GRI Application Levels

Brief overview

To indicate that a report is GRI-based, report makers should declare the level to which they have applied the GRI Reporting Framework via the "Application Levels" system.

To meet the needs of beginners, advanced reporters, and those somewhere in between, there are three levels in the system. They are titled C, B, and A. The reporting criteria at each level reflect a measure of the extent of application or coverage of the GRI Reporting Framework. A "plus" (+) is available at each level (ex., C+, B+, A+) if external assurance was utilized for the report.

How the system works

A report maker self-declares a Level based on its own assessment of its report content against the criteria in the GRI Application Levels (see overleaf).

In addition to the self declaration, reporting organizations can choose one or both of the following options:

- Have a third party offer an opinion on the self-declaration
- Request that the GRI check the self-declaration.

Value of the Levels

The Levels aim to provide:

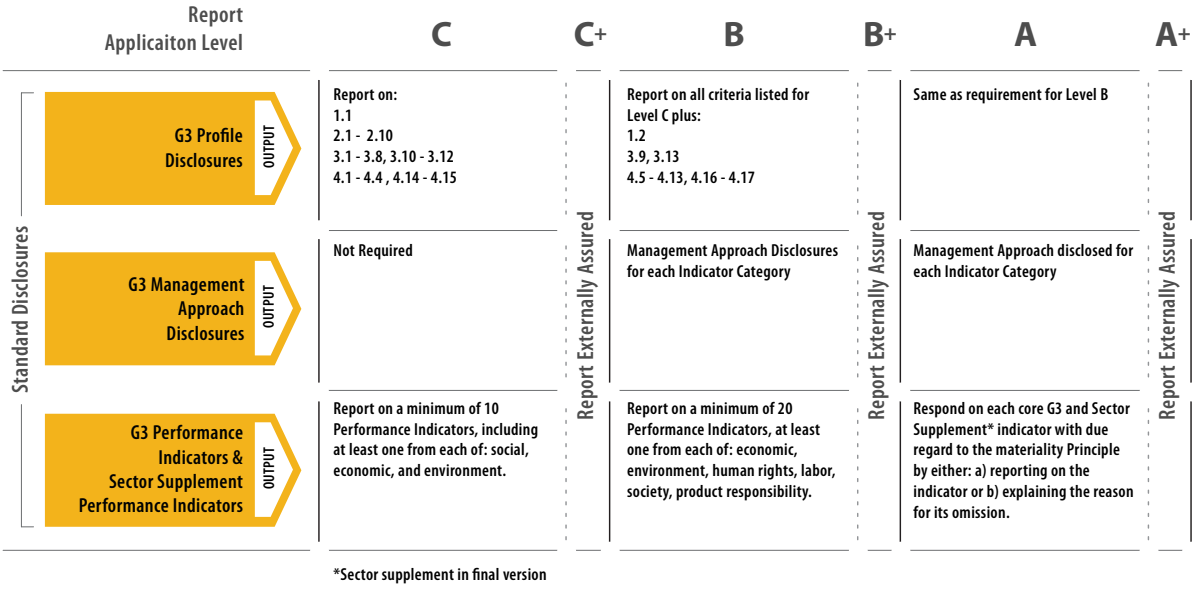
- Report readers with a measure of the extent to which the GRI Guidelines and other Reporting Framework elements have been applied in the preparation of a report.
- Report makers with a vision or path for incrementally expanding application of the GRI Reporting Framework over time.

Declaring an Application Level clearly communicates which elements of the GRI Reporting Framework have been applied in the preparation of a report.

- Incentives for beginners: The Levels provide a starting point for first-time report makers, and also reinforce the importance and value of an incremental approach to reporting which expands over time.
- Recognizing advanced reporters: A growing number have developed sophisticated reporting systems based on the GRI Framework, that include assurance, and are looking to communicate this to readers in a quick and easy-to-understand way.

Application Level Criteria

Reports intended to qualify for level C, C+, B, B+, A or A+ must contain each of the criteria that are presented in the column for the relevant level.



*Sector supplement in final version

Declaring an Application Level

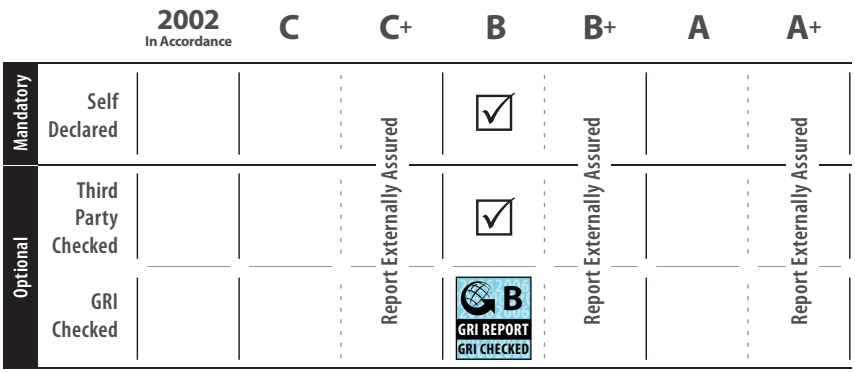
A GRI Application Level grid should be included in the report to show which level is being declared, and who has made this assessment. For a report to be recognized as GRI-based, self-declaration of a level is required. Report makers may exercise their option to seek opinions from a third party or the GRI secretariat on the accuracy of their self-declaration.

