

# Tourism Impact Alliance



Concept Paper

# Audit Office

- › Quality assurance
- › Promotion
- › Impartiality, credibility and transparency
- › Independent certification body
- › Joint venture



## NEEDS



- The Audit Office is an alternative and accessible approach towards increased **quality assurance** in the sustainable tourism certification community.
- It brings together those who share the same vision of **promoting sustainable tourism**, of making its impacts visible, of making certification more credible and of generating a higher market impact.
- **Impartiality, credibility and transparency** are essential. Many certification programs cannot provide impartial services because standard setting, consulting, auditing and certification are all in the responsibility of the same organization.
- The Audit Office will support quality and credibility by taking over certain tasks. As an **independent certification body**, the Audit Office will manage certifications in compliance with international assurance standards.
- The Audit Office will be based on **alliance building and collaborative development**. It will support and empower the great variety of well experienced and truly sustainable certification programs.

# CHALLENGES



The **Label jungle** of more than 150 certification systems worldwide confuses both, the industry and the tourists

This jungle of labels results in a **competitive environment** between certification organizations, bringing small organizations into existential distress and creating different certification approaches due to financial resource and market challenges.

At the same time, small and medium-sized systems cannot financially afford or are not well-structured enough to obtain immediate accreditation which would attest the **quality and credibility** of their systems and thus make them more competitive.

There is **growing demand** for accredited services as more and more major tourism companies require services from businesses that are certified by an accredited certification body.

The tourism industry has **complex supply chains**. Certification programs are facing challenges to measure impact, to benchmark performance and to monitor certified organizations.

# MISSION

The Tourism Impact Alliance will create more favorable framework conditions for tourism sector transformation towards SDG achievement.



## THE GLOBAL GOALS

We want to increase the **credibility of certification** through quality assurance and at the same time increase efficiency of audit procedures

We want to take **quality leadership** by digitalized standards towards a measurable impact of sustainable tourism

We want to strengthen **cooperation** among certification bodies and standard owners and promote digitalization, innovation and collaborative thinking

We want to generate a **higher market impact**, raise awareness and increase publicity of sustainable tourism offers



# PREVIOUS RESULTS

**The Audit Office is a collaborative initiative, based on the cooperation of the Certification Community.**

Various certification schemes have teamed up and have done important groundwork for the Audit Office, supported by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs – SECO. The results are the basis for the road to the Audit Office:

**Certification Community:** Various certification bodies have been brought together in the Certifiers Panel with regular exchange.

**Audit System:** With support of accreditation experts, procedures, standards and workflows of a certification process have been defined in accordance with GSTC and ISO requirements.

**Audit Manager:** The online evaluation tool for certification bodies, auditors, certifiers and businesses and destinations has been developed and piloted and is ready for use.

# OUR OBJECTIVES

## 1. Increased Quality Assurance

We want to take leadership in quality, efficiency and credibility of sustainable tourism assurance.

## 2. Better Impact Verification

We want to provide accessible tools for impact measurement and performance evaluation.

## 3. Higher Credibility of Certification

We want to make certifications more credible by raising quality and impartiality of verification procedures.

## 4. Collaboration, Innovation & Visibility

We want to strengthen cooperation within the certification community and jointly promote digitalization, innovation and market visibility.

**The project particularly contributes to the achievement of the following Sustainable Development Goals:**



Policies to promote sustainable tourism



Tools for monitoring the impact of sustainable tourism



Revitalizing the global partnership

# CERTIFICATION COMMUNITY

The **Certification Community** is an initiative of various certification bodies, standard owners and national authorities together with the GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) who all share the same vision of promoting sustainable tourism, of making its impacts visible, of making certification more credible and of generating a higher market impact.

Various international certification bodies have joined the **Impact Panel** for a collaborative approach to shared challenges and quality efforts.

The Impact Panel was built up in the project COASYS (Collaborative Online Audit System) which was formed by TourCert, the Austrian Ecolabel and GreenStar Hotel together with the GSTC.

The follow-up project **Tourism Impact Alliance** (2022-2026) provides the framework for continued dialogue and collaboration within the certification community.

