



Public Sector Standard: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Public Sector Standard?

The Public Sector Standard is a document that explains how public sector organizations can develop inventories of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The standard focuses on high-level “GHG accounting” procedures, such as determining what emission sources should be included in an inventory, and how emission reduction targets can be set and tracked over time. It adapts the core accounting principles found in the WRI/WBCSD GHG Corporate Standard to the unique organizational and structural needs of public agencies at the local, state and federal level.

2. For whom is the standard designed?

Any public organization controlled or operated by the government, including government agencies, school boards, quasi-governmental organizations and utilities, as well as public-private partnerships. The standard is intended for all levels of government -- municipal/city, state and federal. Furthermore, while the standard is geared towards government operations in the US, it is expected to have broad utility for the public sector in other countries too.

Public sector agencies may conduct a GHG inventory for a variety of reasons, including: managing the costs and risks increasingly associated with GHG emissions, preparing for potential regulation and public reporting, and demonstrating leadership. Regardless of your goal, the standard is intended to offer a flexible basis for robust GHG management strategies.

3. Why was the Public Sector Standard developed?

Public agencies are increasingly being called upon to take responsibility for the environmental impacts of their operations, and the urgency of global climate change has accelerated the need for GHG emissions management. Many states have already passed “Lead By Example” laws requiring public agencies to report and reduce their GHG emissions, and federal agencies may be required by Executive Order to do the same. In addition, several agencies have shown environmental commitment through participation in voluntary reporting programs such as The Climate Registry.

But this growing diversity of GHG laws and programs has revealed a need for harmonized accounting guidance that can apply to all levels of government. The standard intends to address this need and serve the public sector in the same way the WRI/WBCSD Corporate Standard served the private sector: by providing a flexible GHG accounting framework that enables organizations to achieve multiple reporting objectives (including both voluntary and mandatory). The Public Sector Standard Steering Committee has been working with The Climate Registry, the California Action Reserve, the Carbon Disclosure Project and ICLEI to ensure that the Public Sector Standard reflects the existing best practices developed by these groups. In compiling information on existing laws and best practices, WRI also intends for the standard guidance to inform future GHG reporting regulations for the public sector.



4. How does the Public Sector Standard differ from the WRI/WBCSD GHG Protocol Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard?

The Public Sector Standard is based on the WRI/WBCSD GHG Protocol Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard, which is used by thousands of companies worldwide to develop corporate inventories. While many of the same GHG accounting procedures can be used by both the public and private sectors, the public sector has a unique variety of organizational, financial and legal structures, including public-private partnerships and land-use-sharing arrangements that demand specialized GHG-accounting procedures. In addition, for many public agencies, GHG-emitting sources such as fleet vehicles and electricity are owned and/or operated by organizations outside of the agency, requiring further clarification of reporting responsibilities. The standard addresses these core accounting questions and provides sector-specific case studies and best practices.

5. Are you involved with other GHG reporting programs?

Yes. Many GHG reporting programs such as the Climate Registry, California Climate Action Reserve, ICLEI, and California Air Resources Board have developed and are developing new guidance for the public sector. Where these programs' guidance targets specific levels of public organizations and outlines particular reporting and implementation procedures, the standard instead seeks to offer a flexible framework for all levels of government that would serve as a platform for agencies to report to multiple voluntary or mandatory programs. Many such programs are stakeholders in this project, and WRI is working with them to ensure that the best practices they have developed are reflected in the standard and compatible with its core accounting principles.

6. How was the Public Sector Standard developed?

The draft standard is based on a year-long multi-stakeholder consultation process begun in 2008 and coordinated by WRI's partner -- Logistics Management Institute (LMI). Two stakeholder workshops were convened in June and September 2008, and attended by a wide range of state and federal agencies who contributed insights into agency structures and GHG inventory experiences. The next phase of the standard's development process includes a broader stakeholder review and road testing component, supported in part by the EPA and coordinated by an expanded Steering Committee comprised of individuals from WRI, LMI, The EPA Climate Leaders program and the Department of Energy (Federal Energy Management Program, FEMP).

