

Green Artist Information Network

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## **Executive Summary**

Live music venues provide a valuable service to both artists and the surrounding community by offering a fully-equipped space in which they can come together and share in an artistic experience. For decades, the operation of a venue has been relatively unchanged, and little attention has been paid to their overall environmental impact. But venues actually consume a great deal of resources, produce large amounts of solid waste and noise pollution, and pull a significant influx of people into the area, all of which impacts the surrounding community, the environment, and most tangibly, the venue's bottom line.

In order to survive in an increasingly-challenging market, venues must look for ways to stay competitive and discern themselves from the pack, by cutting costs, investing in the long-term, and ensuring the customer experience is consistently and noticeably better than that of their corporate competitors. This is where the GAIN Certification comes in.

GAIN stands for Green Artist Information Network, and was formed in 2019 in Seattle, Washington to connect venues, artists, fans, and anyone else wanting to collaborate, share ideas, and look for opportunities to create a greener music industry.

For venues that are GAIN Certified, key improvements will be built into the core of the business, with reductions in waste and energy usage saving money, improvements in facilities and crowd management creating a better, more comfortable experience, and strategic investments in the long-term viability of the venue ensuring that customers will be seeking out the venue's unique offerings for years to come.

The foundation of the GAIN Certification is the GAIN Standard, the guidance document outlining the criteria for the three different levels of certification: Clean, Sustain, and Overdrive.

Clean level certification results in changes to operations, purchasing, energy usage, etc. for shorter-term gains, without changes in building construction or utilities. Sustain level is the Intermediate level, with updates to sound systems, HVAC, building construction, etc. for longer-term gains. And Overdrive level, which pushes beyond four walls of operations to influence local community and industry towards a greener future.

The live-music industry has vast untapped sustainable potential, and the GAIN Certification can help elevate a venue above the rest.

### **Green Artist Information Network**

The goal of GAIN is to become the first, and most widely-recognized, green certification for venues within the live music industry. When a customer sees that a venue is GAIN certified, they will know that that venue has made a commitment to environmental sustainability that elevates them above the rest. Likewise, when a venue achieves a GAIN certification, it will gain not just a marketing tool, but a series of tangible improvements to their facilities, equipment, and processes that result in increased customer engagement, reduced costs, and, ultimately, a better bottom line.

GAIN stands for Green Artist Information Network, and was formed in 2019 in Seattle, Washington. It was created to connect venues, artists, fans, and anyone else wanting to collaborate, share ideas, and look for opportunities to create a greener music industry. GAIN Certified venues will have access to a treasure trove of sustainable techniques and strategies in areas such as sustainable food and beverage services; construction; energy efficient fixtures, appliances, sound systems, and equipment; crowd management; etc., as well as a vast network of like-minded artists, fans, venue staff, and sustainability professionals all interested in hearing and sharing ideas on how to “green” the music industry.

The foundation of the GAIN Certification is the GAIN Standard, the guidance document containing the criteria for certification. Modeled after ISO standards, the GAIN Standard outlines the various goals and objectives a venue must achieve to reach certification, while providing direction, guidance, and advice for how to reach these goals.

Live music venues have a tremendous impact on their community, both positive and negative. They provide a location for local and touring musicians to showcase their art in a controlled, professional setting, while bringing members of a community together to share an experience and blow off some steam. Inversely, the noise, waste, and influx of people can have detrimental impacts on the surrounding area, and a poorly-designed and poorly-run event can ruin a customer’s experience. By combining advice from experienced industry professionals with established strategies outlined in existing certifications like ISO, LEED, APEX/ASTM, etc., the GAIN Standard provides a practical roadmap for venues to save money; reduce their impact on their community and the planet; and deliver a better experience to their customers and employees.