Both projects have been co-funded by the **Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs – SECO**.

# IMPACT PANEL



# AUDIT OFFICE CONCEPT

Member organizations jointly develop the Audit Office model and as a community promote **credible certification in sustainable tourism**.

The Audit Office will be founded as an independent certification body; it will coordinate audit processes in compliance with **international assurance standards**.

Organizations which previously were defined as certification bodies outsource auditing and certification to the Audit Office and will become members as **certification schemes or standard owners**.

Members agree on credible standards for quality assurance and sign a **service agreement** with the Audit Office. They cannot perform audits or certifications but can provide training, coaching and consulting to clients and help them to work on the certification criteria.

Businesses and destinations sign a **certification agreement** with the Audit Office including rules for invoicing of audit and certification services.

Certification scheme **auditors** may continue to audit under the arrangement, these auditors will have to qualify as GSTC auditors.

The Audit Office is based on a **flexible and agile model**, allowing different development steps and modes of cooperation, according to the needs of the members and with most benefit for them.



# AUDIT OFFICE SERVICES

## Auditing & Certification

- Independent and impartial auditing and certification
- Pool of qualified auditors (various destinations and various languages)
- Joint dialogue with GSTC about industry accreditation achievement

## Shared Training & Seminars

- Training concepts and neutral offline training courses for the use of members with their businesses and destinations
- Training program for auditors including ISO and GSTC courses

## Online Scorecard for members

- Basic self-assessments to be embedded in the member's websites. They provide easy access to clients and create new leads. Shared performance indicators provide additional benefit.

## Carbon accounting & climate management

- Joint standard for carbon accounting and climate management on corporate and destination level

## Remote auditing

- Acredible rules for remote auditing
- Developing digitalization strategies for better audits and impact monitoring

## Destination Standards & DMO Partner Management

- Management of Destination Systems
- Verification and monitoring of partner companies with different levels.
- Impact Measurement and benchmarking

## Impact monitoring & future topics

- Joint Impact model of KPIs on corporate and destination level
- Tools for Supply Chain monitoring
- Solutions for compliance with future EU ESG reporting requirements
- Indicator models for circular economy
- Joint qualification program to promote continuous sustainability management excellence in member communities of certified companies and destinations
- Joint development projects



# ONLINE IMPACT & AUDIT MANAGER

## Audit Manager

The Auditmanager is the **central evaluation tool of the Audit Office**. It allows certification coordinators to initiate, monitor and complete audits. Clients, auditors and certifiers go through standardized and efficient workflows and benefit from elaborated data and process management.

The Auditmanager provides a variety of **features and functions** such as:

- Customized certification workflows for clients, auditors, reviewers and certifiers
- Weighting of criteria and performance index
- Graphic evaluations of self-assessments and audit results
- Easy definition and monitoring of non-conformities
- Messenger to facilitate communication between clients, auditors and certifiers
- Extensive layout possibilities to design individual forms
- All devices & offline mode
- Interfaces to combine with other systems

## Impact Manager

The Impact Manager is an online tool for businesses and destinations to measure impact and performance, to assess supply chains and benchmark indicators.

Impact Manager and Audit Manager are two modules of the same online platform.

Data flow between the two modules enable auditors to better assess supply chain management, performance data and indicators of a business or destination.

## Ownership

The software is a **cloud-based web service** (SaaS – Software-as-a-Service). It is hosted by **avanti Green Software Ltd.**, the Audit Office will rent the web service on the basis of annual fees. Ownership of data remains with the certification scheme and the certified businesses or destinations.

**Data protection and data security** are in accordance with EU data protection requirements.

Certification Schemes will agree to provide specific **performance data** of their certified entities to develop core indicators and enable international benchmarking

The Auditmanager has been piloted by 3 certification bodies and is **ready for use**.

While the Auditmanager is the central tool of the Audit Office and is available to its members, it **can be booked as an individual product**. Non-members can use it for their individual audits and certifications and increase digitalization and efficiency.





