



Best Practice for Reviewers

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This periodically updated document from the CoreTrustSeal Board is intended to support consistent feedback from the Assembly of Reviewers and a consistent experience for CoreTrustSeal applicants. Suggestions for amendments and updates should be addressed to info@coretrustseal.org.

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Introduction

Reviewers will always have their own perspective and style, but inconsistent feedback can cause confusion to applicants and complicate the review and approval process. This document is intended to provide recommendations on how feedback should be provided to increase the consistency and efficiency of the application process,

After their initial submission applicants see the feedback provided in the CoreTrustSeal Application Management Tool (AMT) including, under each Requirement: their previous evidence statement and the compliance level and comments provided by each of the two reviewers.

When the applicant submits a second round (or beyond) of responses the tool will show which evidence statements have been updated by displaying 'revised' on the left hand side of the screen for each relevant Requirement.

For each revised Requirement the reviewer can select it and use the 'show difference' button to display the changes.

If your review is in the second round (or beyond) the tool shows which requirements have been changed by the applicant by marking them as revised in the box on the left hand side of the screen. The changes to the evidence text can be seen by opening the requirement and pushing on the show difference button.

For more information see the manual in the top left hand corner of the tool. **Note:** This is currently not the case for versions of the Triage process as that is done outside of the tool.

Training on the 2023-2025 Requirements can be found on the CoreTrustSeal YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBDo747epL7Kz3lwVBC6JgcuByjp3OIGS>

Recommended Practices

Triage

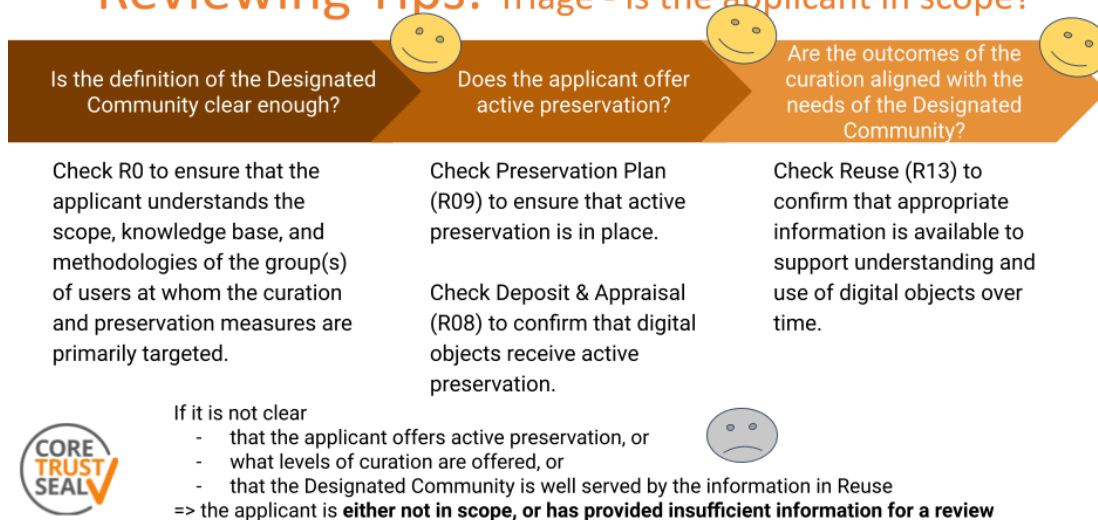
A reviewer can undertake a 'triage' process before they complete a full initial review to check whether the applicant is in scope for CoreTrustSeal. This can help to quickly identify when an applicant is not in scope, or does not provide enough information to make it clear whether they are in scope.

If a reviewer raises a Triage issue with the Board, this can be quickly returned to the applicant so they can decide to end their application, or provide relevant further information. This can speed up the process for in-scope applications, and avoid additional effort (by applicants and reviewers) for those out of scope.

The Triage process is done via email and is not included in the tool. The applicant gets a maximum of 5 rounds of triage.

Is the Applicant in Scope?

Reviewing Tips: Triage - is the applicant in scope?



Is the Definition of the Designated Community Clear Enough?

Check R0 to ensure that the applicant understands the scope, knowledge base and methodologies of the group(s) of users at whom the curation and preservation measures are primarily targeted.

Does the Applicant Offer Active Preservation?

- Check Preservation Plan (R09) to ensure that active preservation is in place.



- Check Deposit & Appraisal (R08) to confirm that the digital objects receive active preservation.

Are the Outcomes of Curation Aligned with the needs of the Designated Community?

- Check ReUse (R13) to confirm that appropriate information is available to support understanding and use of digital objects over time.

