

Gold Standard[®]

Climate Security & Sustainable Development



VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLES + SURVEY RESPONSE REPORT 2022

Version 1.0

AUGUST 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The last few years have seen significant change in the voluntary carbon market. Recent growth in activity and demand has created new opportunities for market participants. At the same time this growth, alongside other unforeseen but disruptive circumstances such as COVID-19, has put additional pressure on already limited resources and capacity, causing delays in certification and impacting projects on the ground. At this critical moment in the market's evolution, Gold Standard considered it important to fully understand what these current challenges and opportunities are and how we can better support our project developer community, both in the short-term and as we build for the future. We therefore initiated two efforts to proactively gauge feedback and insights:

- 1) **Project Developer Virtual Roundtables (x4):** Aimed at project developers, these sessions were chaired by Gold Standard CEO, Margaret Kim, and limited to 12-15 people to enable a frank, open and honest dialogue. More than 50 people attended these roundtables from 40 different project developer organisations.
- 2) **Gold Standard Survey:** This survey gathered feedback and comments on our standard setting and certification process, stakeholder engagement, the Gold Standard Impact Registry, and communications. It was open to anyone who engages with Gold Standard and enabled users to fill in the sections most relevant to them. We received 100 responses in total.

These efforts were supported by information from bilateral calls with project developers, on a one-on-one basis, with comments and suggestions from these calls feeding into this process.

This report synthesises the feedback received and provides detailed steps on the measures we already have in place as well as those that we are planning to implement to help address some of the issues and opportunities identified. This includes efforts to reduce certification timelines, improve stakeholder engagement and enhance our IT infrastructure.

Key deliverables that we hope will significantly support project developers, include:

- **Increased capacity to improve customer service:** Gold Standard has hired two additional staff within its standards development team and is in the process of recruiting four more in the coming months. This is alongside new admin support for the Registry and general helpdesk enquiries and a new Market Relations function to provide dedicated support, key account management, and improved stakeholder engagement. Finally, there are plans to recruit regional staff in Africa, Asia, and Latin America later this year, to provide more tailored support and boost engagement with stakeholders and partners in the continents on which our standard is used most.
- **Accelerate the preliminary review process:** To expedite the timeline to list a project, Gold Standard has excluded preliminary reviews for new regular VPAs; expanded the checklist-based fast-track preliminary review to now include most project types; significantly reduced the information to be provided at this early stage of project development; decreased the timelines for responses; and SustainCERT has eliminated the need to book a review. This new process will be available to Project Developers as of 5 September 2022.
- **Streamline and build capacity for validation and verification services:** As well as developing a VVB Standard (soon to be published for consultation) to improve the consistency and quality of the validation and verification for all projects, Gold Standard has recently issued a [Request for Proposals](#) for a delivery partner to help standardise reporting templates and implement measures that will streamline services to ensure continual improvement of certification quality whilst enabling more efficient, improved, and consistent reviews - including more specific, clearer, and timely feedback to project developers.

This is just a first step in building more inclusive and tailored stakeholder engagement. We will be proactively reaching out to stakeholders and other market participants to build on this feedback, to better understand market considerations on new initiatives and programmes and to provide solutions that better support project development on the ground.

We thank all those that took the time to participate in the virtual roundtables and the survey. If you have questions or would like to reach out, please email claire.willers@goldstandard.org.

KEY ISSUES + OPPORTUNITIES

We received a huge response through these engagement activities, generating a large amount of constructive feedback into the issues and opportunities currently being faced by project developers. We would like to thank all those who engaged with these processes. This section synthesises the feedback received to draw out key issues and opportunities identified.

The main topics raised through the roundtables and survey were:

1. **Delays and challenges within the certification process.** This was at the forefront of project developers' attention as both the roundtables and the survey took place shortly after a communication sent by SustainCERT, in which it set out initial steps that it was taking to manage heightened demand for reviews.
2. **Stakeholder engagement and customer service.** Project developers requested more pro-active stakeholder engagement and customer service, including more guidance and support to both new and existing projects developers.
3. **IT infrastructure and development.** Project developers provided constructive feedback and suggestions on how both the Gold Standard Impact Registry and other applications could be improved.

Project developers and other respondents also shared feedback on topics faced by the market more broadly, including uncertainties related to the implementation of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, and the need, opportunities, and the risks of digitisation to future-proof systems.

