



TRUE Guide to Certification
October 2026

OVERVIEW

Congratulations on your decision to pursue TRUE certification.

You're on your way to increasing the value and environmental integrity of your project. This guide will lead you through the process.

TRUE certification involves four main steps:

1. Register your project by completing the required forms and submitting payment.
2. Apply for TRUE certification by submitting your completed certification application and paying a certification fee.
3. Receive a technical review by Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI).
4. Achieve certification and market your accomplishments.

The content in this guide applies to all TRUE rating systems:

- TRUE version 1 (TRUE v1)
- TRUE version 2 (TRUE v2)

If you need assistance at any time, please [contact us](#).

REGISTER

Registration is an important step in the process, signifying your intent to pursue TRUE certification. Before you begin, you'll want to make sure that your project meets the following criteria:

Facilities pursuing certification must:

- Have achieved an average 90% or greater overall diversion from landfill, incineration (Waste-to-Energy), and the environment for solid, non-hazardous wastes for the most recent 12 months to qualify for certification.
- Define a reasonable boundary, usually the legal property boundary.
- Be operational for a minimum of 12 months.

Events pursuing certification must:

- Have achieved an average 90% or greater overall diversion from landfill, incineration (WTE), and the environment for solid, non-hazardous wastes for the event.
- Include the entire duration of the event, including set-up and tear-down.
- Include all event activities and operations within the project boundary.
- Submit for review within 3 months of the event's conclusion.

Construction projects pursuing certification must:

- Have achieved an average 90% or greater overall diversion from landfill, incineration (WTE), and the environment for solid, non-hazardous wastes for the duration of the project.
- Define a reasonable boundary, usually the legal property boundary.
- Include all phases of the project from site procurement to the Certificate of Occupancy (or similar end documentation), including demolition, deconstruction, and site preparation as applicable.
- Submit for review within 6 months of the project's completion.

Additional requirements and information regarding defining the project and minimum requirements may be found in the TRUE Rating Systems on [the website](#).

Projects pursuing TRUE v1 should register using [this form](#). Projects pursuing TRUE v2 should register on USGBC's online platform, [Arc](#).

As part of the registration process, you'll provide basic information related to your project, submit payment, and agree to the certification services agreement. Once you've registered, you will be given access to your project's application.

PROJECT TEAM ROLES

Different members of your project team may have different roles throughout the process. The two most important roles include the following:

- **Owner:** The owner of the project refers to the individual(s) or entity(ies) that has the legal authority to fulfill the obligations set forth in the TRUE Certification Agreement, whether as the property owner or the property owner's authorized agent. If You have only a leasehold interest as a tenant in the Project (defined below), Your authority is limited to the terms and conditions of Your leasehold interest. The owner has ultimate control over the TRUE certification application, meaning that GBCI (the organization responsible for administering TRUE certification) will respond to the owner regarding the administration of the project over any other member of the project team.

- **Project Administrator:** This team member acts as a project manager, overseeing the TRUE project as well as which project team members are responsible for certain tasks, credits, or prerequisites. The project administrator plays a key quality role by checking that the TRUE application is complete and accurate before submitting the project to GBCI for review and accepting the review results once the review is complete. Note: the individual who initially registers the project will automatically be granted the role of the project administrator, but this can be transferred to another team member at any time by the administrator or owner.

DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION

In order to use the TRUE Rating Systems as a roadmap for increasing your organization's diversion, we encourage you to register as early as possible. Registration will give you access to your project's application form, allowing you to begin gathering and entering information for submittal.

DEFINING YOUR FACILITY

Prior to registration, you will need to choose one of the following categories for your facility:

Individual Project

The most common submission type is a single facility pursuing TRUE certification on its own.

Campus Group Projects (multiple buildings on the same site, certifying as one)

If you are planning to bring more than one building located on a single shared site and under the control of a single entity (for example, an educational campus or commercial development) through certification, you may register your project as a campus group project to streamline the documentation you'll need to submit for review. Campus projects use data that is aggregated across all buildings and receive certification as a group, rather than at the individual facility level.