## Background

The idea for a live music sustainability standard came about after researching what sorts of resources currently exist for live music sustainability. As it stands, there is guidance for festivals (Zifkos, 2015), events (ISO 20121:2012), touring (Reverb, 2019) bars and restaurants (Green Restaurant Association, n.d.), as well as various standards and resources for building design (U.S. Green Building Council, 2019; ISO 21930:2017) and retrofitting (Paradis, 2016). All of these items are applicable to live music venues, but the scope of each is broader, and more work is required for venue owners, operators, and/or designers to find the most relevant aspects of each. Thus, the decision was made to create a standard that draws from each of these sectors but is specific to indoor live music venues.

The term “sustainability” can be defined thusly, according to Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway and Director-General of the World Health Organization: “Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Willard, 2012). Or, to put it more simply: Human activity must not exceed our planet’s capacity to support life (Winston, 2014). There is a finite amount of resources available on this planet – and finite room for byproducts to be stored – and we are rapidly approaching the stage in human development where both of these are being depleted beyond repair. The study of sustainability and Sustainable Development (SD) is the study of how we can utilize existing resources, technology, and strategies to ensure the long-term viability of the planet to sustain life, without compromising our standard of living. Indeed, successful sustainability policy should also raise the standard of living of those in struggling and impoverished communities throughout the globe, and not simply maintain the lifestyle of developed nations (Business & Sustainable Development Commission, 2017). Through the power of both business and public policy, a better world is within our grasp.

Traditional economics has generally revolved around only one form of capital, namely financial capital, or profit. Environmental Economics, however, is focused around three equally-important forms of capital, in what is often called the Triple Bottom Line (Willard, 2012). In addition to financial capital, there is also environmental capital: The physical and biological resources necessary for the product or service, as well as the impact the manufacture, use, and disposal of the product has on the natural environment; and social capital: The company’s

relationship with its employees, customers, and the communities in which it operates (Willard, 2012). Or, put more succinctly: People, Planet, and Profits (Willard, 2012).

For decades, the operation of a live music venue has been relatively unchanged, and little attention has been paid to their overall environmental impact. But venues actually consume a great deal of resources; produce large amounts of solid waste and noise pollution; and pull a significant influx of people into the area, all of which impacts the surrounding community, the environment, and most tangibly, the venue's bottom line.

In 2018, concert attendance rose 8% over the previous year worldwide (Mandell, 2019). Conversely, the number of privately-owned music venues in the United States has shrunk over the past decade, as giant behemoths like LiveNation slowly absorbs all competition (Mandell, 2019). For a small, indoor, non-stadium venue, the competition isn't with other venues of similar nature, it's with the massive monopolies looking to take over the entire live entertainment industry.

Thus, in order to survive, these venues must look for ways to stay competitive, by cutting costs, investing in the long-term, and ensuring the customer experience is consistently and noticeably better than that of their corporate competitors.

The GAIN Certification can impact a venue's Triple Bottom Line in the following ways:

- **Environmental** – Reducing energy needs for sound equipment, lighting, HVAC; reducing solid waste and litter from cups, cans, bottles, posters, handbills, cigarette butts, etc; reducing noise pollution.
- **Social** – Reducing impact on surrounding area from noise pollution and influx of people; creating a positive, efficient, comfortable experience for customers; cultivating a safe and healthy workplace experience for employees.
- **Financial** – Cost-savings from energy and waste reductions; increased marketability and customer engagement; increased interest from bands and acts.

When it comes down to it, Sustainable Development is a “decision” problem, i.e. the tools and strategies exist for more sustainable operations, all it takes is a decision to pursue them (Winston, 2014). However, once the benefits are apparent, it becomes an easy decision to make.

### Pre-Planning

When considering whether to pursue a project such as this, it is important to understand the potential pros and cons of the project. For this, a SWOT analysis can be an effective tool.

Here is a SWOT analysis for GAIN:

- **Strengths:** First of its kind, able to capture and influence the market before any competitors.
- **Weaknesses:** No competitors to benchmark; Requires active participation from venues to be successful, could be difficult to initiate.
- **Opportunities:** Once created, the GAIN Standard upon which the certification is based will become the first and only of its kind, making it the go-to document of its type within the industry.
- **Threats:** Lack of interest could kill the momentum before it starts.