# OPPORTUNITIES & BENEFITS

## Members and Partners

The Audit Office reaches out to all stakeholders in the sustainable tourism certification community:

- Certification bodies
- Standard owners
- Destination Management Organisations
- National and regional authorities

## Membership fees

There will be a basic membership fee starting at €1,500 / year, as well as a fee for using the Audit Office's services per entity / year.

## Benefits

Operate with an efficient and high-quality management system and provide credible **quality assurance**.

Use the **online Auditmanager** for standard workflows and audit processes.

Increase credibility by **impact verification** and use elaborated benchmarking against certified international entities.

Develop **auditor qualification** with GSTC auditor training.

Strengthen **training and consulting** services instead of coordinating audit and certification.

## New Fields of Activity

Many organizations consult, audit and certify. Leaving auditing and certification to the Audit Office will open doors to new possibilities and sales fields. With existing expertise, training, coaching and empowerment services can be developed and expanded.

## Innovation

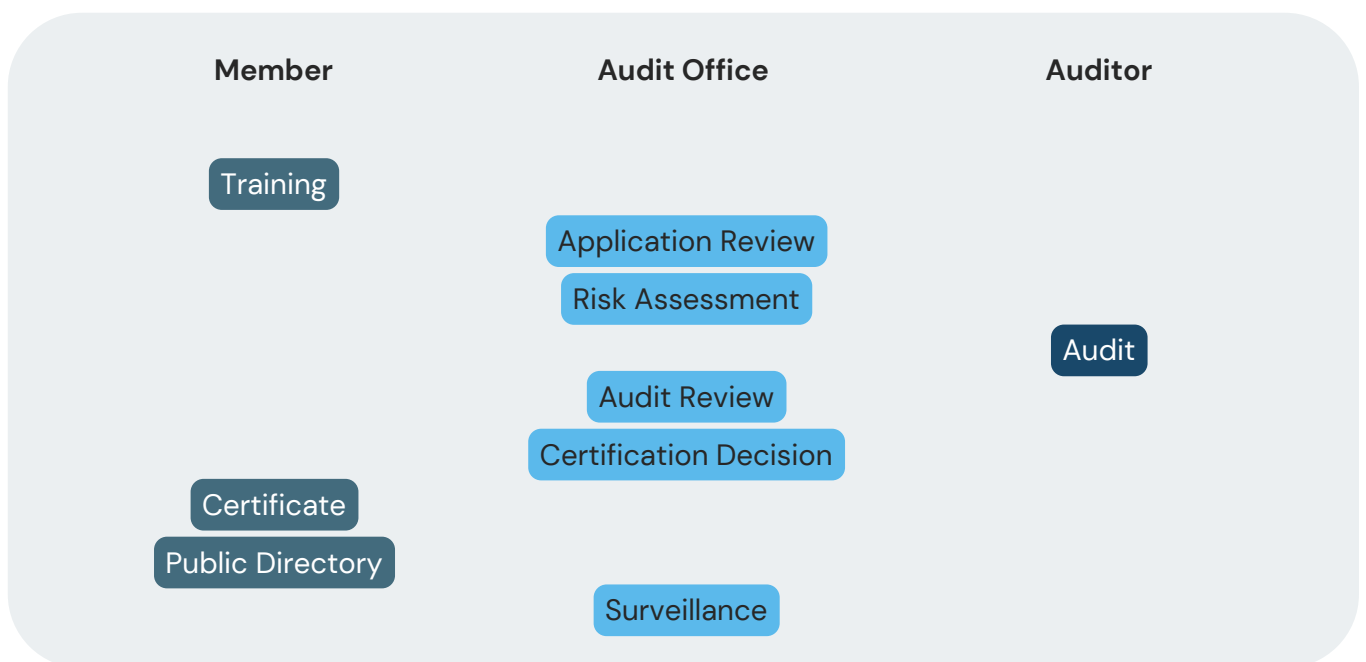
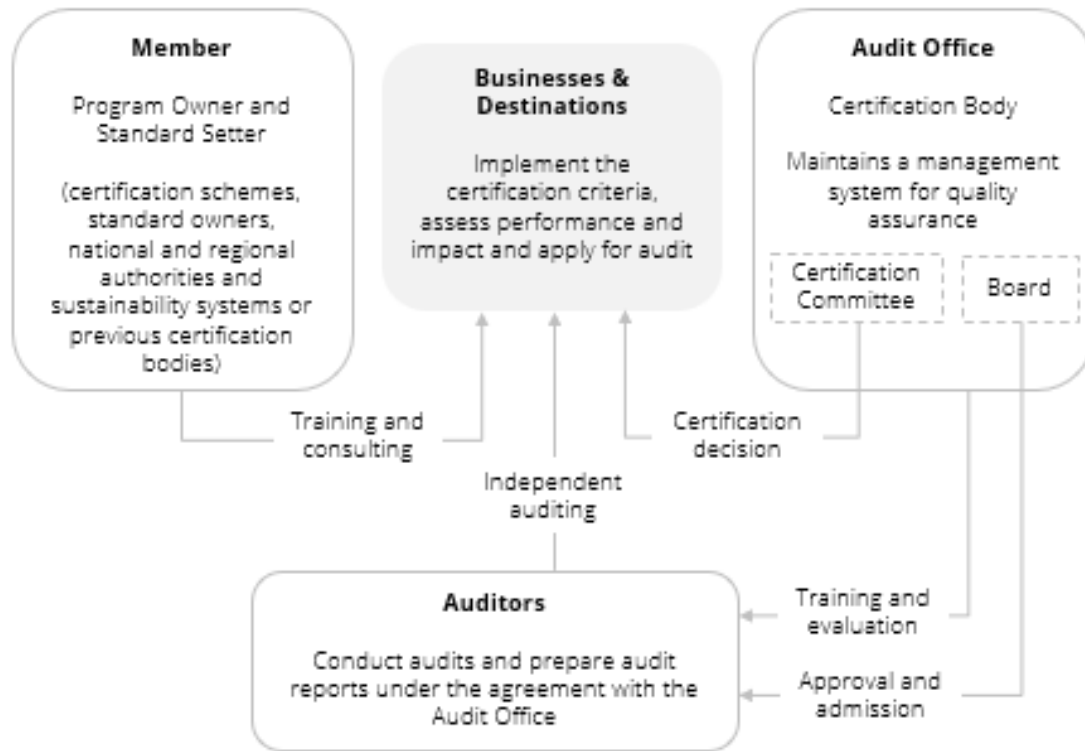
The Audit Office provides room and formats for further business development and market-oriented service portfolios (see 'Audit Office Services').