NEXT STEPS

Taking on board the suggestions and feedback provided by the project developer community, this section outlines what we are already doing to address the issues, concerns, and opportunities identified, as well as information on upcoming activities that will help support ongoing project development. This represents the starting point, with further steps under consideration for the future, and will evolve as our stakeholder engagement deepens.

REDUCE DELAYS IN SCHEDULING + PROCESSING REVIEWS

TIMELINE	ACTIVITIES
IN PLACE	<p>Building capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two additional staff already hired in the Standards Development Team with four more in the process of recruitment. This, along with Market Relations and added capacity to the Registry/helpdesk function, will help ensure deviations, clarifications, and questions are resolved quickly, clearly, and personably. - SustainCERT has shared information separately on steps it is taking to strengthen its certification team and processes. <p>Process optimisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gold Standard no longer requires a Preliminary Review for inclusion of regular VPAs to a PoA – see revised PoA Requirements. - The new Programme of Activity Requirements also made the design of PoAs more flexible, integrating different scales and scopes of projects in a more streamlined certification process. - Templates now include guidance, references, and a self-assessment checklist to help project developers navigate the certification process and easily locate relevant information to ensure submissions are complete and avoid unnecessary review rounds. Already updated reports include Preliminary Review Form,

Transition Request Form, Annual Report, Deviation Request, and Clarification Request, with review of other templates to follow.

- **The deviation request and approval process** and the **clarification process** were streamlined, and deviation decisions are [now available online](#) for use by other project developers and VVBs.
- **The SDG Impact tool** was [launched](#) to standardise the way SDG impact is reported and evaluated by VVBs and SustainCERT/Gold Standard. The tool improves the certification process and adds value through increased transparency and comparability of projects. We will continue to streamline this by digitising the tool in the coming months and will reach out for your inputs into this process.

UPCOMING

Preliminary reviews:

- In addition to the new Preliminary Review Request (a checklist-based assessment) and exclusion of preliminary reviews for new VPAs (as mentioned above), the following changes have been adopted to further expedite the listing timeline:
 - Checklist-based fast-track preliminary review expanded to now include most project types, including retroactive projects.
 - Significantly reduced information requested, and documents required for preliminary review.
 - Expedited timelines (response in 14 days after completing the submission).
 - No advance review booking required for preliminary review.

These changes will be available to Project Developers as of 5 September 2022.

Validation, Verification and Certification reviews:

- New VVB Manual developed to improve consistency and quality of the validation and verification process for all projects. This will be published for public consultation in the coming weeks.
- A [Request for Proposals](#) issued for a delivery partner to help standardise reporting templates and provide capacity building for VVBs/certification body to enable more efficient, improved, and consistent reviews, including more specific, clearer and timely feedback to project developers. We will proactively reach out to VVBs and project developers to gather insights and test the templates.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: ENSURE TIMELY, CLEAR RESPONSES + IMPROVE QUALITY

TIMELINE	ACTIVITIES
IN PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New Market Relations function at Gold Standard created to provide dedicated support and improve stakeholder engagement with frequent, tailored consultations and communications that are customer oriented in approach and focus. - New hires for the standards development team and Registry team will provide more capacity to support standard-related and general helpdesk enquiries and any other requests. - New template published to standardise the process for submitting clarification requests and receiving timely responses.
UPCOMING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gold Standard to provide dedicated training + calibration sessions to VVBs/certification body to support auditor/review process.

- Gold Standard plans to **recruit new regional staff** in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to provide more tailored support for project developers and boost engagement with partners and stakeholders.

IMPROVE GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT FOR NEW AND EXISTING PROJECT DEVELOPERS

TIMELINE	ACTIVITIES
IN PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New webinar series focused on the fundamentals of Gold Standard for the Global Goals - Support materials now published with several new methodologies to help reduce the time and resources needed for project development. These include emission reduction calculation tools and survey templates. - As mentioned above, templates now include guidance, references, and a checklist to help project developers make assessments and better navigate the certification process.
UPCOMING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New step-by-step guide featuring practical steps for certification – including fees, expected timelines and Service Level Agreements - More agile and up-to-date FAQs - More training on the fundamentals of our standard - More easily accessible information on how to apply for and use the Impact Registry - Regional support to project developers, governments, and market more generally (as referred to above) - Exploration of an online repository of experts with carbon project development experience active in different geographies

