



*NSF International Standard /  
American National Standard*

# NSF/ANSI 391.1 - 2019

## General Sustainability Assessment Criteria for Professional Services



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**NSF/ANSI 391.1 – 2019**

NSF International Standard /  
American National Standard  
for Sustainability –

# **General Sustainability Assessment Criteria for Professional Services**

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## Foreword<sup>2</sup>

This American National Standard, NSF/ANSI 391.1 General Sustainability Assessment Criteria for Professional Services, has been developed as part of the ongoing efforts of a number of interested parties to document and improve the environmental, economic and corporate performance profile of professional services using established and advanced scientific principles, practices, materials, and standards.

The purpose of this Standard for professional services is to establish environmental, economic, social and supply chain performance criteria and performance metrics that exemplify sustainability leadership in the market. These performance criteria are intended to form the basis of conformity assessment programs, such as third-party certification or registration.

This Standard was developed by the NSF Joint Committee on General Sustainability Assessment Criteria for Professional Services using the consensus process described by the American National Standards Institute.

Suggestions for improvement of this Standard are welcome. This Standard is maintained on a Continuous Maintenance schedule and can be opened for comment at any time. Comments should be sent to: Chair, Joint Committee on General Sustainability Assessment Criteria for Professional Services at [ncss@nsf.org](mailto:ncss@nsf.org), or c/o NSF International, Standards Department, PO Box 130140, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48113-0140, USA.

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# NSF/ANSI Standard for Sustainability – General Sustainability Assessment Criteria for Professional Services

## 1 General

NSF 391.1 is an ANSI approved standard defining a set of qualifying key performance indicators (KPI) for professional services organizations, which also serves as a sustainability credential for suppliers. It is intended as an earned sustainability credential for professional service organizations and, thereby, as a reference tool for procurement professionals seeking to purchase more sustainable services.

NSF International (NSF) developed this Standard to address the lack of a uniform measure of sustainability that can be applied across a range of professional service providers and their offerings. The Standard complements NSF's expertise in developing sustainability standards for products. As with sustainable product standards, a workable sustainable professional service standard must be relevant and credible to the marketplace. This includes large institutional purchasers of professional services and incentivizing meaningful environmental, social, economic and supply chain practices and outcomes by professional service providers, while providing the flexibility needed to accommodate service providers of different sizes, business models, and geographic footprints. To the extent practicable, it is a goal of this Standard to be applicable across a spectrum of professional service providers in the marketplace, from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to large privately-held and public corporations.

Though no intent exists to deter “microbusinesses” (firms with 1 to 9 employees)<sup>3</sup> from attempting conformity or seeking to qualify for the credential itself, the 391.1 Standard was not developed with a view toward such organizations due to the general nature of their operational characteristics, including, their smaller workforce, smaller physical footprint, fewer financial resources, and simpler supply chains.<sup>4</sup> These characteristics can present a vastly different set of concerns, abilities and measures from those of the larger subject firms, and thereby cause the performance requirements of this Standard to extend, as a comparative and even practical matter, beyond their reach.

The prerequisites, KPIs and assigned point values in this Standard were developed to establish minimum required levels of achievement for companies seeking base levels of sustainability and those seeking to demonstrate leadership.

One of the major challenges in defining sustainability for the professional service sector has been the scarcity of accurate information on applicable multi-attribute sustainability characteristics. Comparing the sustainability of any one product or service to another can be complex, often prompting reliance on “single-attribute” standards which reduce sustainability to a single metric – for example, energy efficiency, carbon footprint, or lists of hazardous chemicals. Such single-attribute standards are particularly ill-suited to the professional service sector, where investments in human capital and related policies may compete with energy use and environmental impacts in determining the long-term stability of the business and its impact on the community and natural environment. The NSF 391.1 Standard incorporates a broader approach to sustainability, building on the concept of the “triple bottom line,” i.e., environmental, social, and economic (ESE) sustainability, and then going one step further, to factor in sustainability within the supply

<sup>3</sup> The Standard defines the terms “microenterprise” with the statutory definition established in 15 U.S.C. 6901 and “microbusiness” as recently defined by the Small Business Administration (SBA). See Definition section for more information.

<sup>4</sup> NSF understands that these generalizations do not apply to all microbusinesses, and that some may be very similar.

chain as a fourth category.<sup>5</sup>

The criteria in this Standard ensures that professional service providers pursuing sustainability in their operations are able to understand the expectations of customers and personnel responsible for procurement of sustainable professional services. The Standard is intended to establish a minimum threshold in determining conformity, while providing supplemental criteria that, when achieved, can lead to “leadership” recognition within the industry.

### **1.1 Purpose**

The purpose of this Standard is to establish a set of general practices and performance criteria by which professional service providers may demonstrate their sustainability performance to meet the growing demand from governmental and private entities for sustainable products and services. Companies achieving certification to this Standard will have achieved documented and measurable levels of environmental, social, economic, and supply chain sustainability for the operations of their businesses and facilities.

### **1.2 Scope**

The Standard is one of the first to focus on the service industry subsectors described as “professional services”. Professional service firms are often characterized as those that have low capital intensity, high knowledge intensity, and a professionalized workforce.<sup>6</sup>

Some subsectors of the service industry rely heavily on the use, consumption, or conversion of raw materials, hazardous materials, manufactured goods, and/or energy to deliver the marketed service. A few examples might include commercial cleaning services, commercial landscaping, pest management, taxi service, and air travel. In these cases, the energy, material, or product-intensive nature of the service may dominate the overall “sustainability footprint” of the subsector, and the traditional lifecycle impacts of these energy and materials inputs may be the largest determinant in the service’s triple-bottom line sustainability. NSF will address these service sectors as part of a separate, complementary Standard.

### **1.3 Boundary**

Service providers come in many different sizes and structures, from single-owner proprietorships, co-ops and partnerships with a single leased office, to publicly-traded corporations with dozens of leased and owned buildings / campuses across the country and even worldwide. While the business boundary of a small local enterprise may be obvious, the boundaries can be ambiguous in the case of large multilayer corporations, physically operating within multiple owned and leased properties, where the presence of holding companies, parent companies and subsidiaries may blur operational lines. For this reason, the Standard recognizes the importance of establishing a clear organizational boundary for the entity engaged in the certification process.

“Organizational boundary” is a critical concept to understand, as defining this ‘boundary’, in turn, defines that aspect of the business which may seek and be awarded with a certification under this Standard. Aspects of a business which fall outside this boundary may not apply nor be considered for certification since their measure of sustainability lacks meaningful relevance to the institutions seeking to purchase their services. The question to answer, therefore, is which aspects of a business characterize what shall be inside and what outside this ‘boundary’?

For companies that only offer professional services, the service line can be equivalent to the entire company or specified locations. For companies that offer a mix of professional and non-professional services,

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<sup>5</sup> EPA, United States Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, DC 20402. <[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)>

<sup>6</sup> The Sustainable Procurement Leadership Counsel (“SPLC”), Guidance for Leadership in Sustainable Purchasing Version 1.0 (2014) at 147.