



# GUIDE TO CERTIFICATION

June 2023

Green Business Certification, Inc (GBCI)  
Washington, DC

# OVERVIEW

GBCI's TRUE certification program helps projects define, pursue and achieve their zero waste goals, cutting their carbon footprint and supporting public health. The certification goes beyond diversion numbers and focuses on the upstream policies and practices that make zero waste successful in any organization and beyond.

TRUE certified spaces and events are environmentally responsible, more resource efficient and help turn waste into savings and additional income streams. By closing the loop, they cut greenhouse gases, manage risk, reduce litter and pollution, reinvest resources locally, create jobs and add more value for their organization and community. TRUE certified projects:

- **Save money:** Waste is a sign of inefficiency and the reduction of waste reduces costs.
- **Progress faster:** A zero waste strategy improves upon production processes and environmental prevention strategies, which can lead to larger, more innovative steps.
- **Support sustainability:** A zero waste strategy supports the three P's – people, planet and profit.
- **Improve material flows:** A zero waste strategy uses fewer new raw materials and sends no waste materials to landfills, incineration (waste-to-energy) and the environment.

Implementing the requirements and credits of TRUE certification has the following benefits to any project looking for a better approach to resource use and operations:

- Helps eliminate pollution — in our air, water and land — which threaten public health and ecosystems
- Improves their bottom line by reducing costs
- Cuts the ecological footprint by reducing materials, using recycled and more benign materials, and giving products longer lives by increasing reparability and ease of disassembly at end of life.
- Promotes positive forces for environmental and economic sustainability in the built environment by protecting the environment, reducing costs, driving the development of new markets, and producing jobs throughout our economy.
- Fosters strong total participation including training of all people and zero waste relationships with vendors and customers
- Allows the project to showcase their responsibility to the local and global community, and to the environment

## Certification Levels

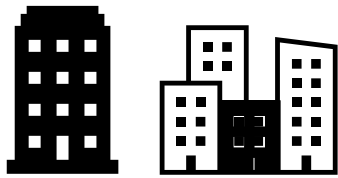
Certified: 31-37 points  
 Silver: 38-45 points  
 Gold: 46-63 points  
 Platinum: 64-81 points

### Overview of Categories & Points

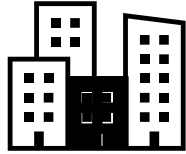
Redesign	4	Leadership	6
Reduce	7	Training	8
Reuse	7	Zero Waste Analysis	5
Compost (Re-earth)	7	Upstream Management	4
Recycle	3	Hazardous Waste Prevention	5
Zero Waste Reporting	4	Closed Loop System	4
Diversion (Min 90%)	5	Innovation	3
Zero Waste Purchasing	9	<b>Total Points</b>	<b>81</b>

# DEFINITIONS

## Project

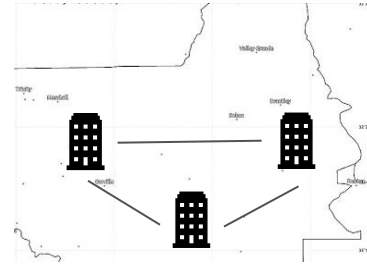


**Individual Project**



**Campus Group Project**

(same site, certifying as one)



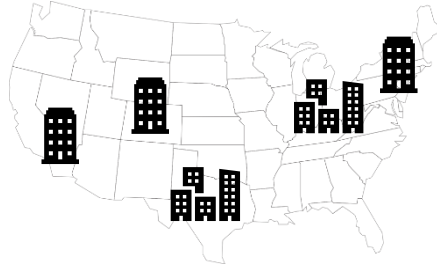
**Regional Group Project**

(different sites, certifying as one)