REDUCE QUANTITY AND IMPROVE CLARITY OF STANDARD DOCUMENTS + UPDATES

TIMELINE	ACTIVITIES
IN PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Latest updates featured on the homepage of the GS4GG website and communications are accessible from our main website. - The rule update and rule clarification sections on the GS4GG website provide an overview of any applicable update. - All requirement pages in the GS4GG website feature related/relevant resources to improve navigation for users. - To provide more consistent updates to project developers and VVBs, updates are applied and communicated quarterly, unless exceptional circumstances apply. - Public consultations provide a mechanism to feed into any updates including clarity of documents. - Documents containing procedures now include process flow charts to improve clarity. Those already updated include Deviation Approval Procedure, Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement Requirements, Site Visit and Remote Audit Requirements and Procedure, PoA Requirements. Further flowcharts will follow soon. - Requirements are now progressively concentrated per topic/process -e.g., the Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement Requirements now cover both PoAs and stand-alone projects.
UPCOMING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue to update/improve language in the standard as and when revisions are required as part of ISEAL¹ governance. - Better highlight important deadline dates in communications and within the Standard Documents on the GS4GG website. - Continue to develop user friendly templates and in time digitise these templates as/where required/useful for project development.

¹ ISEAL is the global membership organisation for credible sustainability standards. Gold Standard is the only carbon standard that is a [code-compliant member of ISEAL](#).

APPLICATION IMPROVEMENTS: GOLD STANDARD IMPACT REGISTRY

TIMELINE	ACTIVITIES
IN PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CORSIA eligibility for pre-2020 credits is already visible online for both projects and credits. - A filter was introduced on the issuance page to enable search by country. - PoA information was added to credit detail and transfer pages. - Enhanced back-end maintenance tools were developed to allow for increased performance and scalability of the registry application.
UPCOMING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allow users to manage Article 6-authorized credits within the Gold Standard Impact Registry - Allow account holders to administer their accounts, including user and subaccount creation - Enhance batch retirements to reduce friction - Improve inventory management for project developers listed on the Marketplace - Enhance certification distinctions, e.g., display information related to Fairtrade, Gender Responsive, and Carbon Removal certifications

MANAGING RISK AND UNCERTAINTY WITH ARTICLE 6 AND THE VOLUNTARY CARBON MARKET

TIMELINE	ACTIVITIES
IN PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Claims Guidelines were updated in June 2022 to provide guidance on credits associated with corresponding adjustments - Letter of Authorization Rules were introduced for project developers and host countries - Subscribe to the Article 6 Early Mover Programme to receive the latest information on Article 6 and VCM developments - Article 6 webinar series provides insights into current initiatives, opportunities, challenges, and lessons learnt across different stakeholder groups - Gold Standard Secretariat support available for questions related to Article 6 implementation via dedicated helpdesk
UPCOMING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New platform for project developers to share experiences, discuss issues and build capacity for project development under Article 6 - A public report to share key findings and lessons learned from a pilot initiative exploring the process to obtain authorisation of mitigation outcomes from activities under Article 6 - New functionality to manage Article 6-authorized credits within the Gold Standard Impact Registry (as referred above) - Consultation on key standard updates to align with Article 6 rules and the Core Carbon Principles under consultation by the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (IC-VCM)

DIGITISATION

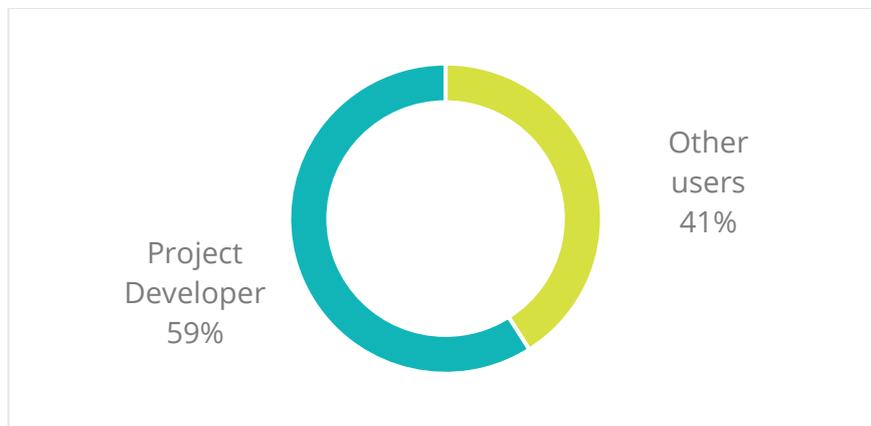
TIMELINE	ACTIVITIES
IN PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Three working groups established under an Open Collaboration on digital solutions for climate impact, focused on digital MRV, digital assets, and digital infrastructure and APIs
UPCOMING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of a digital version of the SDG Impact Tool, under development by technology company Thinking Machines. We will proactively reach out to project developers to pilot and test this tool. - Procedure and criteria for authorising the tokenisation of Gold Standard credits by third-party entities. - More information on our broader plans for digitisation will be shared in due course.