Report makers may locate the Applications Level grid anywhere in their on-line or printed report. Logical locations include, but are not limited to:

- The inside front cover or inside back cover of a printed report
- For Web-based reports, the introductory page, or index page;
- With discussion on goals and parameters for the report (see Profile Disclosures 3.1 - 3.11); or
- With the GRI Content Index (see Profile Disclosure 3.12).

GRI will only recognize reports on its Website as GRI-based if they contain an Applications Level grid reflecting, at minimum, a self-declared level. A third party or GRI check of the self-declaration is not required for listing on the Website. Any use of the specific terminology "GRI Guidelines Application Levels" must be based on the criteria for GRI Application Levels specified above.

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For example, this illustrates that a report maker self-declared the B level, a third party checked the declaration, and the GRI checked the declaration.

GRI Checked Icon



Requesting an Application Level Check

Report makers have the option to contact GRI and request an Application Level check. Requests should be submitted online at www.globalreporting.org. With advance notice, GRI can check the self-declared level prior to report publication. Once there is agreement on the Application Level, GRI will provide a special icon corresponding to the Level, for use in online or printed reports.

Please note the following about GRI Application Level checks:

- GRI checks for the presence or absence of the criteria in the report that corresponds to the report makers self-declared Application Level. GRI will provide an overview of its findings to the report maker.
- The GRI Application Level check does not represent GRI's view on the value or quality of the report and its content, It is simply a statement about the extent to which the GRI Reporting Framework was utilized.
- The "plus" (+) levels (C+, B+, A+) can only be declared if external assurance has been applied for the report. A GRI Application Level check is not equivalent to external assurance and does not result in the "plus" (+) status.
- If GRI is requested to check a C+, B+ or A+ report it will check for the presence of a statement from the assurance provider.
- The GRI Application Levels check is performed for a fee. This fee is waived for GRI Organizational Stakeholders.

Application Levels and assurance

The Application Levels of C+, B+, and A+ can be declared if external assurance was utilized for the report. For purposes of meeting this requirement, a report maker should only declare a "plus" (+) level if it believes that it has applied external assurance mechanisms that:

- Engaged parties competent in the subject matter and assurance practices who are external to the organization;
- Followed defined procedures that can be explained and were documented;
- Assessed the ability of a report to provide a reasonable and balanced presentation of performance taking into consideration the data of a report as well as the overall selection of content; and
- Result in an opinion or set of conclusions that are available to readers of the report (See page 37 of the Guidelines Version 3.0).

If GRI is requested to check a "plus" (+) level report it will check for the presence of a statement from the assurance provider, but it will not conduct reviews to determine whether external assurance has met the above-listed criteria.

The Application Levels are intended to demonstrate a pathway for incrementally expanding approaches to reporting using the GRI Reporting Framework. They are in no way intended as substitutes or equivalents for external assurance.

2002 Guidelines transition

Report makers experienced with the 2002 Guidelines will want to decide for themselves when to transition to the G3 Guidelines. For this reason, GRI's website will continue to recognize reports based on the 2002 Guidelines for up to two full reporting cycles. (First time report makers are advised to start with the Guidelines Version 3.0)

To indicate that a report is based on the 2002 Guidelines, one of the following reporting levels can be self-declared. GRI can be requested to check "in accordance" self-declarations.

2002 "In accordance" criteria:

1. Report on Sections 1 to 3 of Part C.
2. Include a GRI Content Index as specified in Section 4 of Part C.
3. Respond to each core indicator in Section 5 of Part C by either (a) reporting on the indicator or (b) explaining the reason for the omission.
4. Ensure that the report is consistent with the principles in Part B of the Guidelines.
5. Include the following statement signed by the board or CEO: "This report has been prepared in accordance with the 2002 GRI Guidelines. It represents a balanced and reasonable presentation of our Organization's economic, environmental, and social performance."

2002 "with reference" criteria:

The report maker should include a statement in the report that indicates it was prepared "with reference to" the 2002 Guidelines. The term "with reference to" can be replaced with any of the following, as appropriate:

- based on;
- using;
- following;
- informed by;
- guided by; and
- referring to.

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