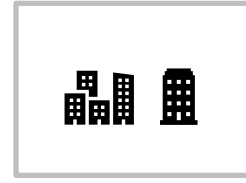
1. **Individual project:** Refers to a single building that is pursuing TRUE precertification and/or certification. The individual building must demonstrate full compliance with the rating system requirements to achieve TRUE certification (and/or precertification). An individual project can be one of multiple projects in a portfolio or could be one of multiple buildings on a campus.
2. **Group project:** A group of buildings pursuing TRUE precertification and/or certification as one project. A group project may be of two types:
  - a. **Campus Group Project (same site):** Multiple buildings on a campus (on one property) may receive TRUE certification as a group based on data and documentation aggregated across all buildings. As a group, the buildings must demonstrate compliance with all requirements to achieve TRUE certification. Since recognition is being achieved as one project, the campus may use the standard TRUE certification process to achieve certification (the portfolio approach would not apply). Note information for all buildings that are part of the group must be submitted at the same time. Campuses that wish to certify buildings or groups of buildings incrementally over time may be considered a portfolio and utilize the TRUE Portfolio Approach (see the [TRUE Portfolio Guide](#) for further details).
  - b. **Regional Group Project (different sites):** Multiple buildings in different locations (on separate properties) in a region may receive TRUE certification as one based on data and documentation aggregated across all buildings, provided all the following conditions are met:
    - The properties are in the same region (less than 100 miles).
    - They physically coalesce and manage materials together.
    - They are functionally dependent and operate as one.
    - All TRUE requirements are met using aggregate data and activities.
    - All properties must be submitted at the same time.

Note that for both group project scenarios above, organizations must message their recognition as a group recognition and not as each building having achieved the recognition individually. The buildings should be described as part of a group certification, and not individually certified.

## Portfolio



Portfolio Projects may be located at different sites



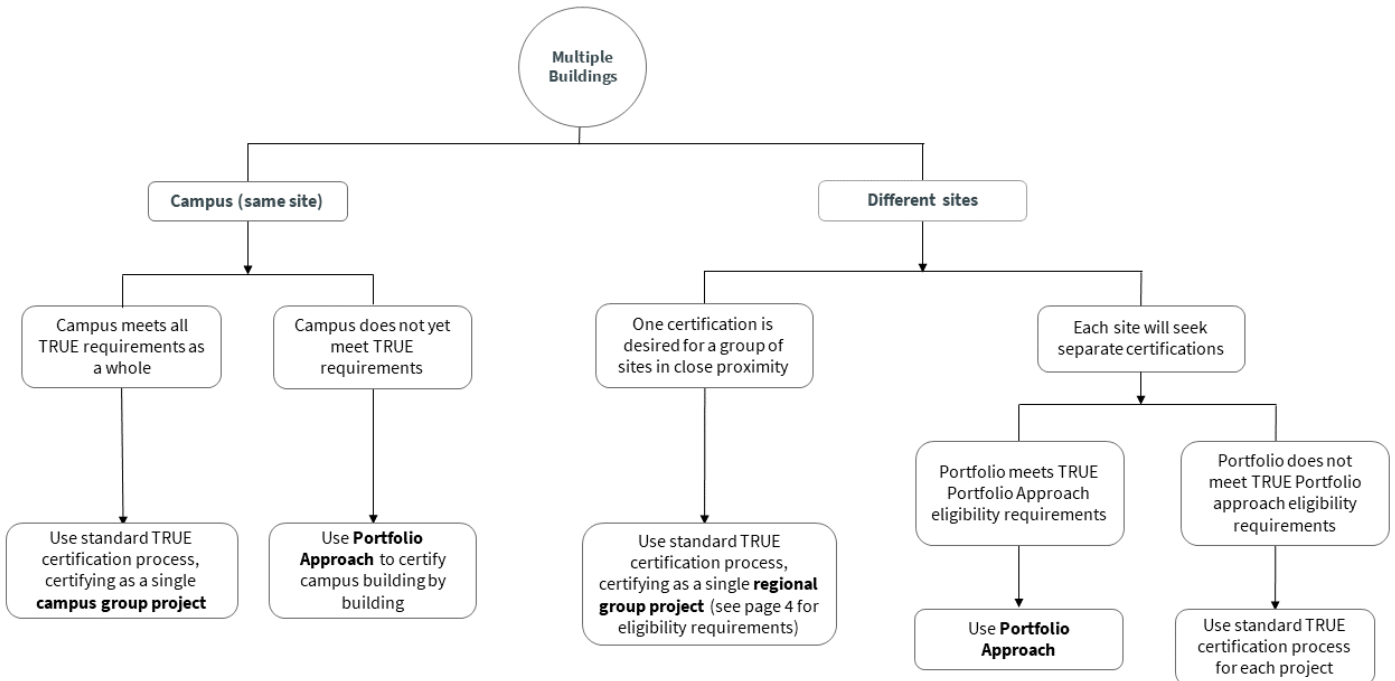
AND/OR

Portfolio projects may be located on the same site

A portfolio is a collection of individual and/or group projects owned or managed by a single organization. Projects in the portfolio can be different sizes and located in different regions across the world or on one property (such as a campus certifying incrementally as a portfolio). TRUE certification is issued to the individual or group project within the portfolio, the portfolio itself does not receive a combined certification.