Because the GAIN Certification is the first of its kind for the live music industry, it is difficult to predict how it will be received. The largest threat to success is a lack of interest from venue customers, so it is necessary to know your audience in order to tailor the product to their needs.

### Stakeholders

The Stakeholders identified for the GAIN Certification are: Venue Staff, Customers, Artists, Communities, and Certifying Bodies. These stakeholders are further defined according to their *influence* and *interest* (see Appendix A, Figure A1). *Influence* is the amount of control a stakeholder has over the operations/behavior of the venue, while *interest* is the benefits realized from the venue, which could be financial (paychecks, investments), or social (personal enjoyment/leisure). The map is then separated into four quadrants that are color coded by level of overall *involvement*. Q2 contains stakeholders with *total involvement*, having maximum impact on the operations while receiving the maximum benefits. Q1 and Q4 are stakeholders with *partial involvement*, those with either strong influence or interest, but not both. Q3 is *minimal involvement*; while they are still considered a stakeholder, they are the least important in the system.

#### A. Venue Staff – Q2

- The Owners, Operators, and Employees that are responsible for the operations of the venue. The most vital relationship to maintain.

- Have the maximum impact on the operations of the venue (influence), while gaining the highest level of benefits (interest), especially financial.
- Some partners operate in a global system (Ticketmaster/Livenation), while most operate within their local cities and communities (Basile, 2014).

#### B. Customers – Q4

- The concertgoers that pay the venue (and through them, the artists) to provide a venue to consume live music. Important to maintain their attention and goodwill.
- Arguably have the highest interest in the service provided, but size and disorganization are limiting to their impact.

#### C. Artists – Q4

- Could also be considered customers of the service provided by the venues, utilizing the space to provide their service to the paying customers (B).
- Influence varies by artist, but they generally have minimal impact on the overall operations of the venue beyond their specific performance. Their financial interest is significant, however.

#### D. Communities – Q3

- The neighboring businesses and residents of the venue.
- Minimal involvement in system usually, unless experiencing disproportionate impacts from other stakeholders, i.e. keep them happy.

#### E. Certifying Body – Q1

- Able to exert significant influence over the venue by enforcing certification criteria, but have little interest beyond the initial certification process.

For this project, it was only really feasible to meet with the Venue Staff and Artists for input. These two stakeholders are able to exert significant influence over this project: The Venue Staff have influence at the local level (whether or not to meet or pursue certification), while Artists are at the global level (the most directly-impacted customer of the GAIN Certification). The other three stakeholders will need to be considered throughout the process, but direct interaction with them will not be necessary.

### **Execution**

There are essentially three phases of this project: Research, publishing, and implementation (see Appendix A, Figure A3).

The research phase consists of the bulk of the research and fact-finding that ultimately results in the GAIN Standard, the supporting document outlining the criteria for the GAIN Certification. This phase consists of literature review, in-person tours and interviews with venue staff, and final editing and reviews with venue contacts.

The publishing phase is the actual creation of the GAIN Standard, by compiling the research into an organized format, and developing the rules and structure of the certification. This is somewhat concurrent with phase one, especially the editing and revisions of the standard.

Finally, the implementation phase is the actual certification of live music venues as GAIN Certified, utilizing the GAIN Standard. This is a future-state phase for the project, and has yet to occur, so it will be discussed mainly in hypotheticals for now.

### **Research Phase**

The research phase is arguably the most important part of the project since it results in the foundation of the GAIN Certification, the GAIN Standard. The standard is generally modelled after an ISO standard and consists of the criteria for certification. The work for this phase can be further broken down into three steps (see Appendix A, Figure A2).

The first step was to research existing sustainability certifications for tools and strategies, as well as local laws, regulations, and building codes. Once the areas most relevant to live music venues are identified, they were compiled into one loose document as a starting point. The majority of these were related to green building standards, like LEED, BREEAM, WELL Building, etc., and sustainable events and meeting spaces, like ISO20121 and APEX/ASTM. It was helpful to seek out advice from other sustainability professionals about what sorts of certifications, tools, and standards should be examined. This took the most time, roughly 55% of the total work (see Appendix A, Figure A2). A reasonable timeline for this step is in the one-to-two-month range.

