

Meeting with CSOs

Arranging a Meeting¹⁴

CSOs regularly request meetings with ADB staff at headquarters and at resident missions. Common reasons for requesting a meeting include exploring avenues for cooperation with ADB, and identifying possibilities for financing. In addition, meetings are often requested by advocacy groups seeking information about projects, programs, or ADB policies from a project officer or division director. Information collected may be used in reports or campaigns urging ADB to take some type of action, such as declining to finance a project on social or environmental grounds, giving attention to implementation of safeguard requirements relating to a specific loan, or consulting in greater depth with particular communities affected by an ADB-assisted activity.

Staff members should attempt to accommodate, within a reasonable period, requests from CSOs for an appointment. If it is not possible to do so (e.g., because of mission schedules or looming project processing deadlines), the staff member concerned should inform the requester of these constraints.

Following are general tips for organizing meetings with CSO representatives.

Request for a Consultation

Respond promptly to requests for meetings with CSOs. If you are not the appropriate person with whom the representatives of the CSO in question should meet, identify one or more staff members responsible for the subject matter the CSO wishes to discuss.

¹⁴ This section has been adapted from the International Monetary Fund's *Guide for Staff Relations with Civil Society Organizations*. Washington, DC, October 2003.

Preparing to Meet

Obtain as much information as possible about the CSO prior to the meeting, agree on a precise agenda in advance, assemble ADB information likely to be of interest to the CSO concerned, and establish appropriate ground rules for the meeting that include the amount of time to be devoted to it.

The Meeting

Ensure ample opportunity for questions and answers. Allow the CSO in question to voice issues of concern, even though these matters might not be priorities for, or even seem directly relevant to, ADB. Be sensitive to cultural differences, and address CSOs in plain language, being careful to avoid technical terms, acronyms, professional jargon, or other specialized vocabulary.

Listen. Discussions with CSOs are an opportunity for staff members to listen, learn, and be influenced as well as to inform and explain. Debate options rather than attempting to sell pre-established positions. Frankly discuss the trade-offs between policy alternatives. Explore the negative and the positive consequences of various approaches to the issue or concern voiced by the CSO.

Remember that some CSOs work in new and fragile democratic environments. CSOs that act as advocates for vulnerable groups may feel at particular political risk. Avoid impressions of overconfidence. Take the time to answer questions fully, plainly, and patiently.

Follow-Up

If you are unable to provide an answer to a query during the meeting and commit to getting back to the CSO, ensure that you do so within a reasonable time.

Prepare a short note to file that summarizes the discussions that took place at the meeting with the CSO. Briefly record who was met, what was discussed, what major complaints or proposals were voiced, general impressions of the encounter, and any actions agreed to at the meeting. As appropriate, include brief details on CSO meetings in back-to-office reports if they occurred in the field.

Share the meeting notes with ADB offices concerned with the subjects discussed and the organizations met.

Consider sending a follow-up note of thanks for the CSOs' input, acknowledging the major points made or the issues articulated, informing them of any steps that have been (or will be) taken in response to their concerns, and inviting their further comment. The provision of feedback is important. If CSOs perceive that their input is not taken seriously and has no impact, then they may respond negatively, for instance by raising their concerns with ADB management or Board of Directors, the media, or in the context of public forums.

Guidelines for Successful Consultations¹⁵

ADB consults with CSOs in various settings such as loans, technical assistance, policy reviews, special initiatives, and country programming. Consultations are a process, not a one-off event. Consultations can take many forms and include a series of methodologies, tools, and activities. The selection of the tools and activities depends on the objectives of the consultation, the type of organization or individuals consulted, as well as other variables. Activities associated with the consultation process take place in stages, with each new activity building on those that took place before it. Following are five guidelines for conducting successful consultations:

- (i) **Clarify the scope and objectives at the outset.** Explain whether everyone's views will be incorporated, whether participants will have a chance to comment on future drafts of written proposals or verbally at other occasions, and whether and when the final product will be shared with participants.
- (ii) **Prepare to listen and be influenced.** If consultations are not balanced and well facilitated, ADB may be accused of "window dressing," leading participants to question

A grant facility, NGO Initiatives to Prevent HIV/AIDS, has enabled ADB to work closely with NGOs in identifying, documenting, and supporting effective outreach and delivery of essential HIV/AIDS services to poor, vulnerable, and high-risk groups

¹⁵ This section is adapted from tips provided in the World Bank publication, *Consultations with Civil Society: A Sourcebook Working Document*. Washington, DC, February 2007.

whether the outcome of the consultation was worth the time and resources they contributed to it.

- (iii) **Aim for ownership of all key stakeholders.** Consultations concerning national policy issues can only be effective if the government is as fully engaged in the process as are other stakeholders.
- (iv) **Don't oversell consultations.** If the objective is to conduct a single meeting with a limited number of organizations, do not promote that meeting as a full-fledged consultation or imply in subsequent statements that civil society was consulted or that a participatory process was used.
- (v) **Provide feedback.** Consultation processes can be quickly discredited if those consulted are not informed how their views were ultimately taken into account in decision making. It is therefore important that stakeholders who have shared their views are provided with feedback concerning which comments were accepted and which were not (and why).

Annual Meeting Dialogue with CSOs

More than 150 CSO representatives from dozens of organizations typically attend ADB annual meetings hosted in the Asia and Pacific region (somewhat fewer attend the yearly event when it is hosted outside the region). Advocacy groups participate in the annual meetings to request information from, voice concerns to, and try to influence the positions of ADB senior staff and Management, Board members, government delegations, journalists, and other attendees.

ADB provides a physical space and basic services and facilities for CSO representatives to meet and organize their networking activities at the Annual Meeting. ADB works with CSOs to develop a program of discussion panels and meetings with ADB representatives, including a representative of ADB management, to engage in dialogue on issues of common interest.

CSOs attending the annual meeting for the first time must be accredited in advance. To be accredited, a CSO must be endorsed by the government of the country in which the organization is based. The ADB Board of Directors endorses accreditation of CSOs, a process coordinated by the NGOC. As a general rule, organizations that secure accreditation keep it in perpetuity and may attend future annual meetings. More than 400 CSOs have been accredited to date.