## Efficiency gains

Based on exemplary calculations, certification organizations will save with each certification aprox. 50% in working time using the Auditmanager and standardized Audit Office processes.

Additionally, monitoring and surveillance processes becomes more efficient and effective.

# CERTIFICATION MODEL & PROCESS



# SHIFT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The shift of tasks below is an exemplary model for certification bodies which become an Audit Office member and turn into certification schemes or standard owners. When a certification scheme decides to become an Audit Office member, several tasks will be shifted from the organization to the independent Audit Office to safeguard impartiality and credibility. If an organization does not have audit procedures established yet, the model will look differently since less tasks will have to be shifted.

## **Focus and Development of Activities**

*Members can focus on their existing expertise in consulting, training or other fields which often generates better revenue than certification.*

## **Member**

- Determining certification criteria
- GSTC Recognition
- Marketing the certification program
- Training auditors (program related)
- Initial contact with clients
- Training and consultants for clients
- Preparing audit application with clients



*The member outsources audit and certification to the Audit Office and remains program owner and/or consultant.*



## **Audit Office**

- Maintaining the management system according to GSTC and ISO
- Impartial auditing, certification, monitoring and surveillance of businesses and destinations
- Approval, training and assignment of auditors
- Training of Audit Office staff
- Providing indicators and benchmarking
- Managing complaints and appeals

# STRUCTURE & GOVERNANCE

The Audit Office will be a non-profit organization and a joint venture by various certification schemes. It strengthens cooperation and participation and allows schemes and standards to be closely involved in its development and strategic orientation.

