



GSSB Global
Sustainability
Standards Board

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Item 04. Final GSSB Work Program 2017-2019

For GSSB approval

Date	9 November 2016
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Description	<p>This paper sets out the GSSB work program for 2017-2019, including high-level focus areas.</p> <p>The Annex includes a schedule with the specific GRI Standards which will be revised/ further developed during 2017.</p> <p>Two changes have been made in response to GSSB input during the 27 October 2016 meeting:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The following sentence has been added to section (b) and to Annex I: <i>'The GSSB will evaluate the need for an omnibus exposure to address language and unintended consequences that affect more than one Standard in 2017 and 2018'</i>2. A specific reference to the work of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) and their Phase I Report has been added into section (b) and Annex I, with the commitment that GRI will monitor developments of the TCFD and assess the possible implications for relevant GRI Standards

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17 GSSB Work Program: 2017-2019

18 *Overview*

19 During the calendar years 2017-2019, the GSSB will oversee the following priority work areas.

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

22 **Priority work areas**

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

34 *Description of priority work areas*

35 a) Support the implementation of the GRI Standards (Q1 2017-Q2 2017)

36 This area focuses on supporting the development of training, communication, and other resources
37 to help G4 users transition smoothly to the GRI Standards. Expected activities and deliverables
38 include:

- 39 • producing high-level communications on the new GRI Standards, such as brochures, guidance
40 documents, and webinars to communicate about and answer questions on the key features of
41 the GRI Standards (Q1 2017)
- 42 • launching the GRI Standards in key markets (Q1 2017)
- 43 • coordinating the translations of the GRI Standards into high-priority languages: these will likely
44 include Spanish, Portuguese, German, French, Chinese, and Japanese (Q2 2017)

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

46 The GSSB is committed to reviewing a portion of the Standards on an annual basis. Depending on
47 Standards Division resources available, between 4-6 Standards will be prioritized for review in
48 2017, with a similar number reviewed in 2018 and 2019.

49 Priority areas will be identified by the GSSB based on stakeholder feedback through the GSSB's
50 public consultations, as well as research carried out by the Standards Division and third parties.
51 The GSSB will publish a schedule for the review of Standards on an annual basis between 2017-
52 2019.

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

58 As part of the review process, the GSSB will establish expert networks, with the aim of maintaining
59 these networks beyond the lifetime of the initial review project. The networks will have a dual
60 purpose: 1. Draw attention to the GRI Standards and the related engagement opportunities; 2.
61 Assist the GSSB in assessing the need for further updates to topic-specific Standards in the future.
62 The expert networks will not have the status of a Project Working Group or Ad-hoc Technical
63 Committee as described in the Due Process Protocol.

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

66 See [Annex I](#) for the *GRI Standards Review and Development: 2017 Schedule*. In addition to the
67 specific Standards mentioned in the Annex for 2017, the GSSB will monitor developments related
68 to the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) and their Phase I Report, in
69 order to understand potential implications for relevant GRI Standards (e.g. such as *GRI 302: Energy*
70 and *GRI 305: Emissions*, amongst others).

71 The GSSB will also evaluate the need for an omnibus exposure to address language and
72 unintended consequences that affect more than one Standard in 2017 and 2018.

73 **c) Develop additional topic-specific Standards on a regular basis**
74 **(commencing Q2 2017)**

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

79 Depending on Standards Division resource capacity, the GSSB expects to begin development of
80 1-2 new Standards on an annual basis. In some cases, new content or topic areas may be merged
81 in with the review of an existing Standard.

82 Priority areas will be identified by the GSSB based on feedback from stakeholders during public
83 consultations, research carried out by the Standards Division and third parties, and the outcomes
84 of the development of new sector-specific content.

85 The GSSB will publish a schedule for the development of new Standards, on an annual basis, from
86 2017 to 2019. See [Annex I](#) for the *GRI Standards Review and Development: 2017 Schedule*

87 **d) Develop sector-specific content (estimated 2018)**

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

93 The timeline to begin this work depends on securing adequate resources. The aim is to have a
94 significant portion of high-impact sectors covered by the end of this three-year Work Program.
95 The number of sectors covered by the end of this three-year Work Program will depend on the
96 system used for classifying sectors, to be decided in the early phases of the work

97 **e) Issue authoritative interpretations and guidance (ongoing)**

98 The GSSB will enable all interested stakeholders to submit questions and feedback about the
99 application of the GRI Standards through dedicated channels.

