Due Process Protocol](#), members of the TC are appointed by the GSSB. The principal criterion for selecting the TC is relevant knowledge and experience relating to business and biodiversity, including ecosystems. This includes familiarity with the goals and targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and experience in identifying and measuring impacts of businesses on biodiversity.

Members shall be available and able to participate in TC meetings, review drafts, and provide written feedback (all in English) when requested.

In addition, the following criteria will be considered:

- relevant knowledge of sustainability reporting on biodiversity;

- familiarity with the needs of users of sustainability reports;
- related experience with multi-stakeholder initiatives;
- understanding of and willingness to work in a consensus-based, multi-stakeholder working group.

TC commitments

TC members are expected to:

- act in an individual capacity, exclusively in the public interest, and according to due process as defined in the [GSSB Due Process Protocol](#);
- review the materials provided by the Standards Division in advance of TC meetings, in order to actively participate;
- provide timely feedback on documents or other materials distributed by the Standards Division;
- work in a manner that aims at achieving consensus.

The revision of the Biodiversity Standard is expected to take up to 12 months following the appointment of the TC. See the timeline included in Appendix 1.

A total time commitment of 75 hours across the entire project is estimated for each TC member. Members commit to attending up to 25 hours of meetings and reviewing the draft Standard for a minimum of three times during that period. TC members also commit to planning sufficient time to prepare for meetings, review other materials, and engage in supplementary content creation methods. It is estimated that this may result in up to 50 hours of time commitment across the project (excluding any necessary travel time).

Meetings and other engagement methods will vary depending on the needs of the TC and the project. Commonly used methods include virtual TC meetings, sub-group meetings and/or workshops, and digital content creation platforms. The use of these methods will also consider any travel restrictions or risk factors related to Covid-19.

Virtual meetings are normally held between 1.00-2.30 pm Central European Time (CET), so that members in most time zones can join. This will be adjusted based on the final geographical representation of the TC.

In the event of an in-person meeting (which we do not foresee at this moment), TC members will be asked to attend a two-day meeting in Amsterdam (excluding travel time).

See Appendix 2 for the proposed minimum meeting schedule and an itemized time commitment.

TC members volunteer their time. There is no fee or compensation associated with participation in the TC. Upon request, TC members will be eligible for travel and accommodation reimbursement for in-person meetings in accordance with GRI policies.

Public communications protocol

Public communication on issues related to the activities of the TC and the development of the GRI Standards is the responsibility of the GSSB. TC members may publicly express their personal opinions and views, but may not speak on behalf of the TC, GSSB, or GRI.

The names and bios of members will be published on the GRI website. Members are welcome to publicize their participation in and the activities of the TC in channels such as press releases or on social media. Members are asked to work with the Standards Division or GRI's communication team to coordinate any such activity ahead of time.

TC members are advised to use the following when referring to their participation in this process:

“[name of member] has been appointed by the Global Sustainability Standards Board (GSSB), GRI’s independent standard setting body, to serve on the Biodiversity Technical Committee to help the review of *GRI 304: Biodiversity 2016*.”

These links are also available on the project website.

Appendix 1. Project timeline and milestones

GRI Biodiversity revision – proposed time frame															
2021								2022							
Project phase	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
GSSB approval	◆	◆													
Content development TC				◆	◆	◆	◆			◆	◆	◆	◆		
GSSB approval draft								◆							
Public comment period								Public comment							
GSSB approval Publication														◆	



TC meetings - milestones

- Dec: Suggestion, input and review first draft
- Jan/Feb: Discuss amendments and new draft
- March: Final draft discussion
- Jun: Consider public comments and revise draft
- July: Final changes to draft based on input
- Sept: Overview of GSSB feedback, final content changes



GSSB meetings - milestones

- Sept: Approval proposal
- Oct: Approval TC members
- Jan/Feb: Progress update – GSSB Feedback
- March: Approval draft for public exposure
- Aug: Progress update – GSSB feedback
- Oct: Approval final draft Standard for publication

Phases and milestones

- **Phase 1 – Project initiation and commencement**

Research phase, project proposal prepared: approved by GSSB: September 2021

Formation Technical Committee, approval TC members by GSSB: October 2021

- **Phase 2 – Content development**

Initial scoping - Interviews with individual TC members and drafting a preliminary discussion paper by the GRI Standards Division: November 2021

TC review and input to the development of the exposure draft: December 2021 – March 2022

Technical and editorial review, final TC agreement on the exposure draft: March 2022

Exposure draft is submitted to the GSSB for approval for public exposure: March 2022

- **Phase 3 – Public exposure**

Draft Topic Standard is launched for public consultation: April 2022

Public comments are collected and analyzed: May 2022

- **Phase 4 – Standard revision**

Based on the analysis of public comments, the Standards Division will develop proposed revisions to the draft Standard: May-June 2022

Comment analysis and proposed revisions to the draft Standard are presented to the TC for review and consideration. Recommendations for revision of relevant content in the Sector Standards is discussed in TC meetings: June – July 2022

Final content of the draft Standard and recommendations to revise the Sector Standards are discussed in meeting with the TC: August 2022

Final Standard and recommendations are submitted to GSSB for approval: September 2022

- **Phase 5 - Standard approval and publication**

Appendix 2. Meeting schedule

The following table outlines the minimum number of meetings expected to occur throughout the course of the project. Engagement as a technical committee is currently predicted to be completely virtual as it is anticipated that international travel and in-person meetings may still be challenging. If this changes, an in-person meeting may be planned and replace some virtual engagements. In this case, the TC will be provided with sufficient notice, and scheduling will be subject to member availability.

Meeting	Time commitment	Approximate date
Meeting 1	2-hour virtual meeting + 2 hours review of preparatory materials	December 2021
Meeting 2	2-hour virtual meeting + 2 hours review of preparatory materials	January 2022
Meeting 3	4-hour virtual meeting + 2 hours review of preparatory materials	February 2022
Meeting 4	2-hour virtual meeting + 2 hours review of preparatory materials	March 2022
Public exposure period		
Meeting 5	2-hour virtual meeting + 2 hours review of preparatory materials	June 2022
Meeting 6	2-hour virtual meeting + 2 hours review of preparatory materials	July 2022
Meeting 7	2-hour virtual meeting + 2 hours review of preparatory materials	September 2022

In addition to the meetings listed above, it is expected that the TC member will provide input before meeting 1 via one or more interviews, thoroughly review the draft Standard several times, three times prior to the public exposure and twice following, and participate in stakeholder engagement activities during the public exposure period and to support the launch of the Standard as relevant.