## BOARD

- Supervision of policies and procedures
- Safeguarding impartiality
- Admission of auditors

## AGREEMENTS

Service and certification agreements with

- Members
- Clients
- Auditors
- Avanti (Audit Manager)

## MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- Structural, resource and process requirements according to GSTC, ISO or others
- Policies and processes to safeguard impartiality

## STAFF

- Implementation and monitoring of management system
- Supervision of finances
- Coordination of certification processes
- Review of applications and audits
- Training of auditors
- Handling of complaints and appeals
- PR & Marketing

## CERTIFIERS

- Skills, competences and experience
- Impartial decision taking on granting a certification
- Can be a committee or an individual person

## AUDITORS

- Skills, competences and experience
- Agreement with Audit Office
- Self-employed



# AUDITORS



Most Certification Schemes have their own **pool of auditors**. These auditors can continue to audit under the Audit Office arrangement if they meet the requirements regarding qualification and experience.

Audit Office auditors will have to qualify as a GSTC auditor. The Audit Office will facilitate the requested **GSTC auditor training**.

The Audit Office members will agree on a **remuneration model** with fees paid per audit according to local wage standards.

# CERTIFIERS



The certification decision will be made by **one or more individuals** which are assigned by the Audit Office.

The certifier(s) review all information and results from the audit and **make a decision** on whether or not to grant the certification.

Those involved in making this decision shall not have been involved in undertaking the audit in order to safeguard **impartiality**.

If a certification scheme has a **certification committee** in place and if the committee's impartiality has been confirmed, then this committee may continue to make certification decisions for the certification program. If the certification scheme does not have own certification personnel, then the Audit Office will provide trained staff.



# ACCREDITATION

## Industry vs Destination

A sustainable tourism certification body such as the Audit Office can receive two kinds of accreditation:

- Destination Accreditation by GSTC
- Industry Certification by ASI or other

While ASI accreditation requires full compliance with ISO 17065, the Destination Accreditation Manual by GSTC does refer to the ISO standard but does not specifically require its compliance. GSTC accreditation is therefore considered more achievable.

## Logos

As an accredited certification body the Audit Office may use the GSTC Accredited Certification Body logo. Businesses or destinations that are certified by the accredited Audit Office may use the Certified to the GSTC Criteria logo



## Audit Office approach

**The Audit Office strives for highest assurance quality and builds its management system based on structural, resource and process requirements by GSTC and ISO.**

