ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems

Summary of the consultations and key changes

December 2023
About this document

This document provides an overview of the development of the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems (the ISEAL Code). It includes a summary of the consultations on the first and second drafts of the ISEAL Code, and an overview of key changes from the existing Codes of Good Practice.

We would like to thank everyone who provided feedback on the drafts, and to those who supported the consultations by engaging with events and sharing information about the consultations with colleagues and stakeholders.

For more information on the development of the ISEAL Code, please see here: www.isealalliance.org/iseal-code-consultation
Outline of contents

› About the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems
› Summary of the consultations
› Summary of key changes from existing Codes
About the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems
What is the ISEAL Code?

The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems (the ISEAL Code) is a normative reference that operationalises the ISEAL Credibility Principles.

The Code defines credible management of the components of a sustainability system, including standard-setting, assurance, claims, and impacts (monitoring, evaluation, and learning).
Approach to developing the ISEAL Code

The ISEAL Code revises and integrates the ISEAL Impacts, Standard-Setting, and Assurance Codes of Good Practice, and also incorporates essential practices from the ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide.

The revision and integration approach was approved by the ISEAL Board in May 2020. Its development was informed by a multistakeholder Steering Group and overseen by the ISEAL Technical Committee.
Summary of the consultations
Public consultation approach

We held two public consultations on drafts of the ISEAL Code, which ran from 22 September to 16 December 2022, and 31 May to 30 July 2023.

The consultations aimed to receive feedback from a wide range of stakeholders that would be affected by changes to the ISEAL Code requirements and to ensure that stakeholders could submit in-depth, mid-level or high-level feedback depending on their preference. In the second consultation, we additionally sought to check with participants in the first consultation that their feedback had been adequately addressed in the second draft.

Feedback was received through a range of mechanisms, including a survey, workshops and webinars, excel spreadsheet, emails, and meetings.
Participation in the public consultations

We received 94 unique responses* (survey and excel submissions) representing 46 organisations, across 19 countries.

The majority of respondents were standards systems (69%), and largely based in Europe (65%).

*These statistics do not include 400+ participants in 14 workshops and webinars (205 organisations, 48 countries). These events were targeted at stakeholders from groups and geographies less represented in the excel/survey feedback, and feedback was aggregated and used as input to the final draft of the ISEAL Code.
All information about the consultations can be found here:

www.isealalliance.org/iseal-code-consultation

This includes:

› Summary of feedback and comment logs from consultations, and how we have responded
› Past webinar recordings
› Previous draft versions of the ISEAL Code

If you would like to discuss any of your earlier inputs and how these were taken into account, please contact consultation@isealalliance.org
Summary of key changes from existing Codes

This section provides an overview of the changes made in the ISEAL Code. It summarises how different aspects of the ISEAL Code have changed from the existing Codes, and how this was informed by the development process, including how input from the consultations on draft versions was used.
Overview of changes

Much of the intent and level of ambition of the existing Codes has remained the same. There are some substantive changes that reflect the updated terms of reference and objectives of the Code integration, and some that arose in response to consultation feedback or wider learnings.

Changes to reflect the updated terms of reference and objectives of the ISEAL Code include:
› introduction of new topics, e.g., due diligence, claims
› more outcome-focused approach
› stronger alignment to the ISEAL Credibility Principles, e.g., relevance to a wider range of sustainability systems, adjusted content of clauses
› broader scope of application to all scheme components that contribute to impacts and claims

Changes to reflect consultation and wider learnings include:
› introduction of content on gender
› structural changes, e.g., new Scope section, division into eight sections
› adjustments to the content of clauses, e.g., level of ambition, editorial amendments
Approaching sustainability systems holistically

Summary of changes

› The structure of the ISEAL Code applies to the scheme as a whole
› The scope of the ISEAL Code has been broadened to be applicable to all scheme components and related strategies that contribute to the scheme’s defined sustainability outcomes, or that back up claims and communications
› Section 6 (standard development and maintenance) applies to sustainability standards and any other requirements that support scheme integrity, such as chain of custody requirements

Development process

› Feedback and input from the Code Steering Group were used to clarify how scheme’s determine which activities fall within the scope of the ISEAL Code. A Scope section was introduced to support interpretation.
Strategy for creating impact

Summary of changes
› Strategy development is positioned as an integral part of the scheme
› Section 1 informs design of other scheme components and is part of performance monitoring that is embedded across daily operations

Development process
› Content is largely drawn from the Impacts Code, with adjustments to terminology and scope
› Terminology was selected to be widely applicable, e.g., ‘theory of change’ used in guidance rather than main criteria as feedback highlighted this was not relevant for some schemes
› Minor changes were made to improve clarity throughout drafting stages
Relevance to a wider range of sustainability systems

Summary of changes

› The audience of the ISEAL Code and ISEAL Credibility Principles both include a wider range of sustainability systems, such as improvement monitoring programmes and ratings systems

Development process

› Feedback and consultant review of the draft ISEAL Code were used to inform development to ensure relevance to these other models
› Terminology adjustments enabled interpretation and relevance to wider audience
Specificity

Summary of changes

› The ISEAL Code takes a more outcome oriented approach
› Some requirements were made less prescriptive

Development process

› Feedback was used to adapt the level of detail in clauses to find the right balance between specificity and clarity
› Compliance lens was applied in development to ensure the compliance process will be clear and not overly burdensome
Claims

Summary of changes
› Essential practices have been incorporated from the ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide
› Requirements focus on the management of a claims system to ensure that sustainability systems can be relied upon to control claims, and that claims made are clear, relevant and accurate

Development process
› Claims were identified as a priority topic to introduce in the ISEAL Code due to the changing regulatory environment and stakeholder expectations
› Feedback was positive and helped to determine the correct level of ambition, clarity and terminology
Due diligence and remediation

Summary of changes

› New requirements were introduced to ensure schemes consider their role in supporting corporate due diligence and in doing their own due diligence on partners and clients
› The ISEAL Code also enhances clauses relevant to supporting processes such as dispute resolution and risk management

Development process

› Informed by input from ISEAL and external experts on policy and human rights issues in response to the changing legislative landscape
› Feedback helped ensure clarity, correct level of detail in clauses, minimal terminology used, and appropriate supporting guidance within the ISEAL Code
Gender

Summary of changes

› The ISEAL Code introduces content to address the need to recognise the impact of gender during MEL activities, and the importance of gender balance in governance bodies responsible for decision-making about the standard

Development process

› Clauses were introduced in response to feedback from the ISEAL secretariat and engagement with Community Members.

› Feedback used to improve clarity and relevance to all sustainability systems
Thank you

More information is available at [www.iseralliance.org/iseral-code-consultation](http://www.iseralliance.org/iseral-code-consultation)

Please direct any questions or comments to: [consultation@iseralliance.org](mailto:consultation@iseralliance.org)