Next, reach out to several venues in the Seattle area (my hometown) to schedule meetings with stakeholders such as owners/GMs, Facilities/Stage Managers, sound personnel, and bar staff to discuss the needs, challenges, areas for improvement, and best practices of each venue, while seeking their advice on how they would realistically implement the standards from my research.

This phase proved to be the most difficult aspect of the project, for completely unanticipated reasons: Coronavirus. The Seattle region had the very first case of COVID-19 in



the United States on January 21st, 2020, and by early March most of the state was sheltering in place. On March 11, all gatherings of 250 or more people were banned, and very quickly afterwards all venues in the region began cancelling all shows indefinitely – including two scheduled venue tours. This effectively ended this step of the research phase.

Still, two venue tours were accomplished at The Highline and The Substation. The interactions in both were almost entirely with the Sound Engineer, though the bartenders and the performing artists were available and answered some questions as well. These are both fairly small venues, but they proved to be the exact type of venues that could benefit greatly from GAIN.

Initially, this phase was scheduled for no longer than one month: One week to research positions, make contact, and schedule meetings, and the rest of the month to meet with the contacts. However, the scheduling of these meetings proved much more difficult than anticipated: While most venues were flat-out uninterested, the hourly/nightly scheduling practices of the business forced the rescheduling of some meetings with the venues that were interested to ensure the right people were available – and this was before Coronavirus hit. The final meeting was with The Substation on March 5<sup>th</sup>, shortly before the city began shutting down.

This step comprised an estimated 15% of the work, and required the strongest leadership to really be successful; these contacts are also potential customers of GAIN, so their input was invaluable, but because they won't realize any immediate benefits from this collaboration, they didn't really have any stake in the claim beyond curiosity and goodwill.

For the venue operators that were met with, this was the first time they even considered the possibility of “greening” their operations, so a rationalist approach was used, by describing the vision of the GAIN Certification and the potential benefits it could provide (Estrada, n.d.). This opened a dialogue about what that vision could mean for their venue, which led to a brainstorming session about a shared vision for their venue, allowing them to take ownership over the idea of a sustainable venue while gaining their buy-in (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). These conversations generally paralleled theoretical knowledge derived from the research, but they resulted in some solid insight into how the research could be practically implemented in the different venues.

The final step was a revision process to incorporate the knowledge gained from the meetings, which took another couple of weeks to polish and finalize the standard. Though in-

person meetings were unavailable, the Sound Engineer from The Substation (now unemployed due to the indefinite shutdown of his workplace) kept in contact through email and was able to review the standard in its completed form. Though he had minimal inputs at this stage, this sort of customer relationship is invaluable in gaining the deep insight that allow the most significant impacts to the target market (Senge, 2006). All things considered, this step was about 30% of the work for this phase.

### **Publishing Phase**

The second component of this project is the actual designing, drafting, and creation of the GAIN Standard. This section will contain a brief outline of the levels of certification and scoring, and the rest of the information can be found in the GAIN Standard itself (see Appendix B).

There are three levels of GAIN Certification: Clean, Sustain, and Overdrive.

Clean level certification results in changes to operations, purchasing, energy usage, etc. for shorter-term gains, without changes in building construction or utilities. While Clean-level certification can be accomplished with just the GAIN Standard, reaching the higher levels will require the assistance of a GAIN Rep, a dedicated representative from GAIN that will help you achieve your sustainability goals.

Sustain level is the Intermediate level, with updates to sound systems, HVAC, building construction, etc. for longer-term gains. This level is more goal-oriented and project-based, and thus more personalized to the venue.

Overdrive level pushes beyond four walls of operations to influence local community and industry towards a greener future. This level requires the venue to complete at least one external certification and commit to a service project that positively impacts the venue's surrounding community and/or industry.