Campus projects need to meet the following conditions:

- All buildings are located within the same legal project boundary.
- All operations occur within the defined project boundary and are consistently accounted for in requirements and credit documentation.
- The entire area contained within the project boundary is held by the same ownership, property manager, or developer or maintained under one operating body.
- All buildings included in the campus project have been operational for a minimum of 12 months.
- All buildings are submitted at the same time.

Regional Group Projects (multiple buildings on different sites, certifying as one)

Multiple buildings in different locations (on separate properties) in a region may receive TRUE certification as one group based on data and documentation aggregated across all buildings if all of the following conditions are met:

1. The properties are in the same region (less than 100 miles).
2. They physically coalesce and manage materials together.
3. They are functionally dependent and operate as one.
4. All TRUE requirements are met using aggregate data and activities.
5. The properties included in the regional project must be operational for a minimum of 12 months.

All properties must be submitted at the same time.

It is uncommon for a project to qualify for a regional group project submission. Most projects with multiple buildings tend to require the individual or campus project approaches. For both campus and regional group projects, one certification is achieved as a group and buildings must not be represented as individually certified.

Portfolio Projects

The TRUE Portfolio Approach is available to portfolios 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. Learn more in the [TRUE Portfolio Guide](#).

If you need help making this selection, or if you would like to discuss your project further prior to registration, please [contact us](#).

APPLY

You're now ready to collect and submit the appropriate documentation so that GBCI may review your project. Working with your project team, you will identify TRUE credits to pursue and assign them to project team members. Your team will then collect information, perform calculations and analysis, and prepare documentation demonstrating your achievement of the prerequisites and your selected credits.

Once your application is complete, make sure to perform a rigorous quality check of your entire application before submitting for review. We suggest that you open each form and check that you have included all required information and open each file to verify that you have submitted the correct document. Cross-check credits and prerequisites to make sure that you have reported common data points consistently.

Want more tips? Here are some characteristics common among high-quality submissions:

- Relevant prerequisite/credit information is clearly provided within the submission
- File attachments are clearly and intuitively labeled
- Only required documentation to support prerequisites and credit thresholds is submitted. Excess documentation may not be reviewed
- Concise narratives are included to describe project-specific circumstances

Don't forget to pay your certification review fee. Your review will commence once you have notified us that your application is complete and your payment has cleared our system.

REPORTING PERIODS

Standard TRUE certifications require a 12-month reporting period, while the reporting period for events and construction projects is the duration of the event or project.

The 12-month reporting period must be consecutive and end no later than 120 days prior to submission.

PRECERTIFICATION

This is an optional pathway available for a fee that is focused on implementation of fundamental actions and policies needed to effectively pursue zero waste. We offer precertification prior to a full certification application to begin the path to TRUE certification, encourage your project to build its data and reporting frameworks, and acknowledge your achievements to date. If you are interested in pursuing precertification, select this option during registration. It is not necessary to register for full certification in order to pursue precertification.

Achieve precertification by completing the TRUE precertification application and submitting the project for review according to the process described below. Precertification projects are valid for three years, are not subject to annual data requirements, and may not recertify.

RECERTIFICATION

Recertification is an important step for maintaining a current certification. Please see the [TRUE Recertification Guide](#) for details.

REVIEW

After you submit your application and pay the certification fee, GBCI will conduct a thorough technical review in accordance with the [GBCI Verification Protocols](#).

While the type of review you'll undergo will vary depending on the specific needs of your project, the rating system under which you are certifying, and the certification program being utilized, the general review process is the same. You will submit your entire application (all credits and prerequisites) once you've completed your project.

STANDARD REVIEW

Part 1: Preliminary Review

- You will first submit your application for a preliminary review. GBCI will check your application for completeness and compliance with the selected rating system and attempted credits.
- GBCI will respond with its preliminary review within 15 business days, indicating which prerequisites and credits are awarded, and which are pending additional information.
- Your team can accept the preliminary review results as final if you are satisfied or proceed to the final review stage.