Note: a portfolio may promote achievement of TRUE certification for the total number/percentage of buildings in its portfolio. For instance, a portfolio organization may indicate “a certain percentage of projects in their portfolio are TRUE certified.” Similarly, a campus pursuing the Portfolio approach where TRUE certification is achieved for all buildings on the campus over a period of time may indicate that “all buildings on the campus are TRUE certified.”

The following decision tree may also be a helpful tool to understand the various options for projects to engage with TRUE:



Please see the [TRUE Portfolio Guide](#) for more details on the process for certifying a portfolio of projects. If assistance is needed defining the portfolio(s) and the projects within it, utilize the [TRUE Portfolio Assessment Tool](#) and/or [contact us](#) to be put in touch with a TRUE team member.

## ELIGIBILITY

TRUE precertification and certification are available for any physical facility and its operations, including buildings owned by: businesses, property managers, schools, government agencies and nonprofits. Tenants within a multi-tenant building or buildings within a broader campus may pursue recognition from TRUE, so long as they are able to quantify their individual waste generation and diversion tonnages. The project must have achieved an average 90% or greater overall diversion from landfill, incineration (WTE), and the environment for solid, non-hazardous wastes for the most recent 12 months to qualify for certification. For a complete list of minimum program and credit requirements for certification, see the TRUE rating system on the [Resources](#) webpage of the TRUE website.

In addition to facilities, construction sites and events are also eligible to receive recognition from TRUE. Any site currently undergoing construction is eligible for precertification. Construction sites may also submit for certification after completion of construction. Eligible events include public or private organized gatherings of people at a predetermined time and place (such as conferences, festivals, entertainment or sporting events, etc.) View the *Technical Guide for Events* on the [Resources](#) webpage for more information on fees, review process, requirements, and more.

For any unique project types outside of an event, facility, or construction site please contact GBCI at [true@gbci.org](mailto:true@gbci.org).

## FEES

**Registration fee:** The registration fee is a flat fee charged on a per project basis and must be paid at the time of registration.

**Certification fee:** The certification fee is charged on a per project basis and must be paid prior to submitting your application for certification. For facilities, the fee is based on facility square footage and includes the standard services described below. There are discounts for USGBC Silver, Gold and Platinum level [members](#); for completing precertification, and for paying the registration and certification fees together.

**Other fees:** Other fees for optional services, including expedited and supplemental reviews, may apply. The fees for precertification, recertification, events, and portfolios of projects differ from the standard fees for facilities.

[View the fee chart on the TRUE website for pricing >>](#)

# CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The TRUE certification program rates how well projects perform in minimizing their non-hazardous, solid wastes and maximizing their efficiency in the use of resources. First, become familiar with the requirements and the available credits in the TRUE rating system. If needed, an introductory call can be scheduled to answer any questions where the information is not available in published guidance and/or the project has a unique or complex scenario requiring additional discussion. Once you've familiarized yourself with the rating system and [assessed your readiness](#), you can register your project(s). It is advised to register your project(s) at least 16-18 weeks (4 months) before any targeted date to receive recognition by.

If your organization has a portfolio of more than 5 projects pursuing TRUE precertification or certification, a streamlined documentation submission and review process is available. Please contact us at [true@gbci.org](mailto:true@gbci.org) for more information.

## 1. Register

Register your project(s) by completing the registration form online and submitting payment for the registration fee. Once you've submitted your registration form, you will receive the necessary information and guidance via email to complete the registration process.

When registration is complete, GBCI will provide access to additional certification resources and information, a link to submit documentation, and forms to complete the submission and review process. When contacting GBCI regarding your project at any time during the registration and review process, please always reply to the latest email from GBCI ([true@gbci.org](mailto:true@gbci.org)). This ensures that GBCI links all communications to your project. Non-technical correspondence or questions unrelated to your project submission should be sent to [true@gbci.org](mailto:true@gbci.org).

### *Determining Your Privacy Designation*

During registration, you will be asked whether your project(s) should be considered public or private. Each designation is defined below. You may change the privacy designation for your project(s) at any time.

**Public:** the project name, address, identity of the owner, owner organization type, project gross square footage, date of certification, and case study may be included in TRUE project lists, publicity, and in the [online project directory](#).