There are four major categories that the information in the GAIN Standard fall under: Power and Energy, Food Services and Waste, Process Improvement, and General (which is essentially just goal-setting).

There is a great deal of work that is required for each level, and the GAIN Certification was designed so that venues are recognized for the work they are performing, not simply the work that has been completed. Thus, a venue will have been considered Certified at a particular level when it has:

1. Set specific goals and objectives for each of the four categories, falling within the scope of said level; AND
2. Taken tangible steps towards achieving said goals; AND
3. Completed all goals and criteria in the preceding level.

Demonstrating to their customers that a venue has committed to sustainable operations will boost customer support and goodwill, which, in-turn, will motivate the venue to work harder towards their goals. This feedback loop can result in an ever-expanding scope of continuous improvement, driving venues to seek out even greener strategies to bolster their reputation with their customers (Winston, 2014).

### **Implementation Phase**

The final step in the project is the implementation phase; this phase actually signifies the end of this project, and the beginning of the “standard work” of certifying venues. Like with ISO standards, the GAIN Standard is accessible on its own, and organizations should be able to pursue the sustainable improvements on their own, but it will take a GAIN Rep – an official representative from GAIN that is knowledgeable in the areas of both Sustainability and live music - to come in and certify the venue at a particular level.

### **Conclusion**

Live music is, by nature, an ephemeral industry; every night a new band or artist comes through, each with their own unique requirements, each presenting a new set of challenges. The customers come from all over the area to share a musical experience with each other and the artists; whether dancing, crowd-surfing, or bobbing their head in the back, they all expect – and deserve – the best experience the venue can deliver. Likewise, the venue staff, ranging from highly skilled and specialized (sound engineers, stage managers) to hourly workers (coat check, bar staff), deserve a workplace that takes their comfort, safety, and wellbeing seriously, allowing them to put on the show as smoothly as possible. If all of these things go well, the venue can make a lot of money; if not, the networks of fans, artists, community members, etc. will remember, and avoid the venue in the future.

