



## GUIDE TO CERTIFICATION

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Green Business Certification, Inc (GBCI)  
Washington, DC

# OVERVIEW

GBCI's TRUE certification program is used by facilities and events to 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 facility or event 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 facility or event 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>

## ELIGIBILITY

TRUE certification is available for any physical facility and their operations, including buildings owned by: businesses, property managers, schools, government agencies and nonprofits. The facility 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. For a complete list of minimum program and credit requirements, see the TRUE rating system on the [Resources](#) webpage of the TRUE website.

In addition to facilities, events are also eligible to receive TRUE certification. 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.) TRUE for Events certification has been adapted from the original certification program to help events reach their zero waste goals. View the *Technical Guide for Events* on the [Resources](#) webpage for more information on event certification fees, review process, certification requirements, and more.

## FEES

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

**Certification fee:** The certification fee is charged on a per facility or event 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. Assessor travel costs are included, however additional fees may apply for projects outside of the U.S. 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 certifying events, precertification, and recertification differ from the standard fees for facilities.

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

## CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The TRUE certification program is an assessor-based program that rates how well facilities or events perform in minimizing their non-hazardous, solid wastes and maximizing their efficiency in the use of resources. The assessor is an impartial third party that delivers services under the direct supervision of GBCI and is expected to review and assess compliance with the rating system requirements.

First, become familiar with the requirements and the available credits in the TRUE rating system. Once you've familiarized yourself with the rating system and assessed your readiness, you can register your project.

## 1. Register

Register your project by completing the registration form online, signing the GBCI certification agreement, and submitting payment for the registration fee. Once you've submitted your registration, you will receive the necessary information and guidance to complete the registration process. This includes an invoice for the registration fee, an invoice for the certification fee (upon request), and the GBCI certification agreement.

When the registration process is complete, GBCI will provide access to additional certification resources, information, and forms to complete the submission and review process. If needed, an introductory call can be scheduled at this time to answer any remaining questions.

### *Determining Your Privacy Designation*

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

Public: the project name, information, and case study will 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 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. Note TRUE precertification is not available to events pursuing TRUE certification.

## 2. Apply

To apply, your team will collect information, perform analyses, complete narratives in the application form, and prepare documentation demonstrating your achievements of the selected credits. Technical questions that arise while preparing your application should be sent via reply to the most recent email from GBCI, to [true@gbci.org](mailto:true@gbci.org), or via GBCI's [contact us form](#). Additionally, a pre-submission phone call can be arranged to answer any questions on the application before submittal.

Once you are ready for review, submit payment for the certification fee (if it hasn't been pre-paid during registration) and your completed documentation to GBCI.

## 3. Review

### *Preliminary Documentation Review (15 business days)*

After you've submitted your documentation and the certification fee payment has cleared, GBCI will review the documentation and provide comments in a preliminary review report. If there is missing or insufficient documentation, GBCI may issue a mid-review clarification request for additional information. If requested, clarification should be submitted within 10 business days of receiving the mid-review clarification request. If needed, you will have the option of requesting a post-review conference call with your assessor to discuss any review comments.

### *On-site Assessment*

Once you submit for review, the on-site assessment can be scheduled. The assessment will be scheduled a minimum 20 business days from the submittal date to allow time for the assessor to complete the preliminary review process, coordinate site visit logistics, and book any needed travel and accommodations. Assessments outside the U.S. will be scheduled a minimum 30 business days from the submittal date. Depending on the size of the facility, the assessment activities may take half a day or a full day. For projects in countries where English is not the primary language, it is recommended to have an on-site contact who is bilingual or provide a translator.

A site tour is required for the assessor verify credits and requirements. During the site tour the assessor will:

- Examine all department waste stations to assess collection methodology and contamination levels
- Examine bins and dumpsters to ensure low contamination/proper sorting of materials. They will also verify that the size and number of bins match documentation.
- View all actions and items that must be verified on-site to award certain credits (for example: on-site composting, garden, repurposed materials or equipment, reusable transport containers, etc.)
- Observe all employees and their zero waste practices. Interviews need to be conducted with key onsite personnel and randomly selected personnel from each department; each interview lasts for approximately 15 minutes.

At the conclusion of the assessment, the assessor will request any additional information or documentation required to confirm compliance with outstanding credits. The final review timeline will begin once additional information is received.

Note: there is no on-site assessment for events pursuing certification, and for projects pursuing precertification or recertification. Please see the applicable guidance documents in the Resources section of the TRUE website for more information on the review process.

#### *Final Review (15 business days)*

After the on-site assessment, 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, additional fees apply*).

#### *Questions about your Certification?*

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.

## **4. Certify**

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.

Upon accepting the certification results, you will receive an email with an official award letter and next steps, including: instructions on ordering a formal certificate and a glass plaque, a request to complete a project profile webpage, 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, insights, and play a pivotal role in educating others.

After you've earned certification, 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 the facility 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 are not subject to annual certification maintenance requirements post-event, as they are one-time occurrences.

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 project teams do not provide annual data for three consecutive years and do not recertify their project at the three year anniversary, the project will no longer be considered certified. The project team will be required to recertify their 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 the project team maintains 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. The project team will be required to recertify their project by following the process and fees outlined in the *Certification Maintenance and Recertification Guidance* document on the [Resources](#) webpage.

If the project team elects to recertify to increase their certification level, or 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.

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. Projects may recertify 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. 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 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](https://true.gbci.org):

[TRUE One-Pager](#)

[TRUE Advisor Certificate Program](#)

[Upcoming Events](#)

[Project Directory](#)

[Articles](#)

[PR Guidelines](#)

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

[USGBC Membership](#)

[USGBC Education Hub](#) (TRUE and zero waste educational resources)

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