



# Sustainable Development Advisory Group

## Terms of Reference

March 21, 2024

The purpose of this document is to define the roles and responsibilities, composition, and scope of activities of the relaunching of Verra's Sustainable Development Advisory Group.

### Background

Verra's mission is to support climate action and sustainable development with standards programs that credibly, transparently, and robustly assess environmental and social impacts and enable funding for sustaining and scaling up these benefits.

We are making steady progress toward our [New Era for Verra](#) commitments to the three priority areas identified to advance climate action and sustainable development: operational excellence, enhanced program integrity and impact, and accountability.

To further the commitments under the accountability and enhanced program integrity and impact thematic areas, Verra is relaunching the Sustainable Development Advisory Group (SDAG). This new cohort of the SDAG will serve as a strategic and technical resource to support the evolution of Verra's long-term sustainable development strategy across all programs.<sup>1</sup> It will help improve their integrity, usability, and consistency of rules and requirements for the following aspects:

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<sup>1</sup> Verra's portfolio includes the following programs:

- [Verified Carbon Standard \(VCS\) Program](#), the world's most widely used greenhouse gas (GHG) crediting program, which drives finance toward activities that reduce and remove emissions, improve livelihoods, and protect nature
- [Sustainable Development Verified Impact Standard \(SD VISTA\) Program](#), the premier standards program for certifying the real-world benefits of social and environmental projects that support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- [Plastic Waste Reduction Program \(Plastic Program\)](#), which enables the robust impact assessment of new or scaled-up waste collection and recycling projects
- [Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards \(CBS\) Program](#), which supports land use projects in addressing climate change, benefitting local communities and smallholders, and conserving biodiversity



- 1) Social and environmental safeguards
- 2) Sustainable development impacts

## Objective and Roles

The objective of the SDAG is to provide technical input on, and inform the strategic development of, the following components:

- 1) Strengthened program requirements and guidance on social and environmental safeguards and community and stakeholder engagement in Verra's Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) Program; Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards (CCBS) Program; Sustainable Development Verified Impact Standard (SD VISta) Program; and Plastic Waste Reduction (Plastic) Program
- 2) Standardized monitoring, reporting, and verification of sustainable development contributions and benefits, in alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDAG will serve in a consultative and advisory capacity to Verra staff and board members and not have any decision-making authority. The implementation of recommendations is subject to final approval by the Verra Board of Directors.

More specifically, the SDAG will provide recommendations on these elements:

- Developing robust and auditable safeguard requirements to identify, avoid, mitigate, and minimize adverse social and environmental impacts in the design and implementation of projects registered with any Verra standards program
- Aligning with sustainable development market integrity initiatives and emerging or established best practices
- Guiding standardized and accessible monitoring and reporting systems to support projects in credibly demonstrating their sustainable development benefits
- Updating Verra's sustainable development benefit programs (i.e., SD VISta and CCBS) based on the evolution of the voluntary carbon market and VCS Program updates
- Clarifying and developing guidance for sustainable development outputs in Verra programs (e.g., safeguards, SDG contributions, SD VISta certification and claims, SD VISta labels, SD VISta assets)



## Commitment and Responsibilities

Participation in the SDAG is voluntary, without remuneration, and expected to run at least through 2025, with the possibility of extension. Members must be able to commit to the following: 1) actively participating in one 90- to 120-minute video conference call every six to eight weeks on average, and 2) providing inputs on electronic collaborative documents via email.

No in-person meetings are expected, though side meetings at relevant conferences in which members are participating may be organized. Members may be required to spend one to two hours preparing for conference calls. If willing, a member may extend their time commitment to include participation in ad hoc working groups (see the Operation of the SDAG section).

## Member Composition

The SDAG will comprise a diverse group of qualified members who represent a range of experiences, expertise, geographies, stakeholder interests, identities, and sectors to support the evolution of sustainable development in all Verra programs. Participants should meet one or more of the following criteria:

- First-hand knowledge of on-the-ground realities and challenges related to sustainable development faced mainly by Indigenous Peoples, customary rights holders, and local communities
- Strong understanding of carbon market dynamics from a project developer perspective, including barriers to entry, incentives, social and environmental safeguards, and sustainable development benefits
- Strong understanding of carbon market dynamics from the demand perspective, including drivers for buyer engagement in voluntary and compliance markets
- Expertise in monitoring, reporting, and verification of projects' sustainable development benefits aligned with the SDGs
- Experience in strategic communications in the carbon market, environmental, social, or other relevant sectors
- Knowledge of a variety of carbon or other credit-generating, market-based standards, including the SD VSta, CCBS, and Plastic Programs
- Understanding of SDGs and their implementation at the project level
- Familiarity with supply chain initiatives or interventions
- Familiarity with climate or sustainable development finance



- Understanding of sustainability standards and certification programs (e.g., Global Reporting Initiative [GRI], AccountAbility AA1000 Assurance Standard, Carbon Disclosure Project [CDP], Rainforest Alliance, Fair Trade), including the role of auditors

Verra endeavors to convene a balanced SDAG comprised of individuals across the following identities, roles, and sectors:

- Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as organizations led by members of these groups
- Civil society, including non-governmental organizations
- Project developers and intermediaries
- Municipalities/government and multilateral organizations
- End users of credits (e.g., corporate leaders interested in sustainable development benefits)
- Investors and financing organizations
- Academia
- Assessment experts such as validation/verification bodies (VVBs)

## Operation of the SDAG

Verra staff will be responsible for organizing and facilitating meetings, preparing and disseminating agendas and minutes, producing drafts and proposals regarding sustainable development in Verra's standards programs, organizing SDAG input and review, and facilitating communication and consultation with other stakeholders. Verra may create smaller ad hoc groups drawn from the SDAG and other stakeholder groups depending on needs, participant interest, availability, and expertise.

Depending on member composition and location of residence, Verra may consider offering two sessions for each meeting, addressing the same agenda content in each session to accommodate SDAG members in diverse time zones. Members would be invited to choose the meeting option of their preference for each occurrence.

SDAG members must adhere to the Verra Code of Conduct, which includes confidentiality and conflict-of-interest policies.

The working language of the SDAG will be English.



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## Termination

SDAG members or Verra may give notice of termination of member participation in the group at any time. Verra reserves the right to inactivate or terminate the SDAG at any time.

## Application for Membership

Interested candidates are invited to apply for membership in the SDAG by April 8, 2024. Verra will only accept applications submitted using the [Sustainable Development Advisory Group application form](#).

Verra aims to select SDAG members by the end of April 2024 and hold the first meeting in May. The appointment of advisory group members will be at Verra's sole discretion via direct invitation and from the list of applicants.

If you have any questions or comments about the SDAG, please contact Lia de Queiroz, program officer, sustainable development innovation ([ldequeiroz@verra.org](mailto:ldequeiroz@verra.org)).