**Private:** the project name, street address and identity of the owner will not appear in public TRUE project lists, publicity, or in the [online directory](#). However, certain other non-identifying information may be disclosed including but not limited to: the city and state in which the project is located, the total project square footage, the date of certification, and level of certification achieved. The required case study will also remain private, unless an anonymized version is made available or GBCI receives written consent to share publicly. For so long as you elect for your project to be private, you agree that you will not represent your project to the general public as having registered or applied for certification, or as being certified.

Documents, data, or forms submitted during the certification process will not be made public without the express written consent of the project or portfolio owner. Please refer to the TRUE Certification Agreement for more details.

## **Important Considerations**

### Precertification (optional pathway)

TRUE precertification recognizes projects which have implemented the fundamental actions and policies needed to effectively pursue zero waste and have demonstrated a commitment to achieving TRUE certification. Precertification is available to all projects regardless of the level of diversion performance that has been achieved. It is an optional, incremental pathway to TRUE certification that prioritizes the core actions essential to getting a successful start toward zero waste. View the *Precertification Guidance* document on the [Resources](#) webpage for more information on precertification review process, requirements, and more.

## **2. Apply**

To apply for precertification, certification, or recertification, your team will collect information and documents, perform analyses, complete narratives in the application form, take photos, and prepare new documentation demonstrating your achievements of the selected credits. For documents in languages other than English, at a minimum the section(s) of the document showing the credit requirement has been met must be translated into English. Technical questions that arise while preparing your application should be sent via reply to the most recent email from GBCI, or to [true@gbci.org](mailto:true@gbci.org). Additionally, a pre-submission phone call can be arranged to answer any questions on the application before submittal.

Before you are ready for review, submit payment for the certification fee (if it hasn't been pre-paid during registration). Please note that your certification fee payment must be received and all documentation completed before your review can be initiated. After you submit your documentation for any type of review (precertification, certification, or recertification), it may take up to 10 weeks for you to receive your final results. Therefore, it is advised to submit a completed [TRUE Application Form](#) and documentation for review at least 10 weeks before any targeted date to receive recognition by. For tips on planning your timeline, see our article [How to meet your certification goal date](#).

## **3. Review**

### *Preliminary Documentation Review (15 business days/3 weeks)*

After you've submitted your documentation and the certification fee payment has cleared, GBCI will review your application for completeness and compliance with the TRUE rating system and attempted credits. GBCI will respond with its preliminary review report within 15 business days (3 weeks), indicating which credits are awarded and which are pending, with a request for more information for pending credits. Your team can accept the preliminary review results as final if all minimum program requirements are met and you are satisfied with the point total. Otherwise, prepare new or revised documentation in response to the preliminary review comments, and/or attempt



additional credits before submitting for final review. If needed, you will have the option of requesting a post-review conference call with your assessor to discuss the review comments.

GBCI suggests that you submit all updated documentation within 20 business days (4 weeks).

Projects must submit for final review within 6 months of receiving the preliminary review results in order to ensure that the certification reflects recent data.

Projects submitting for final review more than 6 months after receiving the preliminary review results must update the application's diversion data, including the month of weight verification, to end no more than 3 months prior to the date of submission for final review.

If you decide you no longer want to pursue TRUE certification for your project, we understand. Please contact GBCI so that your application can be closed and accurate records maintained.

#### *Final Review (15 business days/3 weeks)*

GBCI will review revised or newly submitted credits. GBCI will prepare a final review report indicating which credits have been earned, the final point score, and certification level achieved. Once you have received this report, you may accept the results or choose to attempt new credits via an additional, supplemental round of review (*15 Business days/3 weeks, additional fees apply*). Note: if new credits are added to the final review, they will only receive one round of review with no opportunity for comments from GBCI or submittal of additional information in response. The project team will have to submit for additional supplemental round of review (additional fees apply) to submit any clarifications.

Accepting the final review results is the last step in the review portion of the TRUE certification process. Once you've accepted the final review report you can no longer submit supplemental reviews or challenge a credit ruling.

### **Important Considerations**

- During preliminary or final review, if there is missing or insufficient documentation that prevents GBCI from finalizing the review, GBCI may issue a mid-review clarification request for additional information. If requested, clarifications should be submitted within 10 business days of receiving the mid-review clarification request. Note a mid-review clarification is issued at GBCI's discretion and may not be requested by the project team.
- GBCI may also at its discretion, request for conference calls and/or site visits (virtual or in-person) to ask for clarifications or verify the accuracy of information provided. If this is done, sufficient notice will be provided to the project team.
- If you have any questions about your review comments or final credit rulings, please contact us by replying to your results email. Our technical experts are here to help and are on-hand to answer your questions.