ANNEX 1: SURVEY RESULTS 2022

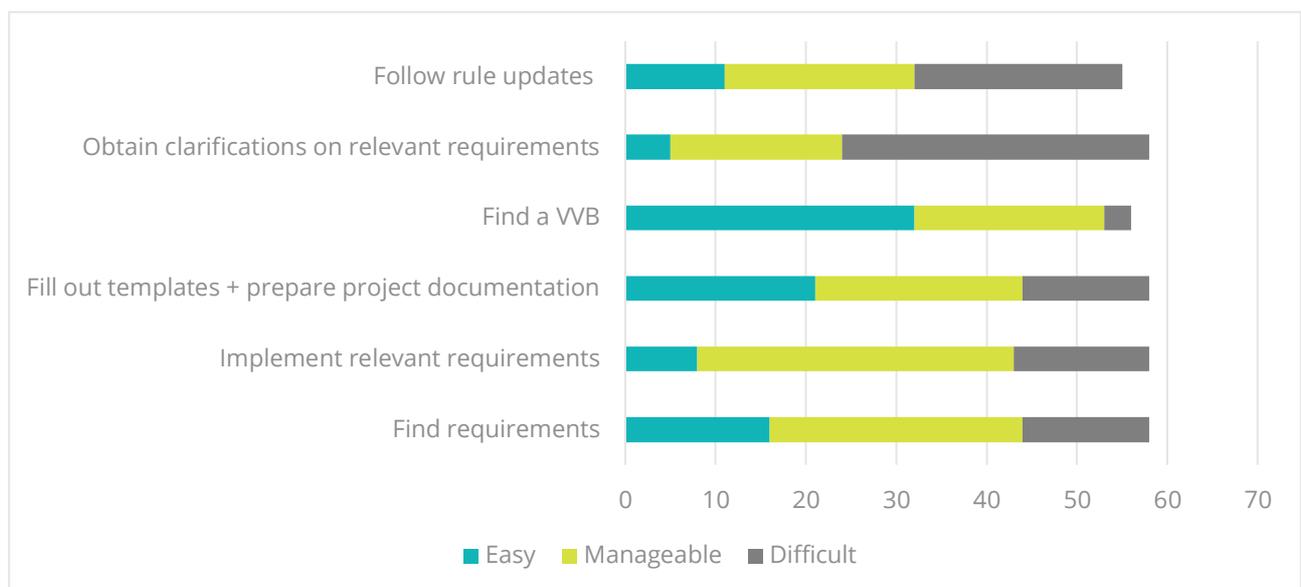
This section provides the high-level overview of the survey results and feedback received.