Part 2: Final Review (optional)

- The final review stage allows you to submit information requested by the reviewer during the preliminary review or amend the application. GBCI suggests you submit these clarifications within 4 weeks after receiving the preliminary review results. GBCI will then review revised or newly submitted prerequisites and credits and reconsider any awarded credits or prerequisites for which information has changed since the return of the preliminary review was completed.
- GBCI will respond with a final TRUE certification review report within 15 business days, marking prerequisites and attempted credits as either awarded or denied.
- Like the preliminary review, you can either accept the review results as final or revise your application and resubmit for a supplemental (appeal) review.

EXPEDITED REVIEW

Expedited reviews may be available upon request. [Contact GBCI](#) at least 20 business days (please allow longer if you are paying by check) prior to submitting an application to request an expedited review to cut your review time in half (reduced from 15 business days to 8 business days per review phase).

Please note that there is an additional charge for this service, and GBCI's ability to fulfill your request depends on their current review capacity. If your request can be accommodated, GBCI will confirm availability and provide an expedited review schedule for your project.

WHEN FURTHER INFORMATION IS NEEDED DURING A REVIEW

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. 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 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.

APPEALING OR CONTESTING A RULING

A supplemental (appeal) review stage provides an additional round of review for specific credits of your choice for a per-credit fee. This allows you to submit additional information, amend the application, or add new credits not previously attempted. After payment and submission for the supplemental review are complete, GBCI will review the credits you have chosen to appeal.

GBCI will respond with an updated TRUE certification review report within 15 business days, indicating which prerequisites and attempted credits have been either awarded or denied.

Like the final review, you can either accept the supplemental review results as final or submit for additional supplemental reviews. There is no cap on the number of supplemental reviews you can receive.

If resolution of a technical issue related to a review ruling has not been achieved via [GBCI's customer support channels](#) and discussion with GBCI reviewers, GBCI has a [Review Challenge Policy](#) whereby a project team may challenge the accuracy of a review decision regarding the sufficiency of already submitted materials.

CERTIFY

When the review process is complete, you'll have the option to accept or appeal GBCI's final review. Accepting the review means that you will no longer be able to submit for supplemental reviews or contest review decisions for specific credits or prerequisites. Please check carefully that you have achieved all prerequisites and targeted credits before accepting the final certification.

Accepting the final review confirms your TRUE certification (congratulations!). You will need to submit the required case study within 30 days of certification issuance.

CERTIFICATION LEVELS

There are four levels of certification to acknowledge the degree of achievement. The number of points that your project earns determines the level of TRUE certification that you will receive. As the number of points available differs depending on which version of the TRUE Rating System is used, so do the number of points needed for each level of certification:

TRUE Version 2

- TRUE Certified: 40-49 points earned
- TRUE Silver: 50-59 points earned
- TRUE Gold: 60-79 points earned
- TRUE Platinum: 80+ points earned

TRUE Version 1

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

PROMOTE YOUR PROJECT

Once you've earned certification, you'll likely want to tell the world. You should. TRUE certification benefits your business's bottom line and underscores your sustainability efforts. It's a cause for celebration!

Following certification, you'll receive instructions on how to order formal certificates of recognition and TRUE plaques.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Achieving TRUE certification allows you to share your project strategies, photos, and insights while playing a crucial role in educating other project teams. If you do not designate your project as "private," USGBC will be able to publish information about it in the [TRUE project directory](#).

Here's a full list of the data and project elements that may be listed in the project directory:

Project directory information:

- Project name
- Project ID
- Physical address

- Date of registration
- Date of certification
- Certification level
- Total points earned
- Project scorecard
- Rating system and version
- Owner type
- Owner name
- Owner organization
- Gross square footage
- Total property area
- Project type

All “public” projects also benefit from publicity opportunities: we may utilize your project data to create case studies highlighting your project’s features, reference your project on our website or to the media, or create other derivative works.

Information that may be used for articles, project profiles, other features:

- Service providers
- Project team members
- Promotional or other project photographs
- Project strategies for certification
- Quotations from team members

At the time of registration, you are free to opt out of the TRUE project directory and publicity opportunities as a “private project.” All private projects that earn certification will be prompted once more to transition to public status (we can’t help ourselves; we love sharing good news!). You will need to re-confirm your “private” status at that time if you wish to retain it.

