



# Public Consultation on the VCS Program

6 February 2023

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The VCS Program is the world's most widely used greenhouse gas (GHG) crediting program. It drives finance toward activities that reduce and remove emissions, improve livelihoods, and protect nature. The VCS Program combines scientific rigor, transparency, and innovative thinking to enable ambitious climate action; it is a critical and evolving component in the urgent ongoing effort to stabilize the global climate and achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Since Version 4 of the VCS Program was released in 2019, there have been significant changes to the context in which the VCS operates, such as the increase in ambition of governments, civil society, and private organizations, with a focus on halving emissions by 2030 and reaching net zero global emissions by mid-century. Meeting this ambition will require a significant increase in the scale and pace of emissions reductions enabled through both government policy and voluntary action. Verra is renewing the VCS Program to meet this challenge, enhancing both the integrity of the program and the scale of its impact. Stakeholder input is a critical next step to inform and help guide this work.

First announced on 17 January 2023, this open consultation invites stakeholders to identify big-picture priorities and ideas to enable the VCS Program to deliver climate action at the scale, pace, and integrity needed to support global climate ambitions. Verra also welcomes input on near-term updates that could improve the effectiveness and usability of the VCS Program. These ideas will help inform the next update to the VCS Program, planned for mid-2023.

Where the consultation identifies ideas or issues that require more thinking or evaluation, we will consult further with stakeholders on specific proposals, similar to the consultations conducted in advance of previous VCS Program updates. This open consultation is only the first stage of the process to align the VCS Program with the integrity, scale, and pace of action needed to achieve global climate ambitions.

### 1.1 Consultation Process and Timeline

The planned timeline for the consultation is set out in the table below.

| Tentative Date(s)         | Activity                                      |
|---------------------------|---|
| 17 January 2023           | Consultation pre-announcement                 |
| 6 February – 7 April 2023 | Open consultation                             |
| 22 February 2023          | Consultation webinar                          |
| April – May 2023          | Review comments and prepare responses         |
| June 2023                 | Publish public comments and Verra's responses |

Please provide comments and responses to the questions in the 'Requested Feedback' section below. Comments may be submitted via the [Consultation Form](#) by 7 April 2023. After the consultation, we will review and incorporate the feedback into our planning for upcoming VCS Program updates.

We look forward to your feedback. As you engage in this consultation, please direct any questions to [programupdates@verra.org](mailto:programupdates@verra.org).

## 2 REQUESTED FEEDBACK

While the scope of the consultation is open, with guiding questions listed below, stakeholders are encouraged to be as specific as possible in identifying improvement opportunities and providing the underlying rationale. Recommendations that relate to a specific clause or section in a VCS Program document can be made using the response table in Question 15. All responses are optional. Verra requests feedback on the following:

- Our vision for the renewed VCS Program is to strengthen its credibility and integrity and to enable increased global climate action to support halving emissions by 2030 and achieving net-zero global emissions by mid-century. To help gauge which topics are most important, please provide a score (between 1-lowest and 5-highest priority) for each of the following based on your recommended overall priorities for the VCS Program renewal:
  - Accelerate the adoption and integration of new approaches to VCS Program fundamentals, (such as additionality, baselines, monitoring, verification, and permanence) to enhance integrity, transparency and impact
  - Align the VCS Program with carbon market integrity initiatives
  - Expand the VCS Program Scope to include additional activities/sectors
  - Integrate the VCS program with government or jurisdictional programs and policies (including Article 6 of the Paris Agreement) to increase alignment and ambition
  - Adopt new technologies, such as digitization of project documents and methodologies, digital monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV), and Web 3.0 opportunities

- Simplify and enhance the usability of the VCS program documents, methodologies, and templates
- Enhance protections and benefits for indigenous peoples and local communities, natural ecosystems, and sustainable development associated with VCS projects
- Other (specify below)

If you selected 'other,' please elaborate on your priority topic(s) for the future development of the VCS Program.

### INTEGRITY

2. What improvements do you recommend to strengthen the credibility and integrity of the VCS Program or better align with the VCS Principles<sup>1</sup>?
3. How could Verra improve the VCS Program approach to additionality, permanence, baseline setting, or avoiding double counting or double claiming of emission reductions and removals?
4. What enhancements do you recommend to the VCS requirements and processes related to project consultation and safeguards to protect and benefit indigenous peoples and local communities, avoid environmental harm, and promote sustainable development?
5. What guidance or requirements should the VCS Program provide regarding the use of VCUs to support global climate outcomes (e.g., how to use VCUs to raise corporate climate ambition and complement direct actions within their operations and supply chains)?

### SCOPE

6. Considering the types of emission reduction and removal (ERR) activities necessary to achieve global net zero emissions, are there any key ERR activities that are *not* currently addressed in the scope of the VCS Program and available methodologies that Verra should include (please list and explain why)?
7. Are there any ERR activities or VCS methodologies that should be avoided, reviewed, or phased out in the scope of the VCS Program (please list and explain why)?
8. How could the VCS better support emissions reductions or removals beyond government policy requirements and incentives while supporting improvements to government policies and programs over time?

### INNOVATION

9. What emerging technologies and related approaches do you think Verra should explore and potentially integrate into the VCS Program requirements, processes, or methodologies?
10. How can the VCS Program help accelerate the development and deployment of new emissions reduction or removal technologies and practices?
11. How can the VCS Program support and align with improvements in scientific knowledge necessary for achieving global climate ambitions?

### USABILITY AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

12. How can Verra improve the operations of the VCS program registration and issuance processes (including through capacity building), and enhance interoperability between the VCS and other

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<sup>1</sup> The VCS Principles are found in the *VCS Standard v4.4*, Section 2.2.1: Relevance, Completeness, Consistency, Accuracy, Transparency, and Conservativeness

Verra programs (e.g. the Sustainable Development Verified Impact Standard, the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Standards, and the Plastic Waste Reduction Standard)?

13. What VCS Program updates could better support the efficient and effective design, financing, implementation, reporting, validation, or verification of VCS projects?
14. How can the VCS Program approach to validation and verification be improved?
15. In the VCS Program documents, definitions, and templates, are there any clauses or sections that are difficult to understand or implement? Are there any errors or oversights in specific clauses or sections that need to be addressed? Please enter your specific recommendations in this downloadable Excel sheet and, once completed, upload it in the Consultation Form.
16. Do you have feedback on how updates to the VCS Program are developed, consulted on, and communicated?

#### **OTHER**

17. Do you have any other general comments or feedback on the VCS Program that are not covered in your responses above?
18. Do you have additional feedback on how Verra could better support the growth, integrity, and evolution of the voluntary carbon market and climate action more broadly?