**All policies, processes, tools and templates will meet the requirements for destination and industry accreditation.**

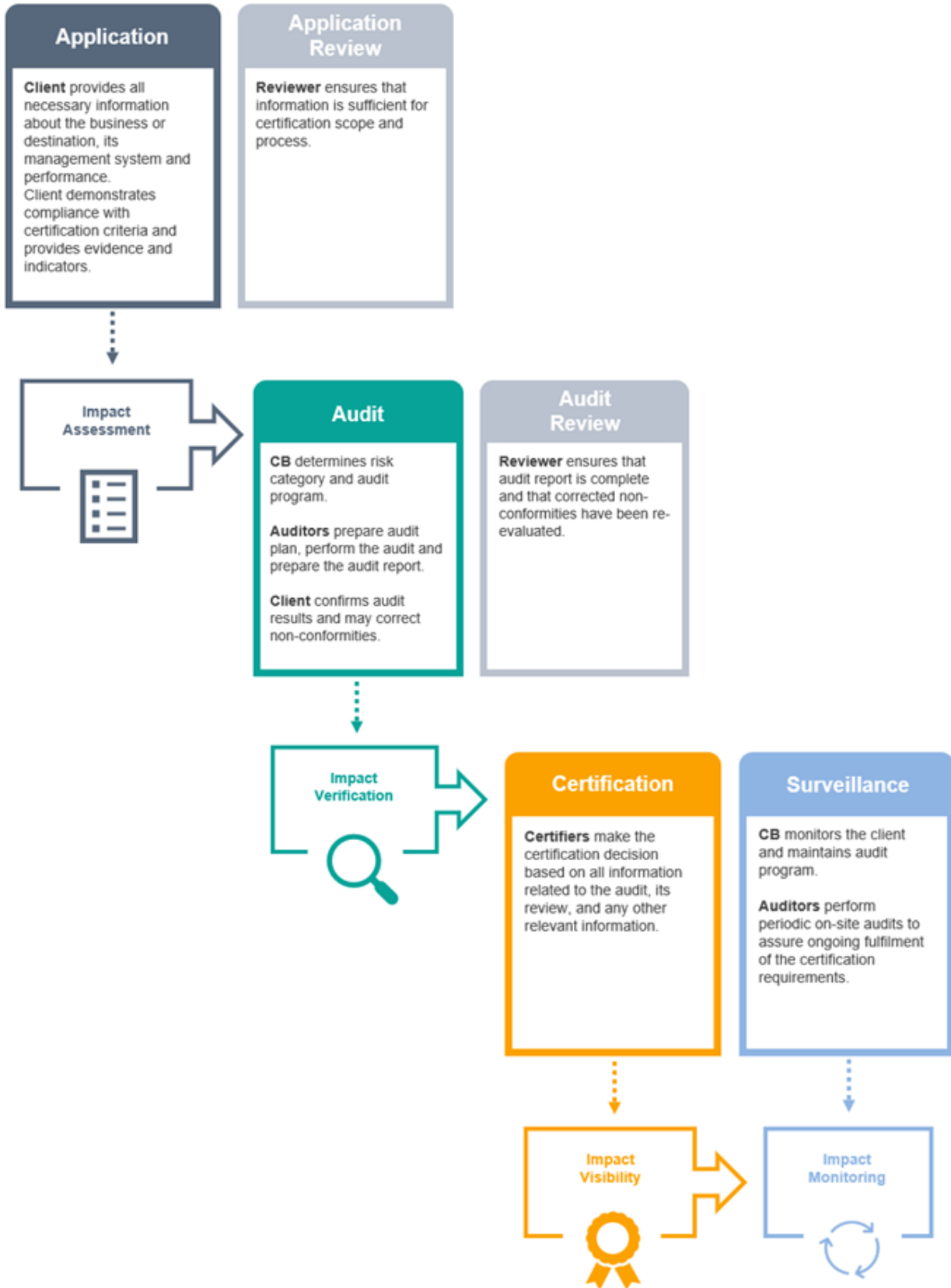
Once founded and established, the Audit Office will apply for Destination Accreditation by GSTC. Industry Accreditation by ASI will be approached as far as requirements are sufficiently accessible and achievable for the Audit Office and its members.

## Destination Accreditation

Requirements are defined in the Manual "GSTC-Accredited / Administered by GSTC, 2018, Version 2.1". The manual is currently being reviewed and updated by the GSTC.

- Fees
- Structure and requirements are partially based on ISO 17065
- Full on-site audits every two years
- Annual self-assessment and compliance report by client
- GSTC-training for auditors is not specifically required

# DESTINATION ACCREDITATION CERTIFICATION PROCESS



# DESTINATION ACCREDITATION ACCREDITATION PROCESS

- Application Form & **Formal Statement**
- **Descriptions and procedures** to demonstrate compliance with GSTC-Accredited Requirements
- Documentation of **staff** qualification, competence criteria and monitoring
- The CB completes a matrix to map the program's policies, practices and procedures against each **GSTC-Accredited Requirement**
- **GSTC Accreditation Panel** decides on granting the GSTC-Accredited (Conditional) status



- Panel will determine whether or not a **witnessed audit** is required
- All criteria which are equivalent to the GSTC Criteria must be **mandatory for conformity**
- Reviewer writes an **evaluation report** and submits it to the CB owner for comments
- **Witness Audit** applies on the Panel's request and is chosen randomly from scheduled audits
- Renewal after **2 years**
- Consideration of **amendments** of accreditation or standard requirements
- Renewal **application**; witness audit on request



# JOIN THE AUDIT OFFICE

The Certification Community invites all certification bodies, certification schemes, standard owners and sustainability systems to join the Audit Office!

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## Funding & Partnership

The Tourism Impact Alliance is an initiative by TourCert in cooperation with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

The project is co-funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO.

**TourCert**  
*Travel for Tomorrow*

**∞ GSTC**  
Global Sustainable Tourism Council



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State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO