



Leather Impact Accelerator (LIA)

Benchmark Approval Process 1.0

– WORKING DRAFT

1. Introduction

The objective of this document is to provide an overview of how to apply for approval to a relevant scope of the LIA Benchmark Criteria.

2. Eligibility Criteria

Standards must meet the following eligibility criteria in order to apply for approval by LIA:

- At least ten certificates/audit reports for single-site audits (for the relevant scope of the application) have been issued.
- The Standard Owner has been operational for a period of at least 12 months.

Standard Owners are required to submit supporting evidence that they meet the eligibility criteria together with the completed application form.

3. Meeting the LIA Benchmark Criteria

An applicant must provide evidence that all benchmarking criteria as outlined in the LIA Benchmark Criteria for the relevant scope and in the Standard Assurance Benchmark Criteria are met.

In order to successfully pass the benchmark and to be LIA approved, standards must prove alignment with all benchmark criteria. Standards that do not fully meet all criteria will not be approved nor will the results of the benchmark be published.

The Standard Owner is required to provide objective evidence that the standard meets the LIA Benchmark Criteria. The LIA benchmarks are pass/fail benchmarks: a criterion is either met or not met, no grades are provided per criterion.

In case details in the standard's documentation are missing or different from the LIA criterion, the standard's formulation can be accepted if the intent of the criterion is covered.

4. Roles and Responsibilities within the Benchmarking Process

4.1.1 The Role of the Benchmark Leader

The LIA benchmark is performed by an independent Benchmark Leader, who executes the Benchmarking Process as described in this document and verifies whether a Standard is in alignment with the criteria of the LIA scope benchmarks. The Benchmark Leader reports to LIA Manager who supervises all the benchmarking activities and communication with the Standard Owner. The Benchmark Leader is the key point of contact for any questions related to the benchmark assessment.

4.1.2 The Role of the LIA Manager

The LIA Manager leads the benchmarking process as described in this document and oversees the implementation of the work plan. They act as the liaison between the Standard Owner, the Benchmark Leader and the Benchmark Committee and ensures that all parties involved are provided with updates and relevant information as necessary. The LIA Manager is the key point of contact for any procedural questions, any questions regarding (external) communication and any issues that might arise during the process. He/she is also the key point of contact for any member or stakeholder inquiries.

4.1.3 The Role of the LIA Benchmark Steering Committee

The LIA Benchmark Steering Committee takes the final decision on LIA approval of a standard based on the recommendations of the Benchmark Leader, the LIA Manager, and the outcome of the stakeholder consultation. The Committee is consulted for conflict resolution and in case of an appeal procedure.

5. Application Steps for Full Benchmark Process

Standards shall apply for full benchmarking in the following cases:

- Initial application for a specific LIA scope
- For re-application after non-completion of the standard application
- For re-application after withdrawal of LIA approval

The benchmarking process shall be carried out in accordance with the following application steps:

1. Application
2. Self-assessment
3. Review #1
4. Virtual meeting
5. Review #2
6. (Review #3)
7. Stakeholder consultation
8. Recognition decision
9. Monitoring and continued alignment

5.1.1 Application

A Standard Owner can apply for full benchmarking through the online application form.

In the application process, the Standard Owner will:

- a. select the relevant LIA benchmark scope(s) to be benchmarked against
- b. complete an information form,

- c. upload the relevant standard and annexe documents

5.1.2 Self-Assessment

The Standard Owner shall carry out a self-assessment of the standard against the:

1. LIA Animal Welfare Benchmark **or** LIA Leather Production Environmental Benchmark Criteria **or** LIA Leather Production Social Benchmark Criteria
2. LIA Standards Assurance Criteria

Clear and precise justification on how the Standard meets each criterion is expected in the Self-Assessment form, including the exact reference to objective evidence for implementation and the document name, page and clause covering each criterion.

The application will be processed once the Self-Assessment is completed and submitted and the application fees are paid. A Benchmark Leader will be appointed, and a benchmarking timeline will be set.

The Self-Assessment Form can be found here.

5.1.3 Review #1

Once the Standard Owner submits the completed Self-Assessment, a 1st review will be conducted by the Benchmark Leader.

For each criterion, the Benchmark Leader reviews the evidence provided by the Standard Owner to verify if it fully meets the respective benchmarking criteria.

The Benchmark Leader takes note of any criteria where additional information is needed and/or where he or she does not agree with the conclusions of the Standard Owner. These comments are supported by comprehensive explanations. All these findings are sent back to the Standard Owner in a Checklist/Report and form the basis of the Virtual Meeting.

5.1.4 Virtual Meeting

In a conference call, the Benchmark Leader will discuss the findings from Review #1 together with the Standard Owner. The objective of the call is to clarify any questions regarding the outcome of the desktop review and what additional information/documents are required. The call also gives the Standard Owner an opportunity to further clarify the submitted evidence. During the meeting, the timeframe for the update of the Checklist and, potentially, the work plan is agreed (*non-alignments, timeline for addressing these?*). The benchmark Leader may also recommend discontinuing the Benchmarking Process.

5.1.5 Review #2

Within the agreed time frame, the Standard Owner provides an updated version of the Checklist as well as any additional documentation as agreed. The updated version of the Checklist must be completed.

Once Review #2 has been completed, a Benchmark Report that clearly outlines any non-alignment(s) with the benchmark criteria and any observations will be prepared.

The Benchmark report is reviewed with LIA Manager and one of the following recommendations will be made:

1. proceeding to the Public Consultation,
2. request the Standard Owner to further improve the Checklist,
3. or recommend discontinuing the Benchmarking Process.

The decision on how to proceed is made through a formal, signed agreement between the Standard Owner, the Benchmark Leader and LIA Manager; if no agreement can be reached, Textile Exchange refers the matter to the LIA Steering Committee for resolution.

5.1.6 Review #3

If further non-alignments between the Standard Owner's documentation and the LIA Benchmark Requirements are found in review #2, the Standard Owner prepares a corrective action plan. The Standard Owner, the Benchmark Leader and the LIA Manager agree on a timeframe to address the non-alignments, within a maximum of 1 year.

5.1.7 Stakeholder consultation

Key stakeholders will be identified and given the opportunity to comment on the benchmark report.

5.1.8 Final Decision

Based on the final recommendation for approval, the LIA Benchmark Steering Committee takes a decision by consensus. If a vote is necessary, the Committee determines the final decision by majority vote. Records are kept of the numbers of votes for, against and abstaining. The decision is communicated in writing to the Standard Owner. If the final decision of the Committee is non-recognition, the reasons for the decision are clearly documented and communicated to the Standard Owner. The Standard Owner has the right to appeal against the Committee decision. Stakeholders who submitted comments during the stakeholder consultation receive feedback on their submissions.

5.1.9 Monitoring of Continued Alignment

The LIA Manager has to investigate any serious complaint or suspected non-alignment of a LIA approved standard with the LIA Benchmarking criteria. The investigation will take the form of a desktop investigation. If the LIA Manager receives a complaint regarding the non-alignment of a Standard with the LIA Benchmark Criteria:

1. The LIA Manager will acknowledge, in writing, the receipt of the complaint or report to the party concerned.
2. When a complaint is received, the LIA Manager will initiate investigative procedures to verify the accuracy of the complaint.
3. The Manager shall ensure that the details of the complaint are clearly understood and documented and that any claims or comments made by the complainant are properly authenticated and appropriately documented.
4. This authentication shall be verified as being accurate and correct by independent sources, in addition to the complainant. It is the responsibility of the complainant to provide information that can be appropriately authenticated.
5. It is at the discretion of the LIA Manager to appoint the Benchmark Leader or an independent assessor at any stage during the investigation process.
6. The LIA Manager must ensure impartiality and preserve confidentiality.
7. If the Benchmark Leader or an assessor is appointed, he or she shall carry out a thorough investigation of the complaint and, where possible, provide a resolution for the issues, fully document the complaint process, and provide a detailed report to the LIA Manager.

6. Application Steps for Partial Benchmark Approval Process

Standards shall apply for partial benchmarking in the following cases:

- Significant changes* or revision of the Standard
- LIA revision

In both cases, the benchmark assessment will be partial, limited exclusively to the changes made.

The Partial Benchmark Approval Process is limited exclusively to the changes made to the standard or LIA Benchmark criteria and the process is simplified:

1. Application: a Standard Owner can apply for partial benchmarking through the online application form
2. Self-Assessment: applied exclusively to the changes
3. Review #1: as described for the full benchmark process
4. Virtual Meeting: as described in the full benchmark process
5. Review #2: as described in the full benchmark process
6. (Review #3)
7. Final Decision: as described in the full benchmark process
8. Monitoring of Continued Alignment: as described in the full benchmark process

**Significant change is defined as a change to a standard's governance or ownership, or a significant change to its management system, requirements, or normative documents, which could compromise the standard's approval by LIA.*

- *The Standard Owner of a LIA approved standard is required to inform LIA in writing about the significant change and start the partial benchmarking process within 9 months of the entry into force of the significant change.*

7. Status on the LIA Website

The Standard Owner may choose how to be displayed on the LIA website, depending on the status of the benchmark of the standard:

- “Approved”: Standard that have successfully passed the LIA benchmark for the respective scope.
- “In progress”: Standards may choose to be displayed as currently undergoing benchmarking to show their commitment to meeting industry expectations.
- No information: Standards may choose not to make public that they have applied for benchmarking. If approval is achieved, the Standard will be displayed as “approved”.

8. Sanctioning *(to be developed later)*

8.1.1 LIA Suspension of Approval Procedure

8.1.2 LIA Withdrawal of Approval Procedure

8.1.3 LIA Appeals Procedure - LIA Approval