ISEAL Credibility Principles revision: Summary of feedback on V1.1
About this document

This document summarises how feedback on the first draft of the revised Credibility Principles (version 1.1) was incorporated into the second draft (version 1.2). Version 1.2 is out for consultation until 18 December 2020.

We would like to thank all the respondents who took time to share feedback in the first round of consultation. We believe that your input and suggestions have made the principles clearer and stronger, and we are looking forward to your views on version 1.2 of the principles.

We are also hoping in this round of consultation to reach stakeholders who were somewhat under-represented in the first round, particularly producers and businesses who use standards. We would appreciate you sharing the information about this consultation in your networks with this in mind.

More information on how to participate can be found on the consultation page.
Document outline

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About the consultation
Since launching in 2013, ISEAL's Credibility Principles have become an international reference for the foundations of credible practice for sustainability standards.

The Credibility Principles were reviewed in 2019 to determine if they need to be revised to remain useful to stakeholders.

The review concluded that the Credibility Principles do need updating to ensure they remain relevant in our changing sustainability landscape.
Credibility Principles
first consultation

› Public consultation on the first draft of the revised principles (version 1.1) ran from 14 May - 31 July 2020

› Over 600 comments from 140 respondents

› Input received through an online survey, webinars, emails and calls
Who participated?

140 people provided feedback: 86 via the online survey and 54 via webinars, emails and calls
Who participated?

28 countries were represented in the consultation process.

Participants by region:
- Europe: 33%
- North America: 16%
- South America: 10%
- Asia: 20%
- Africa: 8%
- Oceania: 4%
- Unknown: 9%

Map showing the distribution of participants by region.
Summary of feedback and changes made as a result
General feedback and changes

› Overall the efforts to simplify language and improve the Credibility Principles as a communications tool were appreciated.

› The use of language that supports the application of the principles by a wider range of tools was also appreciated.

› Some overlaps between principles were identified, but overlaps were not considered to be a significant issue by respondents and in some cases there were requests to make the interconnections more explicit.

› In a few cases, specific wording from version 1 was considered more explicit and has been reintroduced.

› Some reordering of the principles was suggested and the order in which the principles are presented has been adjusted as a result.

› Statements outlining why each principle is important have also been added.
General feedback and changes

› There were some requests for technical requirements. In most cases, the ISEAL Codes of Good Practice do define requirements for implementation. Where specific requirements were suggested that are not already addressed in the Codes, this has been noted as input for Code revision.

› In a number of cases, examples and other guidance was requested and this has been noted as input for the development of supporting materials.

› Other international references relevant to the Credibility Principles were also highlighted by some respondents. Efforts have been made to ensure that the Credibility Principles are complementary and supportive of initiatives with a related scope and/or purpose. References identified have been noted for the development of supporting materials.
Sustainability impacts

Summary of feedback received

› Organisations should address and eliminate negative impacts
› Be more explicit that the 'most significant sustainability impacts and outcomes' are specific to the scope of the organisation's system
› Reference theory of change
› Provide a definition for ‘sustainability’ that clearly references economic and people/social and planet/environmental dimensions
› Expand the definition of impacts to more explicitly include positive and negative, intended and unintended, direct and indirect impacts
Sustainability impacts

Summary of changes made in response to feedback

› Eliminating and remediating negative impacts now addressed within the principle Sustainability impacts rather than Measurable progress
› References to scope, materiality, and theory of change added
› Definition of sustainability added
› Definition of impacts expanded
Measurable progress

Summary of feedback

› ‘Remediation of harm’ needs clarification; concerns also expressed about the focus on negative impacts (remediation of which could be interpreted as a focus on the minimum necessary)

› The term 'high quality data' needs clarification and verification should be referenced.

› Auditability should be addressed.
Measurable progress

Summary of changes

› Remediation now addressed in Sustainability impacts. A definition was also added (which draws on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights). While we appreciate concerns raised about framing, we also had strong feedback that effective remediation is critical to system credibility and an area where we must still raise the bar when it comes to performance.

› The principle is clarified so that the reference to data quality is explained in context and verifiability is now referenced explicitly. Definition of data quality also added.

› Auditability is now more explicitly addressed in the principle Accuracy and the principles have been reordered to improve the logical flow.
Improvement

Summary of feedback

› Consider renaming as ‘continual improvement’ and clarify the distinction between ‘improvement’ and ‘measurable progress’.

› Be more specific about when and why ‘new ideas and approaches’ are needed.

› Further illustrate ‘continual improvement’ in guidance materials.

Summary of changes

› Renamed as Continual improvement and reworded to clarify the distinction between ‘continual improvement’ and ‘measurable progress’.

› Amended to clarify the context and purpose of adaptation
Collaboration

Summary of feedback

› Strengthen the principle: be more specific about the purpose of collaboration, the types of organisations to collaborate with, and what quality collaboration looks like.

