

**GSTC Board Meeting
October 27, 2011
Meeting Minutes**

<u>PARTICIPANTS</u>	
<u>Board Members</u>	
Kelly Bricker	Staff
Anna Spenceley	Erika Harms
Steve Noakes	Liza Agudelo
Luigi Cabrini	Amos Bien
Herve Houdre	Janice Lichtenwaldt
Richard Edwards	
Leilani Latimer	Absent Board Members
Jamie Sweeting	Judy Kepher-Gona
Ronald Sanabria	Rick Parnell
Herbert Hamele	Jane Ashton
Seleni Matus	Shannon Stowell
Mei Zhang	
Charles Arden-Clarke	
Fabian Roman	

OBJECTIVES

Approval from the board based on the GSTC Secretariat's brief on the revised steps towards GSTC recognition, approval, and accreditation.

1. The revisions to the time frame for accreditation and standard recognition are based on the current market environment

- a) There is definite interest in GSTC accreditation in the market place, but the reality is that there hasn't been enough volume in demand for certification systems.
 - Currently, 5-6 new standards have been recognized. There have been 29 standards that have applied. The volume of applicants demonstrates the interest to work with the GSTC.
- b) The objectives of the GSTC are to be low cost, increase speed and volume, and to avoid green washing
- c) The GSTC has had a limited time frame to establish the certification mechanisms (6 months) versus the 8 years that ISM and IFOM had to establish their systems.
- d) The approval of the certification programs will provide the momentum to launch accreditation in 3 years and increase market demand. Those that have been recognized can go through the approval and accreditation processes. Currently, there isn't sufficient volume and the costs are high; this prevents wide market availability.

- e) The costs that have been newly established are the use of the logo for \$100 and out of 3,000-5,000 hotels, 1,000 of those will go through the approval process. The GSTC has enough now to bring in 5,000 hotels; perhaps with a future subcommittee the GSTC can better position itself in the market. Use of the logo will be \$100 per certificate, \$50 for GSTC members.
- f) The GSTC will reserve the right to conduct spot checks within the system and to incorporate a “secret shopper” component together with the Market Access Working Group. This will help to gage the responses of the consumer. The GSTC has been working with Amadeus on a partnership to manage customer reviews.

Recommendations:

- The GSTC needs to guarantee that the differences between Recognition, Approved, Accreditation are clearly defined and accessible to the public. The scope of the recognition process will rely on compliance of all steps; a detailed “road map” will ensure the steps of recognition are attainable.
- The Market Access Working Group could develop a feedback mechanism to make customer empowerment a core component; Leiliani offered Sabre’s technical solutions as resources.
- The secret shopper component relies upon a large amount of human resources. The Market Access Working Group could work on a feedback mechanism to make customer empowerment a core component.

2. The Standard Recognition Process

- a) 130 invitations were sent to certification programs from around the world, 40 of those were eligible to go through the process. In total, 29 of the 40 eligible programs have shown interest in the recognition of standards.
- b) The steps required for the recognition of standards are:
 - i. The certification program must be using GSTC recognized standard that is aligned with the GSTC criteria
 - ii. A paper audit will ensue, followed by an in-person audit to ensure that the standard is in line with International Best Practices
 - iii. A site visit will be conducted within a year to ensure that the guidelines by standardization are in place
- c) With 29 standards currently in queue, the waitlist for the 29th standard is long, as of now a timeline of 3 months has been communicated to the applicants. Incomplete standards submitted to the GSTC are being returned to the applicant.
- d) The GSTC is developing a communication strategy with large hotel companies. Hilton and Melia have been approached and are publically stating the value of GSTC recognition for their businesses. Marriott and Hyatt are possible contenders for standard recognition.

- e) While there is the potential to focus on the aggregate influence of small companies in the market place versus seeking support solely from larger companies, as of now, the costs for accreditation are \$20,000. Accreditation is not yet ready for small companies

Recommendations:

- Build up the GTSC profile in the hotel industry, an overarching strategy to work internally with these companies to align with the GSTC.
- A brainstorming session of all possible critiques and questions surrounding the recognition process will allow the GSTC to be amply prepared for its release.

3. The outlined revisions to the Accreditation Manual and GSTC Logo and the new role of the Accreditation Panel

- a) The Accreditation Manual has been revised to find a solution that meets all requirements.
 - The manual has been broken down into 3 parts (Accreditation, Recognition, and Standards)
 - The manual provides procedures, guidelines, bench-marking measures, and a matrix comparing standards.
 - After the board reviews the manuals, they will then be posted on the website to ensure transparency and allow for public comment.
- b) The future role of the accreditation panel will be to build critical mass for standard recognition. The panel would be able to give final approval of the standard. For the site visits, panel members within the geographic region of the site will conduct the site visits. A form of payment would be involved to increase commitment from the panel.
- c) The GSTC Bylaws have been reviewed, it will be distributed to the board in the coming weeks and the updated business plan will be made public.
- d) The logo will be permitted for use during the approval stage, as long as the organization is in alignment with the most of the process. Therefore, the organization will be GSTC recognized, but not GSTC approved. GSTC recognition implies that the organization will be promoted but won't be permitted to use the logo.
- e) It must be determined how to manage standards that are in line with GSTC on paper, but in practice do not correspond with our mission. The threat to lowering the standard for logo-use is the danger of being aligned with an organization that doesn't meet GSTC standards.
- f) Amos outlined the revised glossary of terms:
 - i. **Recognize** sustainable tourism standards
 - ii. **Approve** the procedures and processes of certification programs
 - iii. **Endorse** qualified accreditation bodies
 - iv. **Validate** accreditation decisions by accreditation bodies
- g) In 2014, it will be possible to go through the additional step of accreditation process. Working towards accreditation is the interim step of approval. The licensing fee will be annual.
- h) There isn't a formal timeline, if the market place is not ready in 3 years, we may have to expand the timeline. The GSTC cannot make people commit to a timeline if the terms are unknown.

- i) The GSTC is not in danger of green washing as long as we follow the market trends without sacrificing the organization's principals. The ideal market place does not exist now, but the strategy now for the GSTC is to incentivize the market where we want it to go.

Recommendations:

- The board should have greater collaboration with the GSTC in building up the membership base. Although the capabilities of large NGOs have been downsized, these NGOs, such as WWF, do have tourism components within their activities; partnerships could be reactivated with these NGOs.
- The GSTC recognition process should be streamlined with a clear time frame.
- Make the public aware of the availability of webinars and workshops.
- The terminology is confusing to the board; it must be clarified if the GSTC is to work with other entities besides tour operators and hotels.

4. Vote on the proposed steps and recommendations outlined by the GSTC Secretariat

- The Board Chair called for a vote.
- There were no objections. 100% approval from the board. The GSTC Secretariat will follow through with the proposed steps.

Actions:

1. Board members are given 7 days to review documents and responses are expected by COB **November 2nd**. (?) The GSTC Secretariat will distribute the Bylaws and remaining documents in the coming days.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

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Be it recommended:

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