- In instances where we are unable to completely resolve your concerns, and in order to protect the integrity and fairness of the certification programs administered by GBCI, you may formally challenge a ruling. Please refer to the [GBCI Review Challenge Policy](#) for more details.
- Past reviews do not set formal precedent for TRUE requirements to ensure that neither prior Project Team errors nor reviewer oversights are perpetuated, in order to maintain the integrity of the rating system requirements.

## 4. Certify

Upon accepting the certification results, GBCI will issue your certification and you will receive an email with next steps, including: instructions on ordering an official award letter, formal certificate and a glass plaque; a request to complete a project profile page for the TRUE [project directory](#); and instructions on submitting the required case study of your certification (due within 30 days). The case study and project profile give you the opportunity to share your project strategies, photos, and insights; and play a pivotal role in educating others. All inquiries after the certification process is complete should be directed to [true@gbci.org](mailto:true@gbci.org) or via reply to the most recent email received from GBCI.

After you've earned recognition from TRUE, we can help you celebrate and share your achievement. GBCI will provide the TRUE Public Relations Guide and our Marketing team can help promote your achievement on GBCI platforms.

### ***Important Considerations***

#### Certification Maintenance

To maintain your certification, GBCI requires you to continue the zero waste activities and programs that achieved TRUE requirements. To demonstrate compliance and a continued commitment to zero waste, you must submit waste diversion data to GBCI annually. Events and construction projects are not subject to annual certification maintenance requirements, as they are one-time occurrences. Precertification projects also do not have any maintenance requirements (see the *Precertification Guidance* document for more details).

In addition to annual maintenance requirements, some projects may need to recertify every three years to maintain their TRUE certification. Policies on when the certification expires and how to maintain certification will differ based on when the project was registered.

#### *Projects registered on or after September 1, 2020*

TRUE certification remains valid for three years. The certification is maintained by complying with the annual maintenance requirements, as stipulated in the preceding section, and by recertifying every three years. If you do not provide annual data for three consecutive years and do not recertify your project at the three year anniversary, the project will no longer be considered certified. You will be required to recertify the project by following the process and fees outlined in the *Certification Maintenance and Recertification Guidance* document on the [Resources](#) webpage.

#### *Projects registered before September 1, 2020*

TRUE certification has no set term of validity and no additional fees are due, as long as you maintain certification by complying with the annual maintenance requirements stipulated in the preceding section. Certified projects that were registered before September 1, 2020 and do not provide annual data for three consecutive years will no longer be considered certified. You will be required to recertify the project by following the process and fees outlined in the *Certification Maintenance and Recertification Guidance* document on the [Resources](#) webpage.

#### Revocation of certification

In rare situations, TRUE certification may be revoked. We've also created the [GBCI Certification Challenge Policy](#) to ensure that TRUE projects and subsequent assessments by GBCI team members are done so with integrity, accuracy and truthfulness. A certification challenge may be initiated by GBCI or by any third party within 18 months of a project's certification. We recommend that you retain all project documentation related to your certification for two years in case of a challenge. In the instance a certification challenge is issued, GBCI may perform an additional site inspection.

## **5. Recertify**

TRUE recertification recognizes projects that engage in a continuous improvement process and demonstrate leadership after achieving TRUE Certification by maintaining or improving their zero waste efforts. You may recertify your project to maintain certification, reinstate a certification that is no longer valid, pursue additional points to upgrade the certification level achieved, or after the facility has moved. If your project was registered before September 1, 2020 and you elect to recertify to increase your certification level, or recertify after a facility move, the new certification will be valid for three years and subject to the certification validity policy for projects registered on or after September 1, 2020. View the *Certification Maintenance and Recertification Guidance* document on the [Resources](#) webpage for more information on recertification policies, review process, requirements, and more.

Note: TRUE certified events and construction are not eligible for recertification. Recurring events must go through the regular certification process each time the event occurs.

## RESOURCES & TOOLS

We offer a number of resources and tools to support you during the TRUE certification process, most of which are available at [true.gbci.org](http://true.gbci.org):

[TRUE Advisor Certificate Program](#)

[Upcoming Events](#)

[Project Directory](#)

[Articles](#)

[PR Guidelines](#)

[Resources](#) (rating system, application form, guidance documents, tools, and more)

[USGBC Education Hub](#) (TRUE and zero waste educational videos, courses, case studies and more)

[USGBC Membership](#)

For more information, email us at [true@gbci.org](mailto:true@gbci.org).