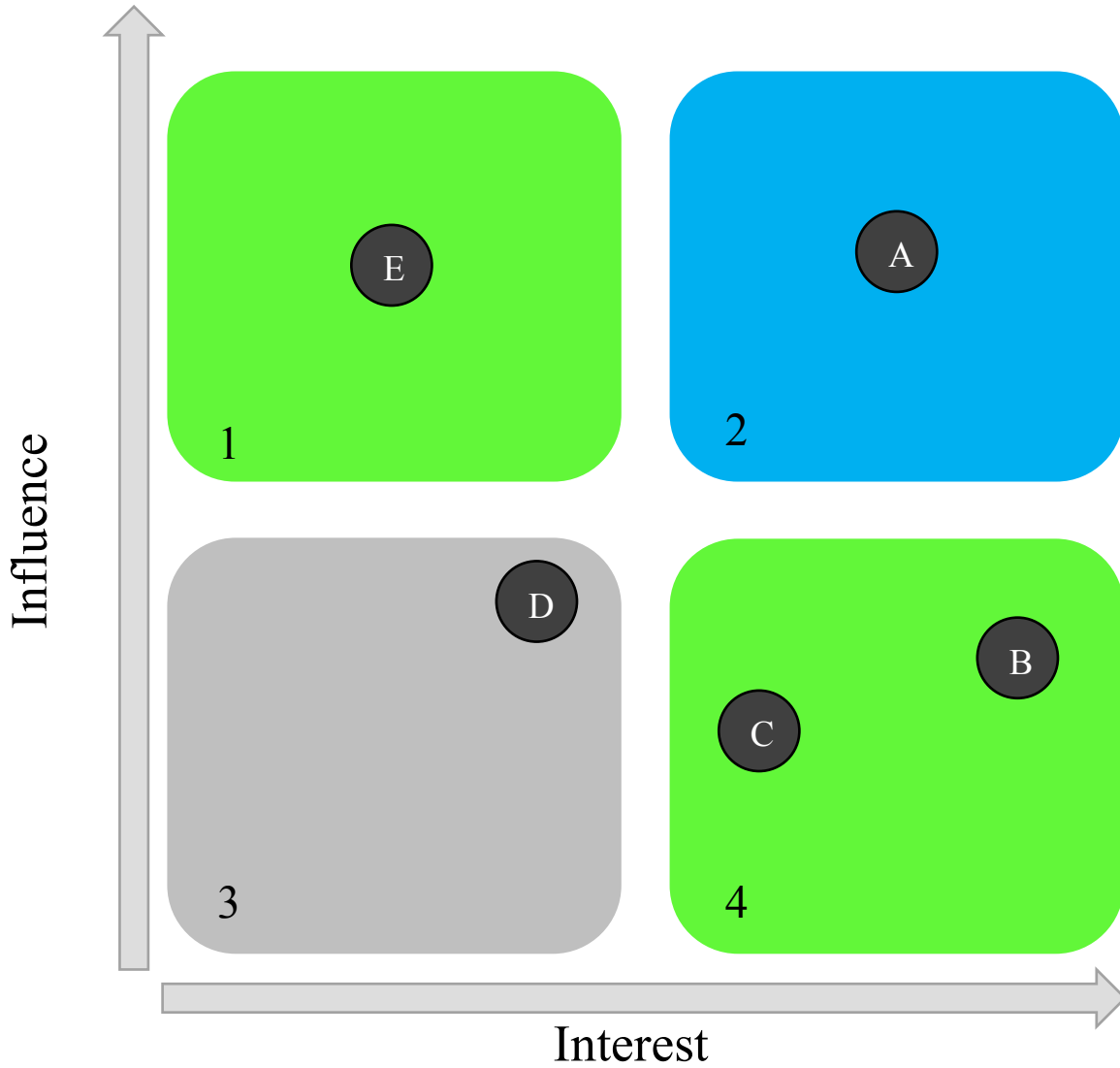
The GAIN Certification has the potential to positively impact each one of these stakeholders, and help keep these small, independently-owned venues keep from being bought up by large conglomerates, or shut down altogether. Indeed, the task of creating a brand new sustainability certification from nothing is no small feat, but it is an incredibly rewarding

experience, and a fantastic opportunity to learn more about sustainability and how it can apply to your industry.

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Appendix A



**Legend**

- A. Venue Owners, Operators, and Employees
- B. Customers
- C. Artists
- D. Communities
- E. Certifying Body

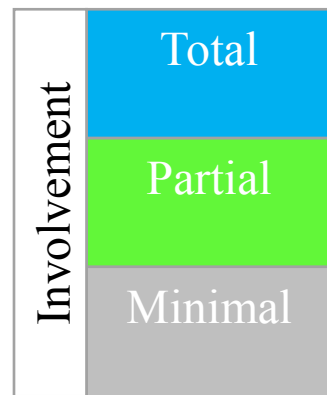


Figure A1. Stakeholder Map

Goal					
Create the GAIN Standard					
100%					
Deliverables	Tasks	% of work	Subtasks	Responsible Party/Contact	% of work
Sustainability Best Practices 55%	Research sustainability certifications (LEED, ISO 14001, etc.)	30%		Me/Certification reps	30%
	Identify sustainability benchmarks	25%	Waste	Me/Waste SME	5%
			Energy	Me/Energy SME	5%
			Noise	Me/Noise SME	5%
			Carbon	Me/Carbon SME	5%
			Marketing	Me/Marketing SME	5%
Live music industry best practices 10%	Contact venues in Seattle for meeting and venue walkthrough	5%	Research contact information for GM, Facilities, Sound Person for each venue Contact venues, schedule meetings	Me	2%
	Meetings and Walkthroughs	5%	Understand requirements and costs: energy, waste output, HVAC, equipment upgrades, staffing, noise etc.	Me, venue GM, Facilities, Sound	1%
			Discuss strategies currently employed, tips, tricks.	Me, venue GM, Facilities, Sound, Bar staff	2%
			Discuss ideas for improvement (to venue and industry as a whole), feasibility	Me, venue GM, Facilities, Sound, Bar staff	2%
Compile material 35%	Create Standard	21%	Categorize strategies and information	Me	7%
			Identify scenarios common within industry	Me	4%
			Develop general solutions for scenarios that can be customized for specific venue	Me	7%
			Recommend industry certifications for each section	Me	3%
	Create Scoring System	10%	Develop rules and certification system.	Me	5%
			Create tier system for short, medium, long term goals, and cost/scope of project (Clean, Sustain, OD)	Me	5%
Review checklist with industry	4%	Facilities	Facilities	2%	
		Sound	Sound	2%	

