ACCESS TO INFORMATION POLICY

Annual Report 2019
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ADB has been monitoring a set of 12 key project document types to assess policy compliance. Because these documents are required to be disclosed within certain time frames, they provide a snapshot of the level and timeliness of ADB’s project document disclosure. In 2019, 1,422 of these project documents were required to be disclosed.
TOTAL NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS DISCLOSED

4,930 project documents
91 evaluation reports

3,413 VALID INFORMATION REQUESTS ON

- projects: 37.44%
- general ADB information: 24.52%
- consulting and procurement: 16.99%
- research and independent evaluation: 9.00%
- cofinancing and private sector investments: 7.84%
- NGO–CSO cooperation: 4.18%
- not indicated: 0.03%

CAME FROM

- 44% private sector
- 15% academe and research organizations
- 8% government
- 1% media
- 11% CSOs and NGOs
- 3% multilateral organizations and development agencies
- 18% others
ABBREVIATIONS

ADB  Asian Development Bank
AIP  Access to Information Policy
COVID-19 coronavirus disease
CPS  country partnership strategy
PCP  Public Communications Policy
TA  technical assistance

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I. INTRODUCTION


II. BACKGROUND

2. ADB has long recognized that transparency and accountability are essential to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.

3. The bank adopted its first information disclosure policy in 1994 and continually revises its approach to improve effectiveness and reflect changes in ADB business processes as it responds to the changing needs of Asia and the Pacific.

4. In 2005, the Board of Directors approved the PCP, which stipulated that ADB had to conduct a policy review within 5 years. In 2010, ADB reviewed and updated the policy. The revised policy, PCP 2011, guided ADB’s commitment to transparency and accountability from April 2012 to December 2018. The PCP 2011 also required ADB to conduct a policy review within 5 years.

5. ADB conducted a 2-year policy review beginning in 2016. The review confirmed that the policy principles and exceptions to disclosure were in line with those of other multilateral development banks. The review also found that principles-based policies were considered best practice for information disclosure. Based on the findings, ADB drafted a policy focused on principles—largely unchanged from the PCP 2011—with the policy implementation arrangements housed separately.

6. ADB consulted its Board of Directors and submitted two consultation papers and a working paper for review. After incorporating the Board’s comments, ADB submitted a final policy paper for Board approval in September 2018. The Board approved the new policy on 28 September, and it became effective on 1 January 2019. ADB Management approved the implementation arrangements, which became effective on 28 January 2019.

7. The AIP includes nine principles, led by a new overarching principle of “clear, timely, and appropriate disclosure;” 13 exceptions to disclosure; and general information about external requests and appeals. It ensures that information is available to people affected by its projects and other stakeholders—including women, the poor, and other vulnerable groups—in a form and language they can understand.

8. The section in PCP 2011 on public communications was removed because it differs from disclosure activities, and communication approaches can change rapidly with the emergence of new technology. The section is included in ADB’s External Relations Approach and is accessible through ADB’s access to information website.4

9. ADB’s website (www.adb.org) remains the primary medium for disclosure. For stakeholders without access to technology, other means of information dissemination are used that consider literacy levels, geography, infrastructure, and popular mass media for reaching project-affected people.

10. In 2018, ADB began conducting internal and external outreach to ensure a smooth rollout of the AIP. The responsibility for implementing the disclosure policy was also transferred from the Department of Communications to the Office of The Secretary, which was already overseeing Board document management and information classification, effective 1 January 2019. In 2019, ADB redesigned the disclosure webpages based on the plain language principles to be more accessible to those who are less proficient in English.5 The website provides information on the AIP, including translations of the policy into 16 languages; information requests with online request forms and e-mail contact forms for staff; the appeals process with e-mail contact forms; annual reports; and the contact information of staff overseeing disclosure.

11. Throughout 2019, ADB conducted awareness-raising and staff training for all operations departments. Awareness-raising and training was also initiated in two resident missions (the People’s Republic of China and Mongolia). Compliance with document disclosure requirements under the AIP has also been incorporated in the project design and management training course that is offered quarterly to staff working in operations departments.

12. To improve the timeliness of disclosure, which has shown a general decline since 2016, ADB increased the number of annual disclosure reminders on ADB’s intranet and enhanced its disclosure systems to automate disclosure procedures for some documents. The system enhancements went into effect in August.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

A. Disclosure

13. Like the previous disclosure policy, the AIP requires a high degree of information disclosure. While most information is disclosed through ADB.org to reach a wide audience, the policy also commits ADB to ensure that relevant information is shared with project-affected people during project design and implementation. ADB is also required to respond to requests for information about its operations and administration in a timely manner.

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5 ADB. Access to Information Policy; and International Plain Language Federation.
1. ADB Policy and Strategy Papers

In 2019, ADB’s Board of Directors considered five institutional policy papers. Four were disclosed on ADB.org within 14 days of approval or endorsement by the Board, as required by the AIP, and one was withheld because it contained financial information that is exempt from public disclosure. Four of these policies required chair summaries of the Board meeting, and all of them were disclosed. Notable institutional documents posted on ADB.org during the year included (i) the ADB Corporate Results Framework, 2019–2024, which is the first corporate results framework aligned with Strategy 2030; and (ii) the Contingent Disaster Financing under Policy-Based Lending in Response to Natural Hazards, which is a new financing mechanism to support developing member countries in strengthening disaster preparedness and provide quick-disbursing budget support following natural disasters.6

Table 1: Web Posting of Selected ADB Project Documents (%)

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Initial project data sheet</td>
<td>93</td>
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<td>97</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Draft environmental impact assessment (subject to 120-day rule)</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5. Draft indigenous peoples planning framework or plan</td>
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<td>6. Initial poverty and social analysis</td>
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<td>7. Technical assistance report</td>
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<td>89</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Report and recommendation of the President, PFR report, grant assistance report, FAST report, investment facility report</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>93</td>
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<td>9. Major change report</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>10. Progress report on tranche release</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Annual audited project financial statement</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Completion report or extended annual review report</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OVERALL                                            | 84   | 93   | 92   | 93   | 95   | 91   | 98   | 91   |

ADB = Asian Development Bank, FAST = Faster Approach to Small Nonsovereign Transactions, PFR = periodic financing request.  
6 ADB introduced a change to the methodology for counting the number of documents disclosed during a year. Documents with a disclosure requirement date in the following calendar year were no longer counted in the reporting year’s data. Instead, those documents will be included in the following year’s data. The disclosure rate would have been 98% using the previous methodology.
2. **Country Partnership Strategies and Regional Cooperation Strategies**

15. The Board of Directors endorsed eight country partnership strategies (CPSs) in 2019: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Georgia, Nepal, and Uzbekistan. All were disclosed within the prescribed 14-day time frame after the Board’s endorsement. If a CPS is translated into a national language, the translated version should be disclosed within 90 calendar days of Board endorsement. The Georgia CPS was translated, and the translation was disclosed within the required time frame.

16. The AIP also requires the disclosure of country or regional operations business plans within 14 days of their circulation to the Board. In 2019, all of the 27 country operations business plans circulated to the Board were disclosed on time as well as the two regional operations business plans prepared during the year.

3. **Project Documents**

17. ADB discloses information about its projects and operations to ensure that stakeholders are informed early in the project design stage and throughout implementation. In 2019, ADB posted 4,930 project documents on ADB.org, 15% more than in 2018. Project documents were downloaded 451,157 times, 6% more than in 2018.

18. ADB monitors a set of 12 key project document types to assess policy compliance (Table 1). Because these documents are required to be disclosed within certain time frames, they are good indicators of the overall level and timeliness of ADB’s project document disclosure.

19. In 2019, 1,422 project documents were required to be disclosed based on the monitored 12 key project document types. As of 31 December, 91% of these were disclosed, down from 98% in 2018 mostly because of methodological changes adopted under the AIP.7

20. Of the 1,422 disclosed project documents, 60% were disclosed on time, a slight increase from 2018’s 59% compliance—the lowest since 2012. Although the timely disclosure of sovereign documents improved from 62% to 65%, continued delays in the on-time disclosure of nonsovereign documents (down from 34% in 2018 to 17% in 2019) lowered the overall compliance rate.

21. The low timeliness compliance in 2018 was mostly because of delays in disclosing progress reports on tranche releases, project completion reports and extended annual review reports, and technical assistance (TA) reports. ADB’s efforts to improve the timeliness of these documents were successful with tranche releases improving from 20% in 2018 to 83% in 2019, project completion reports and extended annual review reports improving from 76% in 2018 to 87% in 2019, and TA reports improving from 38% in 2018 to 57% in 2019.