100 Where needed, the GSSB will develop FAQ or interpretation documents, or provide additional
101 guidance to address issues identified by users of the GRI Standards. This work area will include:

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

107 **f) Participate in initiatives and projects to improve the quality of reporting**
108 **(ongoing)**

109 The GSSB will reserve capacity to play a proactive role in improving the quality of reporting using
110 the GRI Standards. This work area aims to strengthen trust in reported information, and therefore
111 the credibility of the GRI Standards themselves.

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

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

117 The GSSB will continue to engage in the Corporate Reporting Dialogue and will discuss possible
118 collaboration with the WBCSD, IAASB, IIA and other institutions.

119 **g) Develop new guidance for specific groups of reporters (commencing**
120 **2017)**

121 The GSSB will develop new guidance for engaging high-priority groups of new reporters, with a
122 primary focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

123 The GSSB will commit resources to develop an initial set of materials targeted at SMEs by 2017.

124 Other groups of reporters, such as those in developing countries, reporters facing regulatory
125 requirements to disclose non-financial information, and membership organizations with reporting
126 requirements for members will also be considered as potential audiences for tailored resources.

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

132 **h) Collaborate with key partners to reduce the reporting burden and**
133 **increase the uptake of the GRI Standards (ongoing)**

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

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

141 This work area will include:

- 142 • regular communication and engagement with existing and new partners;

- 143 • carrying out a scoping exercise to identify strategic opportunities to better align the GRI
144 Standards with other reporting instruments, with the aim of reducing the reporting burden
145 and enabling more harmonized reporting;
- 146 • updating selected 'linkage documents' to align with the new GRI Standards, and assessing the
147 need for additional linkage documents.

148 **i) Provide technical input on programs, products and services developed**
149 **by GRI (ongoing)**

150 The GSSB will review programs, products and services developed by GRI that reference or build
151 on the contents of the GRI Standards. This includes, for example, training materials, presentations,
152 and services for reporters. The aim of this work is to ensure the quality and consistency of
153 technical content in any materials that reference the GRI Standards.

154 **j) Carry out monitoring on the use of GRI Standards and emerging**
155 **reporting practice (ongoing)**

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

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

160 *Annex 1 – GRI Standards Review and Development: 2017* 161 *Schedule*

162 **Introduction**

163 The GSSB proposes to initiate the review or development of the following Standards in 2017, in
164 two phases.

165 The timeline for each Standard review process is estimated at between 15-18 months. However,
166 these timelines could be extended, for example due to changes in the project scope, availability of
167 Project Working Group members, or need for re-exposure.

168 In addition to the specific Standards mentioned here, in 2017 the GSSB will monitor developments
169 related to the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) and their Phase I
170 Report, in order to understand the implications for relevant GRI Standards (e.g. such as *GRI 302:*
171 *Energy* and *GRI 305: Emissions*, amongst others).

172 The GSSB will also evaluate the need for an omnibus exposure to address language and unintended
173 consequences that affect more than one Standard in 2017 and 2018.

174 **Phase 1 (projects initiated November/ December 2016)**

- 175 • Review of **GRI 403: Occupational Health and Safety**
- 176 • Review of **GRI 303: Water**: The scope of the review would also consider relevant content
177 on ‘effluents’ from *GRI 306: Effluents and Waste*

178 **Phase 2 (projects initiated later in 2017)**

- 179 • Review of **GRI 201: Economic Performance**: The scope of the review would also consider
180 the inclusion of new content related to ‘tax’ and ‘payments to governments’.
- 181 • Review of **GRI 306: Effluents and Waste**: Note that content on ‘effluents’ will be
182 considered during the review of *GRI 303: Water* and therefore the scope of *GRI 306* could
183 be revised to focus on ‘Waste’.
- 184 • Review of **Human Rights-related Standards**: This review would potentially encompass
185 multiple Standards (i.e. *GRI 408: Child Labor*, *GRI 409: Forced and Compulsory Labor*, and *GRI*
186 *412: Human Rights Assessment*, amongst others), and could result in merging or restructuring
187 the Standards