Sustainable Golf Tournaments Criteria

Public Summary Version 1

Golf’s Opportunity

Golf draws an annual participation of 80 million golfers across the game’s 34,000 golf courses worldwide. Beyond playing, 500 million viewers tuned into watch the 2016 Ryder Cup at Hazeltine National in Minnesota. With this global reach comes extraordinary influence. Golf’s major events have the opportunity to serve as a positive communication vehicle for golf’s sustainability movement. Historically, golf tournaments hosted by the game’s major tours are well-acclaimed for the social impact they leave behind in communities, often directing sizable contributions to worthwhile charitable causes and generating significant economic impact for host regions. Accompanying this influence and positive contribution is a responsibility to both host communities and the surrounding environment to address the inevitable environmental impacts associated with hosting a major event.

By aligning various stakeholders and delivery partners behind a shared commitment to incorporate sustainable best practices, golf tournaments are presented with an opportunity to leverage their positive influence to ensure a net positive impact for the community and the environment. Golf’s Tournament Standard is structured to assist each stakeholder – albeit the tournament director, title sponsor, or volunteer working the concession stand – in understanding what their individual role is in addressing impacts they have control over.

Under this approach of clearly defined expectations and shared responsibility, golf tournaments not only stand the chance of operating sustainably within the boundaries of their host community, but as an instrument of good, inspiring global audiences to make similar commitments in their everyday lives. Every golf tournament with an established spectator-base has some level of influence with its audience and host community, and requires some level of resources to stage and host the competition. Whether it’s a regional amateur event, or the most hyped-up Ryder Cup to date, golf can leave behind net positive impacts through the competitions it hosts around the world.

Background to Approach

Since 2010, GEO has provided sustainability support and advisory services to the European Tour, R&A, Ryder Cup Europe, as well as other golf federations and stand-alone golf tournaments. GEO has field-tested a tournament support programme, which has strengthened internal knowledge and experience regarding the key sustainability challenges pertaining to golf tournaments.

GEO has looked at tournament operations from various perspectives: site protection, resource management, communications. GEO has worked with multiple tournaments throughout 2015 and 2016 assisting to measure and calculate a comprehensive carbon footprint.
Scope
The purpose of the VSS is to address environmental and social impacts that result from a golf tournament that must construct a temporary built environment to accommodate spectators. The activities that accompany such a built environment are what establish the impetus for a VSS for golf tournaments. Because the degree of these impacts is correlated directly with spectator attendance, the VSS is organised according to the following attendance categories: high attendance (daily attendance – 15,000 +), medium attendance (daily attendance – 5,000 – 15,000), low attendance (500 – 5,000). Tournaments that have a daily attendance of under 500 spectators are encouraged to apply the VSS, but fall outside the scope; therefore, are not eligible for certification. The VSS is applicable worldwide, and is not limited based on geographically based factors. Golf course impacts (irrigation, fertilizer, pesticide use, etc.) fall under the scope of impacts for the GEO Facility Management VSS. Host venues will be required to achieve performance criteria outlined by the Facility Management VSS in order to be eligible for certain credits.

Objectives
The overall focus of the VSS is to reduce the environmental impact of hosting a golf tournament, ensure that impact on local communities is ‘net positive’, and use the influence of golf tournaments as a positive instrument for change.

Establishing a baseline of sustainable best practices will achieve the following: 1) Set an industry benchmark; 2) Encourage continual improvement; 3) Address specific challenges to golf tournament operations; 4) Communicate results transparently, credibly, and widely through an industry-recognized ecolabel. Through these four objectives, golf industry practitioners will be equipped with the resources and incentives needed to implement sustainable best practices into event operations.

Justification of Need
The Tournament Certification establishes a clear set of criteria and detailed performance requirement. Industry-defined performance criteria and requirements via an international VSS supports the golf industry with three essential needs. First, the VSS enables the golf industry to define baseline performance and understand what must be done to achieve it. Secondly, impacts monitoring and evaluation will promote transparent reporting, thereby also promoting inclusivity across diverse stakeholder groups. Thirdly, achievement against an industry-recognized standard opens up opportunities for tournaments to communicate credibly about their sustainability initiatives – an important incentive for driving participation and motivating continuous improvement.

About Public Consultation Process
The public consultation process will run over the next 8 weeks and will be overseen by the Working Group. During this time views will be sought from all areas of the globe and across many industry sectors (different expertise, backgrounds, parties of interest and influence). The feedback pro-forma in the
consultation pack provides the opportunity to give your full comment of all aspects of the VSS including the overall structure and the form of the individual criterion desired.

The process will be comprehensive, transparent and orchestrated in accordance with the ISEAL best codes of practice and standard setting procedures. Upon the consultation process reaching completion, golf will be the only sport to have an event management standard recognized by the ISEAL Alliance. We would hope that from this consultation process the views and comments will bring forward issues that may require supplementary documentation such as technical advice notes, regional criteria development and research.

About GEO

Supported by and working collaboratively with a cross section of golf industry and external stakeholders, GEO brings golf and sustainability experience and expertise to drive sustainability in and through golf. GEO’s not-for profit support services support the industry’s leadership, credibility and promotion spanning: communications advisory; program and mentoring support for clubs, developments, and tournaments; standard setting; third party certification. On behalf of the industry, GEO has enabled golf’s sustainability system to become the only sports member of the global ISEAL community (isealalliance.org).

Please visit golfenvironment.org to learn more about GEO’s specialist support and coordination role within golf.