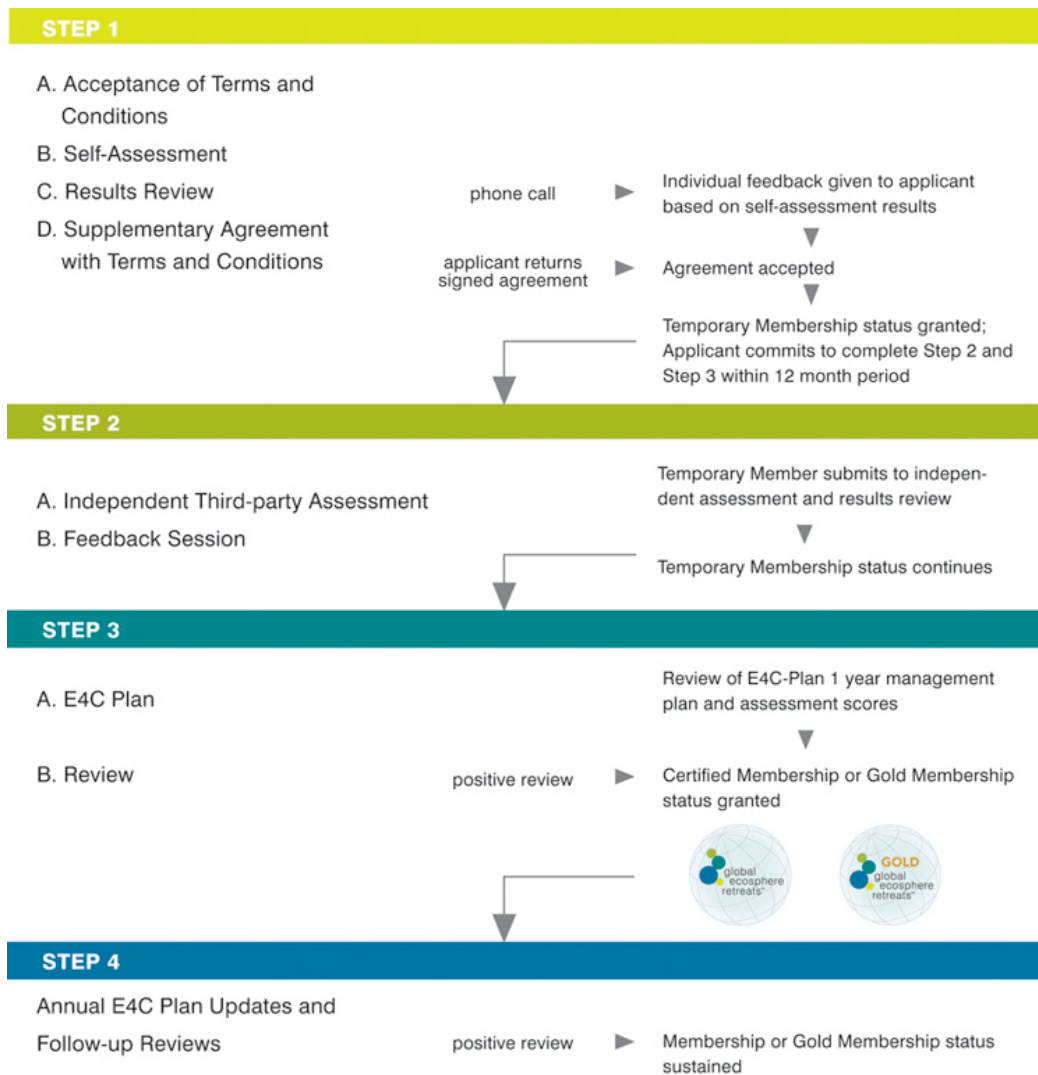


Global Ecosphere Retreats (G.E.R.) Certification Guidelines

Global Ecosphere Retreats (G.E.R.) form an alliance of sustainable and innovative tourist and non-tourist enterprises around the world. Members of this alliance create a network of privately managed natural areas of conservation value with identified and valued ecodiversity that are dedicated to the achieving the highest standards of sustainability through balancing conservation, community, culture, and commerce (4Cs). The Zeitz Foundation supports this alliance in achieving its mission through implementing a performance and process-based certification system on G.E.R. that integrates the 4Cs while maximizing positive and minimizing negative impacts.

The G.E.R. certification system reflects, observes or incorporates available national and international standards and guidelines for all areas of an ecosphere, but also accommodates the need for flexibility when it comes to different ecosystems. Through the certification system, G.E.R. go beyond these accepted standards to serve as "best practice" models, continuously setting new standards through an ongoing process of learning and innovation. The G.E.R. certification system is transparent, relies on independent experts and follows procedures that are common in other international certifications such as in sustainable tourism.

The certification process involves four main steps:



Certification process cont'd

STEP 1 requires that potential applicants introduce themselves by letting us know what natural area or organization you represent. To initiate trustful communication between the applicant and the Zeitz Foundation, we do request that you agree to our Terms and Conditions (ToCs). After accepting and submitting the ToCs, you will have access to our Self-Assessment Workbook, among other important tools and resources, to help you determine advance through the various certification steps.

STEP 2 requires an independent assessor to verify information provided in the self-assessment workbook and provide a feedback session of findings and next steps.

STEP 3 is defined by the development, submittal and review of the E4C-Plan, a document outlining the management plan for all 4Cs of the G.E.R.

STEP 4 entails annual reviews of an updated E4C-Plan and determines if G.E.R. certification can be sustained or not.

Technical approach and relevant standards

The technical approach of the G.E.R. certification system is focused on identifying value-adding solutions and less on finding the problems. It is a performance- and process-based system that balances the 4Cs (conservation, community, culture, and commerce). Accordingly, it encourages members to strive for higher-order learning and long-term achievements rather than on meeting minimum standards. All certification tools continue to evolve in line with global developments and will undergo regular updates.

Integration of existing certificates and ongoing activities

Some G.E.R. already have certification for some or all of their business components such as for environmental management, quality management, carbon reduction program or organic agriculture. Many principles or requirements are common amongst different certification systems. The G.E.R. certification acknowledges these achievements where applicable; it recognizes common features and tries to increase the efficiency of assessments and internal monitoring systems.

For example, a G.E.R. that holds a certification for environmental management likely has detailed baseline information about energy and water usage, transport and waste management. This information can possibly be used as baseline information for the G.E.R. certification as well. Furthermore, ongoing activities that might relate to other certifications can be included in the self-assessment and to provide bases for comparison throughout subsequent assessments.

Planning and assessing

Valuable data for the assessments can be drawn from a management plan template called the E4C-Plan that G.E.R. submit regularly. The E4C-Plan is a document outlining the management plan across all 4Cs of the G.E.R. G.E.R. are supported in how to design and set up a planning system, but the characteristics might vary due to the differences in budgets and existing management systems, as well as the availability of data including from other certifications.

The information provided in the E4C-Plan is then independently evaluated and assessed. The assessments rely on independent experts who are able to analyze complex situations and to suggest suitable ways to make further progress. G.E.R. take an active part in the assessments. They have an interest to provide an accurate picture of the status quo in all four Cs in order to get specific support in planning and implementing next steps.