22. The low timeliness compliance in 2019 (Table 2) mostly stemmed from delays in posting audited project financial statements (48%), initial poverty and social analysis (42%), initial project data sheets (46%), and TA reports (57%).

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7 For the inaugural AIP annual report, ADB introduced minor changes to the methodology for counting the number of documents disclosed during a year. Documents with a disclosure requirement date in 2019 but not disclosed until early 2020 were not counted toward the 2019 total number of documents disclosed. Further, documents endorsed or approved by the Board during 2019 but with a disclosure requirement date in 2020 will be included in the 2020 data. The disclosure rate would have been 98% using the previous methodology.
23. In addition to the monitored documents, ADB routinely discloses a variety of other project documents and information throughout the project cycle to keep stakeholders informed. These include updates to project data sheets, safeguard documents, and legal agreements.

Table 2: Disclosure Timeliness of Selected ADB Project Documents
(%, as of 31 December)

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<td>1. Initial project data sheet</td>
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<td>2. Draft environmental impact assessment</td>
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<td>97</td>
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</tr>
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<td>61</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Technical assistance report</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Report and recommendation of the President, PFR report, grant assistance report, FAST report, investment facility report</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Major change report</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Progress report on tranche release</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Annual audited project financial statement</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Completion report or extended annual review report</td>
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<td>89</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OVERALL** | **59** | **77** | **71** | **73** | **61** | **63** | **59** | **60**

ADB = Asian Development Bank, FAST = Faster Approach to Small Nonsovereign Transactions, NA = not applicable, PFR = periodic financing request.

4. Other Project and Program Information

24. The Independent Evaluation Department produced 25 reports assessing country partnership validations; program and project performances; TA performances; impact, thematic, corporate, and sector-wide evaluations; and other reports. It also produced 55 evaluation reports assessing sovereign project and program completion reports and 11 evaluation reports assessing nonsovereign project and program completion reports known as extended annual review reports. All reports for sovereign project and program completion reports were disclosed on ADB.org within the prescribed time frame. The evaluation reports for nonsovereign project and program completion reports were not disclosed because they contain information that falls under one or more of the AIP’s exceptions to disclosure.
B. Requests for Information

25. In 2019, ADB received 4,209 requests for information, an increase from 4,043 in 2018, through the inquiry form on its corporate website. Of these, 3,544 (84%) were deemed valid. ADB acknowledged 69% of the valid requests within the required 7 days and responded to 83% of the valid requests within the required 30 days. ADB responded to 93% of the valid requests by the end of the year (Figure). The greatest number of requests were for project information (1,327 requests, or 37% of the total), and most of the requests came from the private sector. ADB’s Access to Information Committee—the first of a two-stage appeals process—did not receive any appeals in 2019 regarding ADB’s responses to these information requests.

![Number of Requests for Information](image)


IV. GOING FORWARD

26. ADB is committed to empowering external stakeholders by providing them with the information they need in time to understand, support, and participate in the bank’s development activities. To ensure this, ADB will continue to implement activities to improve its on-time disclosure. For example, it will continue to conduct training for all operations departments, including virtual briefings for staff in headquarters and resident missions, and send disclosure reminders internally.

27. It will also continue to automate disclosure procedures for documents that go to the Board for information or approval to ensure all Board documents are disclosed automatically unless they are classified as confidential.

28. One of the reasons cited by staff for disclosure delays is confusion over the correct format of document cover pages. In 2019, 1,095 documents submitted for disclosure—14% of all documents submitted for disclosure—were returned for incorrect cover pages. To help minimize delays, ADB is working
to automate cover pages with all the required project information for these documents. Departments have also designated focal points to monitor disclosure compliance.

29. ADB is also finalizing an e-learning module that explains the principles, exceptions, information requests, and the two-stage appeals process of the AIP; and provides detailed information on disclosure systems and requirements. The module is planned to be available to all staff in the third quarter of 2020.

30. ADB will continue to explore other initiatives to streamline the disclosure of documents and provide advisory support and strengthen staff knowledge and capacity. ADB will monitor any impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis on compliance under the AIP and seek to mitigate any such impact as appropriate.
About the Asian Development Bank

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members — 49 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.