Please note that confidential or private TRUE-certified projects are not authorized to use the TRUE certification logos or publicly share that they have obtained TRUE certification. Please carefully review the [TRUE Trademark Policy and Branding Guidelines](#) for more information.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Addenda

The TRUE Addenda are official updates that incorporate changes and improvements to the TRUE rating system and other published guidance documents to help clarify, correct, interpret or provide alternative language. Addenda should be referred to in conjunction with the TRUE Rating System and other published guidance documents and can be found on the [TRUE Resources Page](#). Projects registered after an addendum is published must comply with the addenda requirements. Projects registered before an addendum is published are not required to comply with addenda published after their registration date, though it is strongly recommended. In case of a conflict between the Addenda and other guidance documents, the Addenda will supersede the guidance documents.

Past review decisions

In order to maintain the integrity of the rating system requirements, past review decisions do not set formal precedent for TRUE requirements to ensure that neither project team errors nor reviewer oversights are perpetuated.

Deadline for achieving certification

Each rating system will remain open and available for certification after the rating system registration close date. To certify your project under a specific rating system, you must submit for certification (design or standard preliminary review) by that rating system's certification close date, also called the sunset date.

Maintaining TRUE certification

TRUE projects are required to submit diversion data annually to maintain their certification and to recertify every three years as outlined in the [TRUE Recertification Guide](#).

Precertified projects, events, and construction projects are not required to submit annual data nor recertify. Additionally, projects registered prior to September 1, 2020, are not required to recertify as long as they remain in compliance with the annual maintenance data requirements. Should a project registered prior to this date fail to submit annual data for three years running, the project would then need to recertify.

Revocation of TRUE certification

In rare situations, TRUE certification may be revoked. We have a [GBCI Certification Challenge Policy](#) to ensure that all TRUE project submittals and subsequent reviews 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. The certification challenge may include additional review of project documentation, the review of supplemental information, and/or a site visit. In line with the policy, you'll need to retain all project documentation related to your certification, and the achievement of prerequisites and credits, for two years after receiving certification, to ensure that this information is available in case of a challenge.

FEES

TRUE certification provides exceptional value for your money. So, how much will it cost to certify your project?

- **Registration fee:** There is a flat registration fee calculated on a per-project basis that you'll pay upfront at the time of registration. Rates are based on the fee schedule published at the time of registration.
- **Certification fee:** The certification fee is charged on a per-project basis and is based on project square footage, the rating system under which the project is registered, and the type of review selected. The fees cover both a preliminary review and a final review and are based on the fees published at the time the invoice is generated. GBCI will begin your review once payment has been received.
- **Pre-pay:** Certification fees may be paid in advance. If certification fees are paid in advance, you will not be charged for the difference should a subsequent increase in fees occur. If your project does not submit for certification review within 3 years of payment, GBCI will have no further obligations under the certification agreement but may choose to complete the review in GBCI's sole discretion.
- Any change to project square footage, rating system, or review type after an invoice is generated or paid will initiate a change in fees. Fees will be recalculated using the current fee schedule, and any difference in the fees will be due.
- **Other fees:** Other fees related to expedited reviews, supplemental (appeal) reviews, and other optional aspects of the TRUE certification process may apply, should you pursue these avenues.
- **Payment terms:** Invoices must be paid within 30 calendar days and may be subject to cancellation after 60 calendar days. If cancelled, new invoices will need to be generated at current rates. If registration fees are not paid in 60 calendar days, projects may be deactivated.
- **Refunds:** TRUE registration and certification fees are non-refundable and non-transferable.
- **Member discounts:** [USGBC Silver, Gold and Platinum level member organizations](#) benefit from discounted TRUE registration and certification fees. Discounts are available based on the membership status of either the owner or the project administrator for a given TRUE project. Visit the fee charts page below for more information on available discounts.

[View the fee charts](#). For additional questions, [contact us](#) or visit the [Help Center](#).

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