7. What is the stakeholder review and road testing process?

There are two critical components to the development of the standard: the stakeholder review process, and the stakeholder road testing. The review process includes receiving feedback from representatives from local, state and federal agencies as well as GHG reporting programs. The Public Sector Standard Steering Committee has invited approximately 40 agencies to participate in this review thus far, but extends an open invitation for any interested party to offer feedback about whether the standard adequately meets the inventory and reporting needs of the public sector.



The road testing process is an opportunity for agencies to actually begin conducting a GHG inventory based upon the Public Sector Standard guidance. The goal of the road testing is to uncover any practical implementation issues that agencies may experience, and then enhance the guidance accordingly. Because federal agencies will be likely facing an Executive Order requiring the development of GHG inventories, LMI will be coordinating the federal agency road test with the intent of building early administrative and organizational capacity. WRI in turn will be coordinating the state and local agencies road test. WRI will be available to individually assist road testers in the addressing core accounting issues and drawing organizational boundaries. This effort is being funded, in part, by the US EPA.

8. How do I get involved as a reviewer or road tester?

If you are interested in reviewing or road testing the standard, please email pspccomments@wri.org. You will be added to the stakeholder list and informed of upcoming conference calls, etc. WRI estimates that the review will require a time commitment of 1-2 days of reading and reflection. Two stakeholder conference calls will be held to discuss stakeholder feedback and to build consensus for specific revisions to the guidance. WRI will release a draft of the revised standard on the GHG Protocol website (www.ghgprotocol.org/psp) in September.

The road testing can take a variety of forms. It can be “paper-based”, whereby organizations use the standard to determine the boundaries of their GHG inventory, taking into consideration leased assets, arrangements with their General Services Administration and the types of emissions sources integral to their operations. Or road testing can additionally involve collecting data and calculating GHG emissions, leading to complete GHG inventories. Public sector organizations can either road test the standard during the review period or after it has undergone initial revisions and stakeholders have shared best-practices.

Throughout the review and road testing processes, WRI staff will be available to answer questions individual stakeholders may have on the project and GHG accounting procedures. However, WRI is unable to offer resources for the data collection and management components a road test.

9. What resources are needed for road testing?

The extent to which an agency completes an inventory will depend on the availability of emissions data and the staff/resources it can allocate to it, and cost estimates vary significantly. But road testers are encouraged to share their progress and feedback by mid-November.

10. Do I need to have experience in GHG accounting to participate in the review or road testing?

No, GHG accounting experience is not necessary. Anyone with knowledge of the organizational and operational structure of government operations (e.g., legal and financial accounting structures) can offer valuable insight into the standard and is therefore encouraged to participate in the stakeholder process.



11. Who is participating in the stakeholder review?

A list of stakeholders can be found elsewhere on the project webpage (www.ghgprotocol.org/psp).

12. How were the stakeholders selected?

The Public Sector Standard Steering Committee sought to compose a diverse group of local, state and federal agencies with different operational activities, structures, and GHG emission sources. But any interested agencies or individuals are invited to join the process as reviewers or road testers of the guidance.

13. What is the timeline for the stakeholder review and road testing process?

For a current schedule of the stakeholder review and road testing process, see the timeline on the project webpage (www.ghgprotocol.org/psp).

14. I missed the Kick Off Webinar for the review and road testing process; can I still be involved?

Yes. Individuals and agencies are invited to read through the standard and offer us feedback anytime during the open review period, lasting through the end of August. A copy of the standard draft and accompanying questionnaire can be downloaded on the project webpage (www.ghgprotocol.org/psp). A recording of the Kick Off Webinar will also be available on that site.

15. I have already developed an inventory for a GHG reporting program - will this project mean I have to change my existing inventorization practices?

Not necessarily. The Public Sector Standard is intended to provide flexible guidance on generic accounting procedures, such as setting organizational and operational boundaries, that specific GHG reporting programs can then adopt and customize to their needs. Any need to alter your inventorization practices would therefore depend on the program to which you report.

16. I cannot participate as a reviewer or road tester, but can you please keep me updated on the process?

Yes! Please complete the online form found on the project webpage to be added to our general updates list (www.ghgprotocol.org/psp).

17. Who can I contact for more information?

Please email pspcomments@wri.org with any questions you may have. You may also contact either Stephen Russell or Mary Sotos at the World Resources Institute:

Stephen Russell. Tel: 202 729 7702.

Mary Sotos. Tel: 202 729 7627.