AUDIENCE BREAKDOWN

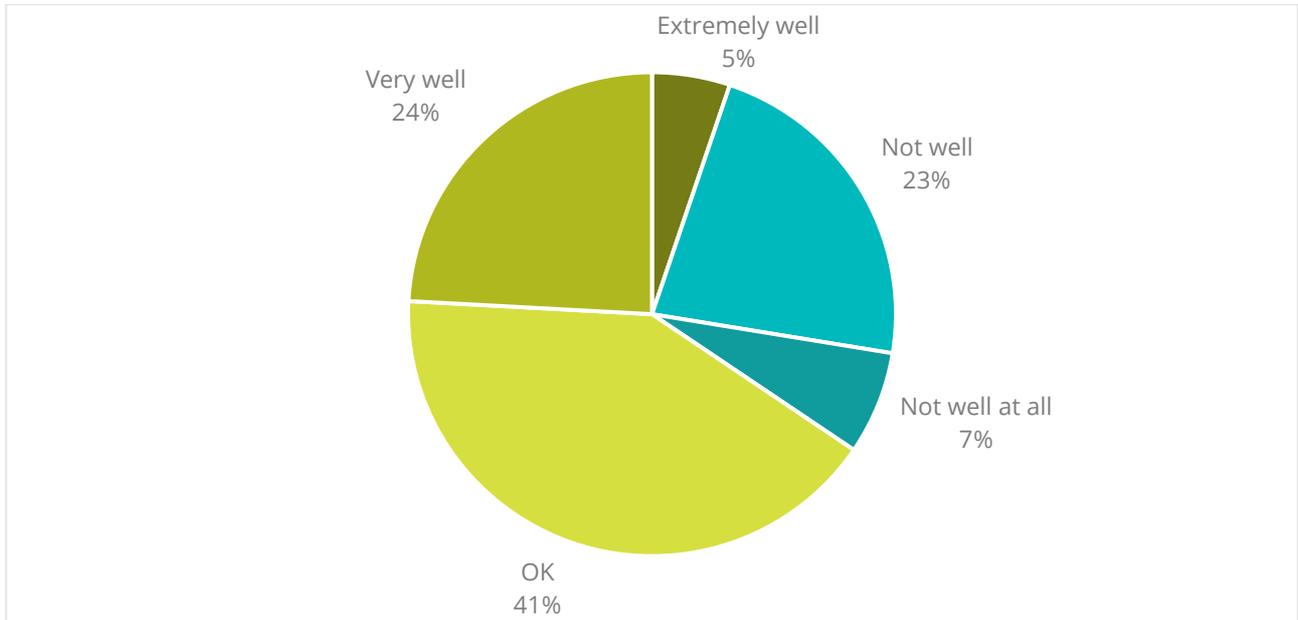
- **VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLES:** Four sessions chaired by our CEO Margaret Kim, with 50+ people attending in total from 40 different project developer organisations.
- **GOLD STANDARD SURVEY:** 100 submissions split 60% project developers to 40% other users.



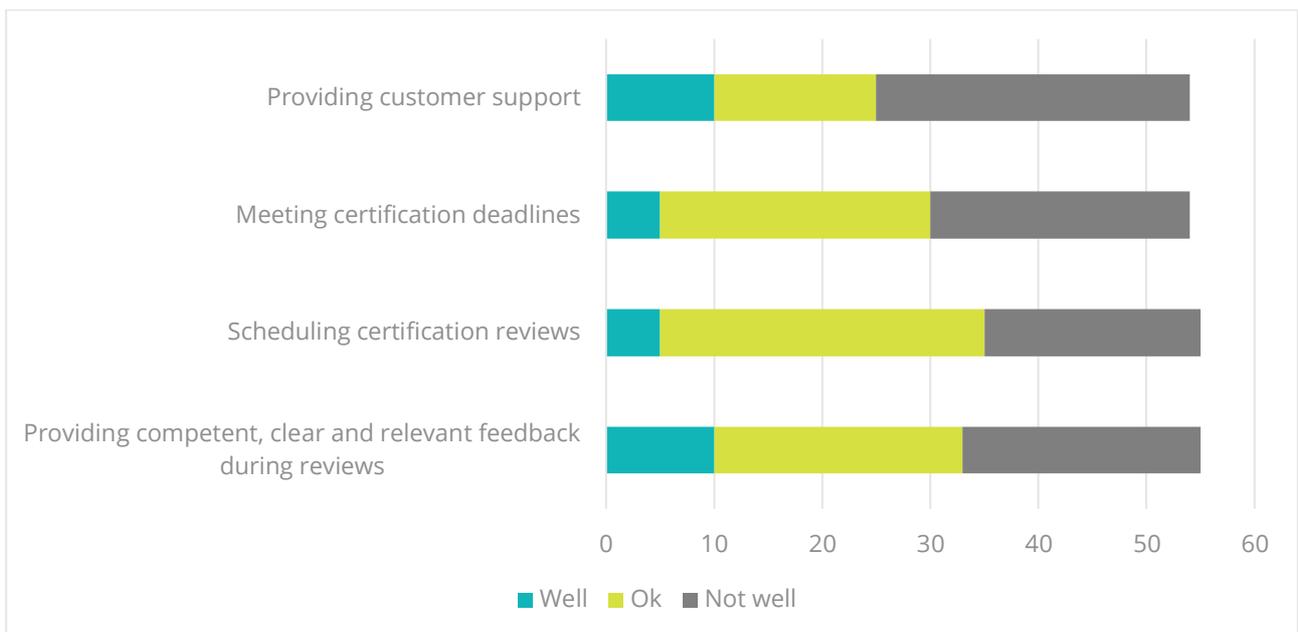
THE EASE OF USING GOLD STANDARD TO:



