

BSR Project Principles

JUNE 2022

Organizational Context

BSR™ works with its global network of the world's leading companies and other partners to build a just and sustainable world. With offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR™ provides insight, advice, and collaborative initiatives to help companies see a changing world more clearly, create long-term business value, and scale impact.

In a world increasingly focused on just and sustainable business, it is essential that we deliver unique value and impact in the following ways:

- We focus on impact in everything we do
- We know how to make connections between issues, and between business and the wider world
- We provide candid advice and insight that translates ambition into action

The Project Principles in this document are designed to advance and implement these objectives

This Document

These Principles are intended to offer guidance for BSR team members on how we provide advice to businesses to further BSR's mission and vision, and to enable companies to achieve meaningful progress. They convey how BSR staff should approach projects, think through novel situations, and articulate BSR insights or recommendations that will achieve the outcomes we seek, and the value companies can generate. These principles are intended to be adaptable and directional; we should always apply judgment. Finally, this is a "living document" subject to ongoing interpretation and revision as the broader context, our organization, and our impact objectives all evolve.

Guidance on how BSR approaches membership and project selection are covered in other BSR documents.

When we work with companies, our perspective, insights, and recommendations should pursue these principles.

Principles for Engagement

We focus on impact in everything we do

1. **Focus on impact and solutions.** Our perspectives should be ambitious and pragmatic, and should support, enable, and challenge companies to focus on outcomes/impacts.
2. **Focus on the most significant opportunities for meaningful change.** In cases where it is necessary to recommend incremental action, we should always strive to include additional context to highlight what more ambitious, robust action would look like, why it is worth pursuing, and where opportunities for additional progress remain for the company.
3. **Connect impact and business success.** In many cases, more ambitious or comprehensive approaches will achieve *both* more impact and more value for a company. Look for ways to draw this connection, and work with colleagues to develop strategies for influencing companies to understand and embrace such an approach.
4. **Promote comprehensive action,** by encouraging companies to use all aspects of the [act, enable and influence](#) theory of change.

We make connections between issues, and between business and the wider world/stakeholders

5. **Know the company's business and social context.** In our projects, we should address the company's business strategy, operating environment, culture, and current circumstances. We should use tailored language and terminology that connects with internal stakeholders to impel action. Our teams should also be aware of the company's operating context such as core business strategy, mainstream/business press coverage and reputational dynamics, market conditions, etc.
6. **Bring clarity to a changing world and a complex field.** We should show companies how just and sustainable business concepts can help them to understand and navigate the many changes reshaping our world. To do so we should translate sustainability and external perspectives into language for a business audience. We should avoid sustainability jargon in our dialogue with companies, especially when working outside the sustainability functions.
7. **Encourage companies to advance equity and consider impacts on a diverse range of rightsholders and stakeholders,** with particular attention to individuals from groups/populations that are (or may be at heightened risk of becoming) marginalized, in addition to individuals and organizations that bring essential perspectives that help companies achieve these goals. To pursue this principle, we should seek to create diverse project teams whose perspectives and expertise are informed by multiple dimensions of identity including gender, geographic, racial, ethnic and/or cultural, subject matter experience, and professional backgrounds.
8. **Promote holistic strategies** that recognize the connections among issues, for example understanding the social justice dimensions of the climate crisis, or building governance models that enhance equity, inclusion, and justice.
9. **Apply a global mindset and solutions,** while recognizing unique local, regional, and industry context.

We provide honest advice and insight that translates ambition into credible action

10. **Articulate the strategic business value of our recommendations.** We should show how the strategies and recommendations that we develop will strengthen a company and address its specific imperatives and opportunities.
11. **Articulate the importance of values.** We also should acknowledge that not every instance of just and sustainable business practices brings clear or immediate business benefits. In short, not everything is a "win-win" and sometimes tradeoffs are needed. Companies shouldn't always need a business case to do the right thing, and we shouldn't be afraid to say so.
12. **Be candid about the limits of our expertise** and recognize the company's own knowledge, while remaining confident in the value of our perspective and provoking thoughtful engagement. Listen and work with humility.

Seek expert input by leveraging BSR's global team, member network, and external contacts. And when there are others who can bring needed expertise that we don't have, we provide value by creating those connections.

13. **Where application of standards is relevant, urge the application of the most ambitious and credible standards** in a way that will propel business action. Recognize that it's sometimes better to align mostly with an existing standard/framework in a way that will create change rather than to seek perfect alignment but fail to create impact.
14. **Encourage companies to collaborate** with others—including industry peers, value chain partners, and multi-stakeholder initiatives—to create systemic change.
15. **Encourage companies to support public policy solutions** that are essential in achieving progress towards just, inclusive, transparent, and sustainable business, and to align performance objectives with policy engagement.
16. **Encourage transparency and accountability.** We should advise companies to act transparently and take actions that will be considered credible by key external audiences. In an increasingly transparent world, companies' approaches will be more successful, and achieve desired outcomes, if they consider the potential impacts on and responses by key audiences. We should also promote candor, and humility in company communications.