If it is not clear:

- That the applicant offers active preservation, or what levels of curation are offered, or
- That the designated community is well served by the information in ReUse

Then:

- The applicant is either **not in scope, or has provided insufficient information** for a full review.

Possible Outcomes

1. If an applicant is clearly in scope, the reviewer can simply proceed to a full review
2. If an applicant appears not to be in scope, or has not provided sufficient information for a full review:

→ Contact info@coretrustseal.org explaining the outcome of the Triage process in a style designed to be sent to the applicant. This information will be reviewed by the Board and then returned to the applicant via email. A copy will be forwarded to the reviewers for information.

The applicant then has the opportunity to revise their application. It is then up to the reviewers to decide whether a full review process is needed, or if more information is needed. It will be a Board decision as to whether to declare an applicant out of scope and to terminate the application process.

Status of triage:

- **Accepted** → **progress with the review**

If the reviewer has no issues with the Triage they can progress with the full review.

- **Not accepted (round 1 - 4)**

When the Triage shows as out of scope or if there is insufficient information to ensure it is in scope → the secretariat sends an email to the applicant and the application is returned to 'pre-submit' stage in the AMT so the applicant can make changes

- **Rejected (round 5)**

When Triage is still not passed after 5 rounds → application is changed to 'rejected' in the AMT and final feedback is sent to the applicant via email.

NB: As for full reviews, a rejection would normally be sent after 5 unsuccessful submissions for Triage.



Guidance on Full Reviews

Compliance Levels

- Check whether the Compliance Level selected by the applicant matches the evidence supplied and either
 - Use the drop down menu to agree with the self assessed compliance level
 - Use the drop down menu to assign a lower compliance level
 - Leave the compliance level blank if there is not enough evidence provided to make an assessment.

If you lower a compliance level, or leave a compliance level blank, you must explain this in your feedback.

NB: Do not increase a self-assessed compliance level in your feedback. The applicant may have good reasons to select 'in progress'.

Verdict: Accept or Revision

Select one of the two options:

- Accepted: you agree with the compliance level and evidence provided. Adding review feedback text is optional.
- Revision; you need more information on the compliance level and/ or evidence statement and links or attachments provided. You must explain your reasons and what the applicant should do in your review feedback text.

Even if you have minor feedback, for instance a link is broken or attachments are missing, please mark the verdict field as 'revision' so that this is clear to the applicant.

Review Feedback Text

NB: In the second round of reviews, or in subsequent revisions, the AMT will show the feedback you provided to the applicant last time for your information. You should remove all feedback text that the applicant has satisfactorily addressed. The AMT saves each round of review as a separate version and no information will be lost.

- If you have lowered the self-assessed compliance level from the applicant, this should be explained
- If you have not assigned a compliance level, this should be explained



- If you have marked the Requirement for revision for any reason then this should be supported by a clear statement as to why:
 - Clear simple statements and questions in feedback text are often easier for applicants to understand, particularly those whose first language is not English.
- Refer to key points in the Guidance or Extended Guidance (<https://www.coretrustseal.org/why-certification/requirements/>) when possible. Avoid copy-paste of large parts of the Guidance text in your feedback. ,
- You feedback text should make it clear to the Applicant, and to the Board whether your feedback refers to something:
 - **absolutely needed** to meet the Requirement or to match the Compliance Level claimed.
 - **'nice to have'** or an enhancement to the application that you feel the applicant can probably respond to in their next revision .
 - Something **for the future**, e.g something that could increase a compliance level when they renew their certification in future.
 - If the applicant has self-assessed as 'in progress' your feedback could request a timeline and plan as to how this will be addressed before they recertify in future.

Overall Comments and Recommendations

- General comments from the Reviewer about the whole application can be added to the final field: R17 Applicant Feedback.

Other Points of Note

- The requested review period is one month. If you cannot achieve the deadline when provided please contact info@coretrustseal.org to see if additional time can be provided.
- Each reviewer comes to their own independent conclusions. However, it is permitted and encouraged for reviewers to discuss issues and opinions between themselves. This is particularly helpful for newer reviewers and ensures clear and consistent feedback to applicants.
- For applicants renewing their certification the reviewer can check their previous application to identify any comments or feedback that they were asked to address when they recertify. If requirements have not moved from 'in progress' to 'implemented' since the last certification, there should be clear explanations as to why this has not been possible.
- For applicants that are part of a larger network for which component repositories have already been CoreTrustSeal certified, then the reviewer can examine one/more of the public applications. This can improve the understanding of common network practices and policies, standards and processes, and contribute to more consistent feedback.