› Explicitly include the need for collaboration between systems to avoid unnecessary duplication.

› Clarify the distinction with Stakeholder engagement

Summary of changes

› Principle amended to be more explicit and clearer in light of feedback.
Added value

Summary of feedback

› Reintroduce language from version 1 to strengthen the link to accessibility; include the previous specific references to capacity building (adapted as needed to reflect a wider range of tools).

› An important level of feedback calling for a refocus on accessibility without the introduction of the wider frame of added value.

› In contrast, a similar level of support for the introduction of added value, but with clear feedback that the principle needs strengthening: clarifying what is 'added value’, who the added value is for and why it matters.
Summary of changes

› The possibility of refocusing on accessibility was carefully considered; however, the review findings pointed to the importance of added value particularly for producers and this was given significant weight given that producers were not strongly represented in the first round of consultation. We decided to retain the focus on added value while clarifying the rationale and intent of the principle.

› Language from version 1 was reintroduced to strengthen the references to accessibility.
Accuracy

Summary of feedback

› Clarify the scope of the principle
› Make the link to claims (while maintaining the importance of Truthfulness as a separate principle)
› Consider renaming the principle (e.g. reliability)
› Define competence
› Provide guidance on what methods, tools and oversight mechanisms can be used to ensure accuracy, consistency, competency and impartiality
Accuracy

Summary of changes

› Reworded (and the principles are reordered) to clarify that Accuracy relates to the performance of users with respect to the tool

› Amended to make clearer that the principle contains two distinct but related concepts: the suitability of the tool for assessment (its ‘auditability’) and the reliability of the assessments performed

› The link to claims was made explicit

› Definition of competence added

› The name Accuracy was maintained as this aligns to the usage established in the Assurance Code
Stakeholder engagement

Summary of feedback

› Clarify references to meaningful engagement and accountability.
› Bring back 'balanced and representative group of stakeholders' and the opportunities for participation defined in version 1.
› Engagement should also include reporting back to stakeholders (not just gathering input).
› Particular efforts to engage disadvantaged stakeholders should be clarified.
› Inclusion is important if we are to be fit for the future.
› Include reference to resolving complaints and provide more detail on what fair mechanisms to resolve conflicts means.
Stakeholder engagement

Summary of changes

› Meaningful engagement reworded to clarify and strengthen and the reference to a 'balanced and representative group’ reintroduced.

› Reporting back to stakeholders included.

› Non-discrimination and inclusion addressed, and more details regarding efforts to engage disadvantaged stakeholders provided.

› Reference to conflict resolution reworded to clarify and strengthen.

› Definitions revised.

› The list of opportunities for participation provided in version 1 was discussed, but we concluded that this level of detail does belong in the Codes and this was not reintroduced.
Impartiality

Summary of feedback

› Some of the language and references from version 1 considered clearer / stronger.

Summary of changes

› Some of the language and references from version 1 reintegrated.
Truthfulness

Summary of feedback

› Clarify some terms, including ‘proportional to the nature of the system’
› ‘Substantiated’ should be specified as substantiated with evidence and research
› Some respondents felt that the phrasing from version 1 “relevant, verifiable, not misleading and should enable an informed choice” should be retained

Summary of changes

› Principle amended to clarify and strengthen in line with feedback
› Reference to ‘proportional’ clarified to specify that this is in relation to the scope and design of the system (e.g. proportional to the traceability model, assurance model, etc.)
Summary of feedback

› Consider the role and value of privacy (e.g. commercially sensitive information, confidential information, information security, and data protection) and what information should be public, private, or only accessible to stakeholders to find the balance between transparency and confidentiality.

› Clarify ‘important’ information. Some suggestions to replace ‘important’ with material.

› Some respondents found the examples in version 1 provided more clarity, as well as there being some additional examples that would be useful to include such as on stakeholder engagement, complaints, and decision-making processes.
Summary of changes

› Need for balance between confidentiality/privacy and transparency specifically addressed.

› Reference to ‘important’ information clarified by rewording to reflect the context and intent. We decided not to replace ‘important’ with material, given that material information has a particular (legal) meaning and we have already used ‘materiality’ in a different sense in Sustainability impacts.

› The list of information to be made publicly available provided in version 1 was discussed, but we concluded that this level of detail does belong in the Codes and this was not reintroduced.
Next steps

We would appreciate your views on version 1.2 currently out for consultation until 18 December 2020. More information on how to participate can be found on the consultation page.

If you would like to review the feedback received in further detail the full log of comments is available on the consultation page (in English only). If you would like to discuss any of your earlier inputs and how these were taken into account please contact eleanor@isealalliance.org.

Thank you again to all the respondents for your input and suggestions. We look forward to your views on version 1.2 of the principles.
Thank you!