Figure A2. Work Breakdown Schedule of the creation of the GAIN Standard

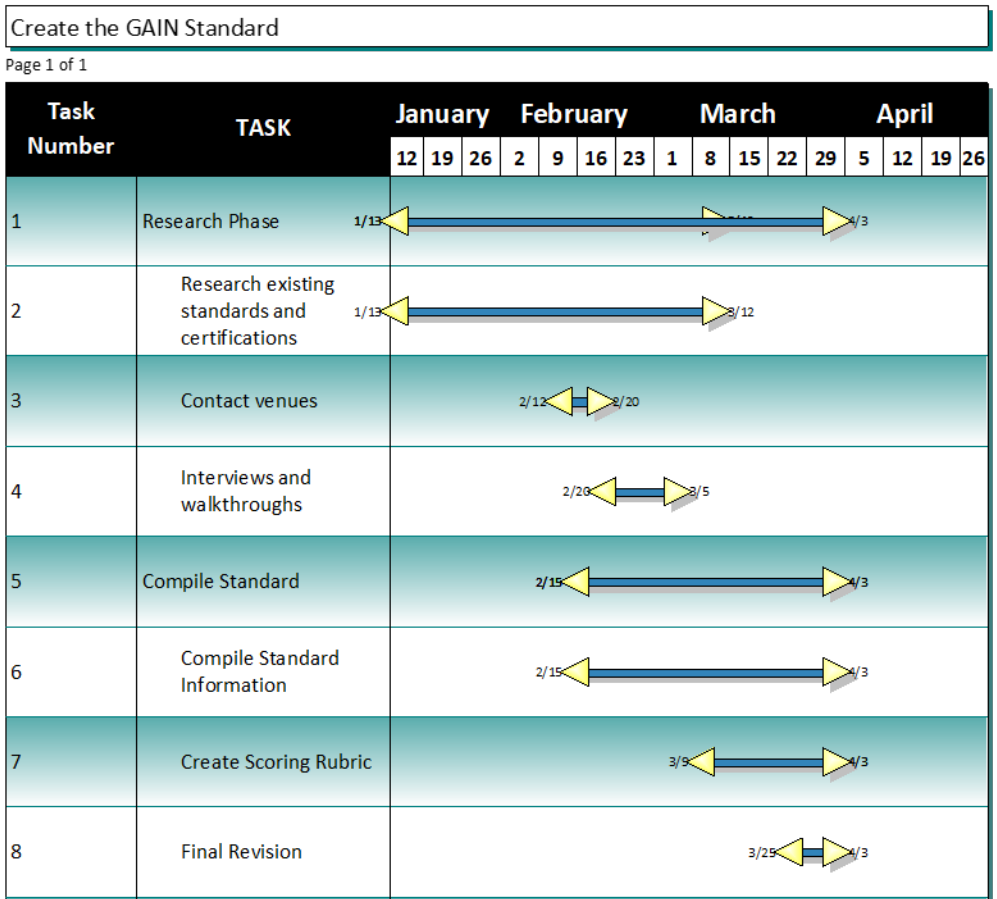


Figure A3. Gantt Chart for the Research and Publishing Phases of the GAIN Standard



**Appendix B**

*See attachment for full GAIN Standard.*