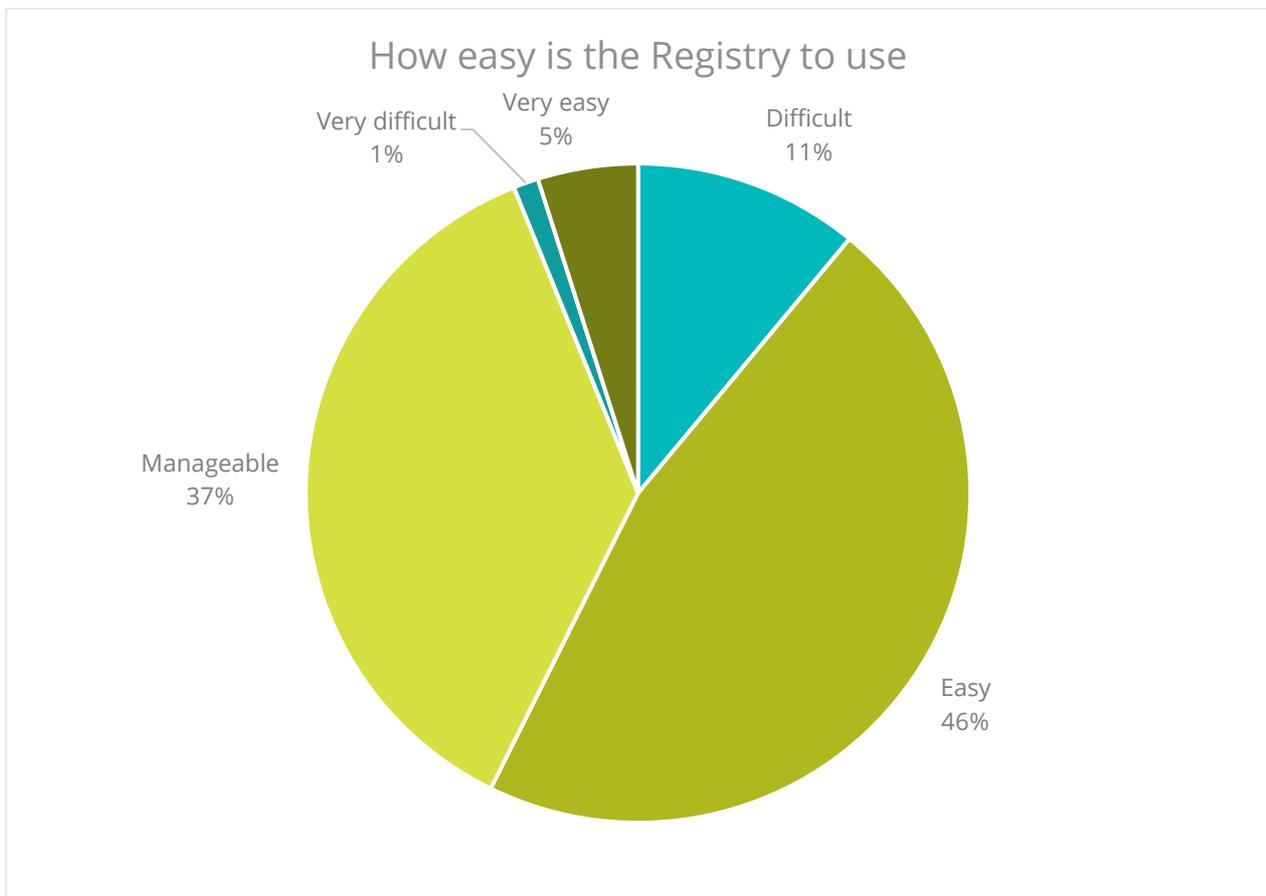
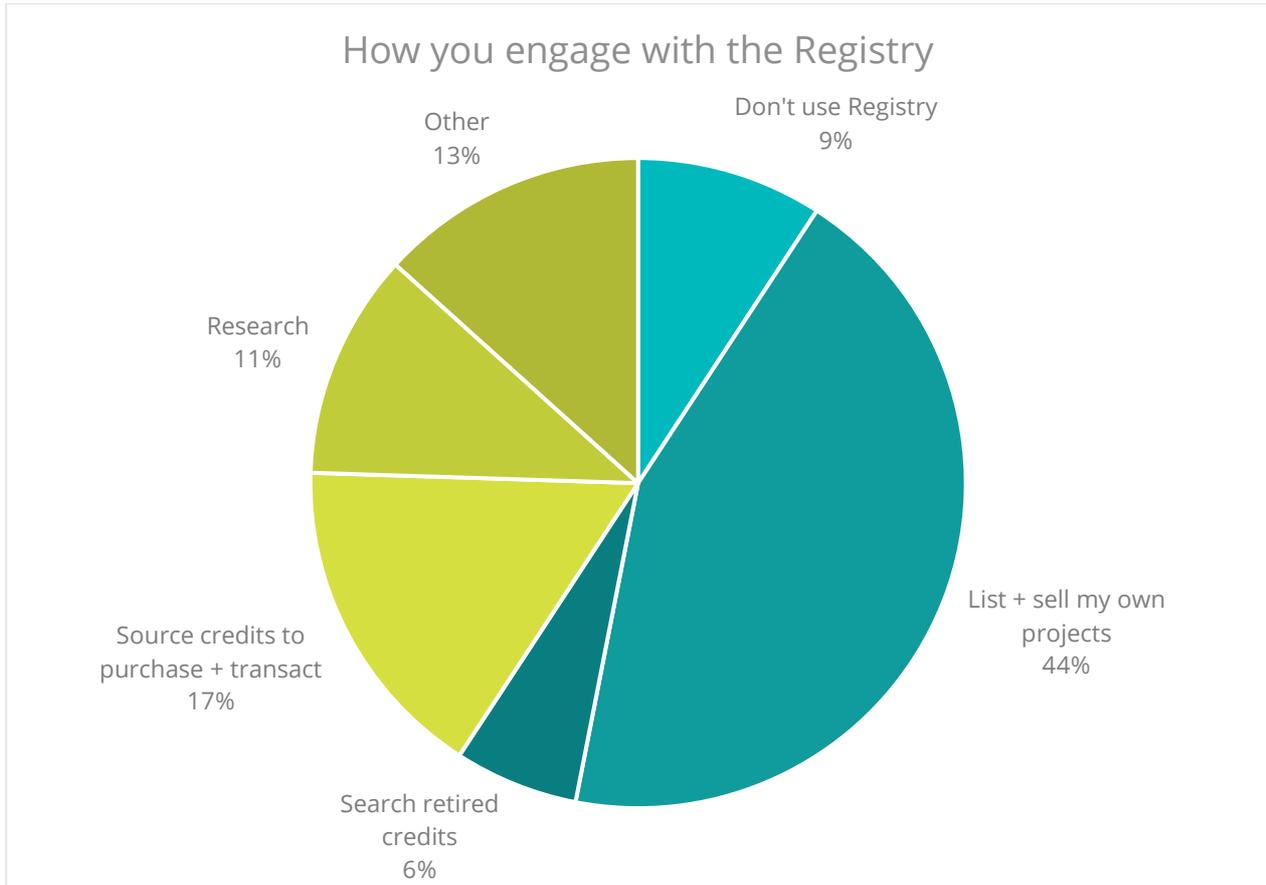
HOW WELL DOES GOLD STANDARD PROVIDE SUPPORT TO PROJECT DEVELOPERS:



HOW WELL DOES SUSTAINCERT UNDERTAKE THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:



ENGAGEMENT WITH THE IMPACT REGISTRY:

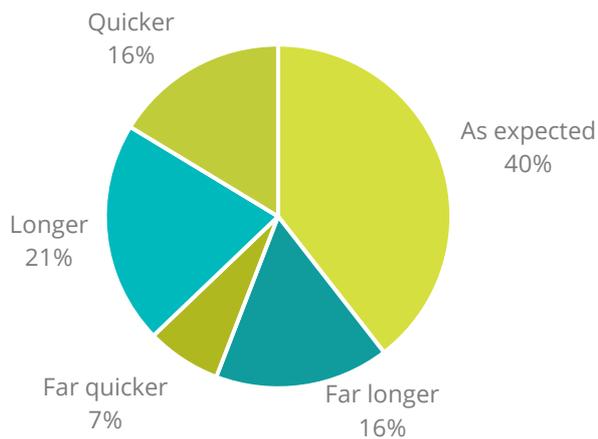


IMPACT REGISTRY SUPPORT:

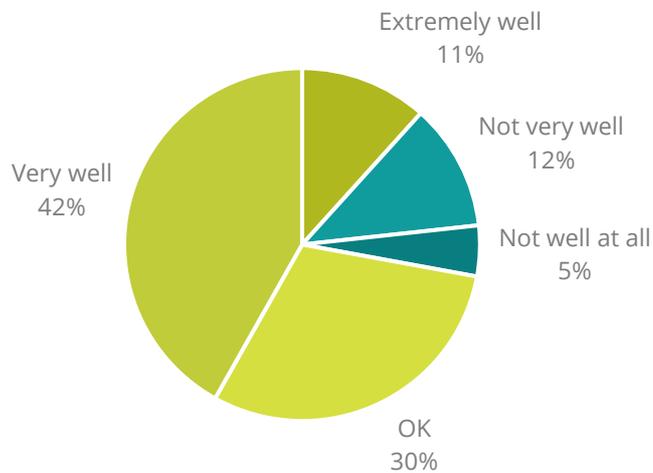
Contact with registry team for support



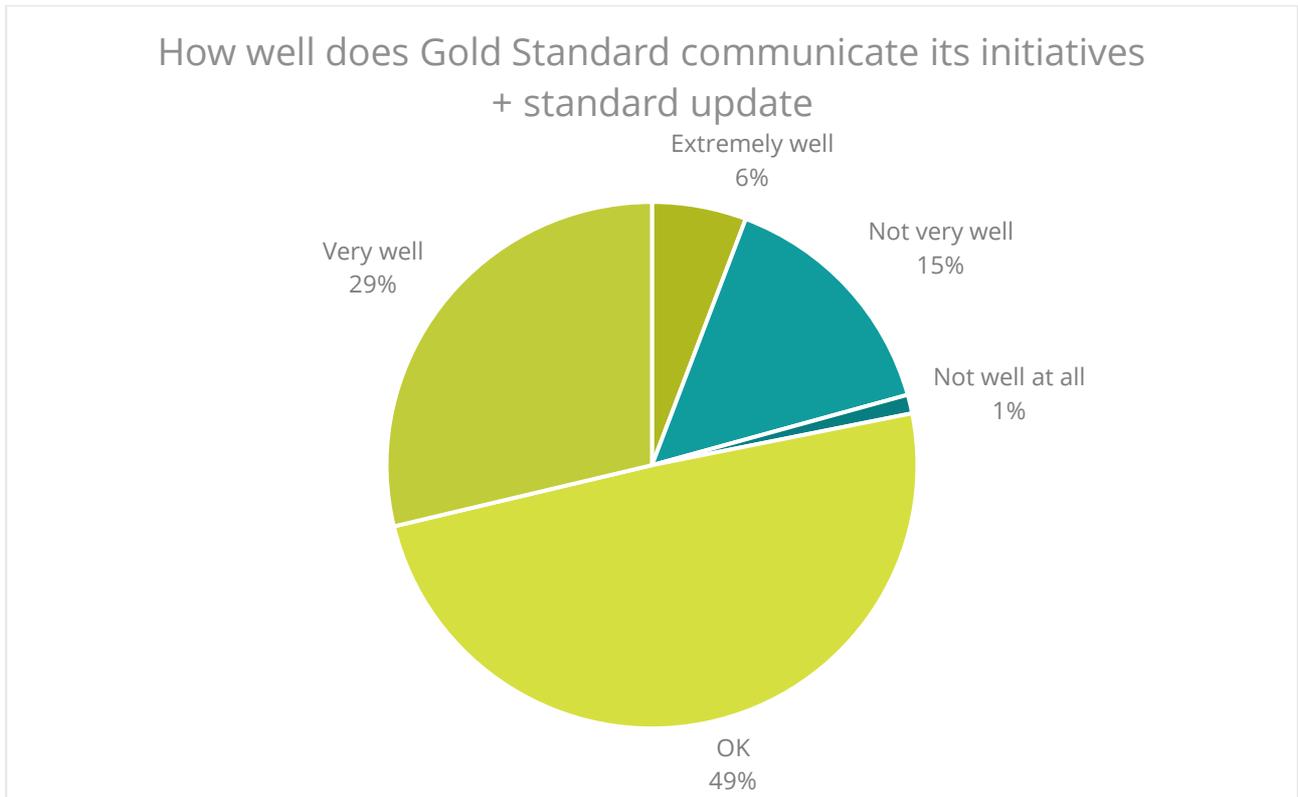
How quickly were your questions and concerns addressed?



How well are your questions and concerns understood?



COMMUNICATION OF INITIATIVES + STANDARD UPDATES:



AWARENESS OF OUR COMMUNICATION CHANNELS:

