

# Public Communications Policy 2011

Disclosure and Exchange  
of Information

HIGHLIGHTS

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# Public Communications Policy 2011<sup>1</sup>

## (effective 2 April 2012)

### Summary

**T**he Public Communications Policy of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is a living document that guides the institution's efforts to be transparent and accountable to the people it serves. The policy recognizes that transparency and accountability are essential to development effectiveness. ADB's vision of Asia and the Pacific free of poverty cannot be achieved unless ADB is aware of its stakeholders' needs and, conversely, they understand and support ADB's role and operations in the region. ([Visit \[www.adb.org/disclosure\]\(http://www.adb.org/disclosure\) to download the complete policy.](http://www.adb.org/disclosure))

The 2005 policy covers both disclosure of information and external relations, making it a comprehensive guiding document for informing and engaging with ADB members, opinion leaders and decision makers, civil society, academia, the media, and the people who may be affected by ADB activities. An essential part of ADB's institutional governance, the policy recognizes the right of people to seek, access, and impart information about ADB's operations. It also highlights the vital role of communications in driving transparency and accountability, and ultimately in improving ADB's development effectiveness.

**Review of 2005 policy.** The 2005 policy requires a comprehensive review to be conducted 5 years after its effective date. Accordingly, ADB launched a review in February 2010 to assess the policy's efficacy and recommend changes as necessary to improve and strengthen it. The review engaged interested individuals and organizations. Consultation drafts were released in June and November 2010. Extensive discussions of the policy

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<sup>1</sup> Approved by ADB's Board of Directors on 25 October 2011.

were held with a wide range of stakeholders in a number of ADB member countries within and outside Asia and the Pacific. ADB also undertook two global surveys of its stakeholders to gauge their perceptions of ADB's performance and communications. The Public Communications Policy 2011 takes into account the internal and external comments received, and the findings of the global perception surveys.

**Experience with 2005 policy.** When adopted in April 2005, the Public Communications Policy was considered progressive and at the forefront of best practices among multilateral development banks. Since then, ADB has made significant strides in its public communications. The policy brought about a major cultural change within ADB such that disclosure is now considered standard operating procedure for all ADB projects. In the 2007 *Global Accountability Report* published by One World Trust, ADB received a score of 100% on transparency good practice. ADB's external relations strategy, which supports the policy, has led to more proactive and targeted efforts to raise ADB's profile and share information about its work. ADB has significantly raised its profile in top tier media through outreach activities and public speaking engagements by Management and staff at major international forums and conferences. In addition, the number of documents posted on the ADB website has increased by 145% since 2005. Of more than 6,000 external requests for information received, ADB provided the information in 95% of the cases.

**Changing environment.** Despite much progress, ADB is committed to even greater transparency in the future. The move towards more transparency of public bodies has elevated public expectations. Recently, other multilateral development banks have adopted, or started work on, new policies on access to information that increase transparency. While in many areas ADB remains in the vanguard, there are some areas where it has fallen behind and should align the level of information disclosure with that of its comparators. ADB must also increase its efforts to ensure that the information it makes available reaches the people concerned. New technologies such as social networking and mobile applications are opening up new opportunities for ADB to reach its intended audiences. At the same time, ADB recognizes that large groups of stakeholders do not have access to technology, and therefore more traditional methods of communications remain essential. Strategy 2020, ADB's long-term strategic framework approved in 2008, acknowledges the importance of accountability, participation, and transparency in ADB's operations and activities.

**General approach and implementation affirmed.** The review concluded that the policy is fundamentally sound and has been well implemented. Thus, the thrust of the policy will not change.

**Updates to the policy.** The review identified five areas where changes are needed to keep ADB at the forefront of best practices. The primary revisions are as follows:

- **Independent appeals panel added.** In addition to the Public Disclosure Advisory Committee, which is the internal appeals mechanism for denied requests, ADB will introduce an independent appeals panel as a second tier to enhance the credibility and functioning of the appeals process.
- **Exceptions clarified.** The list of exceptions to disclosure has been clarified. Headings have been added to highlight seven types of information that are exempt from disclosure. The scope of some exceptions has been tightened by identifying the harm that disclosure of the relevant information could cause to the interests protected by the exception.
- **Increased access to Board decision making.** The majority of Board documents will be disclosed simultaneously to the public and to the Board. These include loan proposals for sovereign projects and final proposals of the regional cooperation strategies and country partnership strategies, subject to the concurrence of the member country concerned to such early disclosure, and proposals of policy and strategy papers that have undergone a public consultation process. This will increase stakeholders' participation in ADB's decision-making process. Verbatim transcripts of Board meetings may also be disclosed after 10 years, provided they do not contain or refer to any information that falls within the policy exceptions.
- **Public communications approach updated.** To support the policy, the external relations strategy set out in the 2005 paper has been streamlined to focus on public communications. ADB's public communications approach underscores the need to intensify communications with its audiences in response to evolving development challenges in Asia and the Pacific. The updated approach will ensure that ADB communications are increasingly effective and fully aligned with Strategy 2020. ADB will also respond to changing expectations of stakeholders. The public communications



approach will be better tailored to the needs of specific audiences. Engagement with affected people and other interested stakeholders throughout the project cycle will be strengthened by ensuring that essential communications and information-sharing aspects are integrated into ADB-supported projects and programs. ADB will also increase the dissemination of its knowledge products—online and in hard copy—to support the development of knowledge-based economies in the region. In addition, ADB will use other platforms such as regional and national conferences to share its knowledge products and exchange views with government officials and other key audiences.

- **Other changes.** Other revisions include language clarifications, updates, alignment with ADB’s streamlined business processes, ADB’s prerogative to restrict access to information under exceptional circumstances, and increased disclosure such as translation of project data sheets into relevant national languages for better understanding of ADB projects by in-country stakeholders, disclosure of audited project accounts, and disclosure of base salaries of Management and Board members.

**The policy.** The policy aims to enhance stakeholders’ trust in and ability to engage with ADB, and thereby enhance the development impact of ADB’s operations. The fundamentals of the policy are as follows:

- **Proactive disclosure.** ADB shall proactively share its knowledge and information about its work, as well as its opinions, with stakeholders and the public. The ADB website will be the primary vehicle for proactive disclosure. As appropriate, information may also be disclosed using other means. Proactive disclosure will follow prescribed time limits, facilitating stakeholder participation in ADB decision making. ADB shall also disclose information in response to individual requests. Unless restricted by other provisions in the policy, documents submitted to the Board for information shall be posted on the ADB website upon circulation to the Board. The majority of Board documents submitted to the Board for consideration shall be posted on the ADB website before approval or endorsement by the Board. Other Board documents shall be posted on the ADB website upon approval or endorsement by the Board.
- **Presumption in favor of disclosure.** The policy is based on a presumption in favor of disclosure. All documents that ADB produces

or requires to be produced may therefore be disclosed unless they contain information that falls within the exceptions of the policy.

- **Right to access and impart information and ideas.** ADB recognizes the right of people to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas about ADB-assisted activities. ADB shall provide information in a timely, clear, and relevant manner. Information shall be given to affected people and other stakeholders, including women, the poor, and other vulnerable groups early enough for them to provide meaningful inputs into project design and implementation. ADB shall not selectively disclose information. People will have equal access to the information that ADB makes available under the policy.
- **Country ownership.** ADB recognizes the importance of country ownership of the activities it supports in its developing member countries. Thus, before disclosing certain documents, the views of developing member countries shall be considered with regard to contents as well as timing of their disclosure.
- **Limited exceptions.** Disclosure is subject to limited exceptions. ADB will disclose all information that it produces or requires to be produced unless such information falls within the exceptions of the policy. ADB reserves the right to override the policy exceptions if it determines that the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the harm that may be caused by such disclosure. ADB also reserves the right not to disclose, under exceptional circumstances, information that it would normally disclose if it determines that such disclosure would or would be likely to cause harm that outweighs the benefit of disclosure.
- **Right to appeal.** The policy recognizes the right of those requesting information to a two-stage appeals process when they believe that ADB has denied their request in violation of its policy. To enhance the credibility of the appeals process, the second stage will be independent from ADB. An appeal may also be filed with the internal public disclosure advisory committee to override the policy exceptions that restrict access to the information requested, on the basis that the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the harm that may be caused by such disclosure.

Internal implementation arrangements will not change. However, additional resources must be committed to support the enhanced public communications efforts and the independent appeals panel.

## Results Framework for the Public Communications Policy

Design Summary	Indicators and Targets	Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms
<b>Impact</b> Improved development effectiveness	Monitored by Reform Agenda progress reports	<i>Development Effectiveness Review</i> annual reports <sup>a</sup>
<b>Outcome</b> Stakeholders' trust in, and ability to engage with, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) significantly enhanced	Improvements in stakeholders' perceptions of ADB and their assessment of ADB's openness, accountability, and partnering	Perception surveys of opinion leaders (every 3 years) Client and partnership surveys, and other stakeholder assessments Comprehensive review of the policy after 5 years
<b>Outputs</b> 1. Proactive public communications of ADB	Communications strategy for key ADB initiatives, projects, and policies developed and implemented Sustained presence in key international, regional, and national media Informative and user-friendly ADB external website maintained High-quality flagship publications produced and disseminated	Perception surveys of stakeholders (every 3 years) Public Communications Policy (PCP) annual reports Media and ADB website monitoring tools (i.e., web annual report) Purchase, downloads, and viewership of flagship publications
2. Improved access to information on ADB operations	Communications and information-sharing integrated in ADB-supported projects and programs 100% of requests for information responded to within 20 working days 100% compliance with disclosure requirements Annual increase in documents posted on the ADB website Increased high-quality translations of awareness-raising materials and other documents	PCP annual reports Information requests tracking system data on processed requests and PCP annual reports Disclosure compliance reports of Public Information and Disclosure Unit and PCP annual reports PCP annual reports

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Results Framework for the Public Communications Policy *continued*

Design Summary	Indicators and Targets	Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms
<b>Activities with Milestones</b>		
1.1 Prepare a communications plan for the policy	By the policy's effective date	Communications plan
1.2 Continually improve ADB website to meet user expectations and requirements (e.g., usability, accessibility)	Ongoing basis	External usability tests or online user surveys
2.1 Establish the independent appeals panel	By the policy's effective date	Independent appeals panel established and reported in news releases, ADB website, and PCP annual reports
2.2 Prepare, update, and disseminate staff operations manual and handbook on the policy	By the policy's effective date	Issuance of staff operations manual and handbook
2.3 Develop and disseminate borrower and client awareness-raising materials on the policy	Within 3 months of the policy's effective date	Issuance of awareness-raising material
2.4 Conduct training and awareness-raising activities on the revised PCP with staff, and relevant stakeholders	Within 1 year of policy's effective date	PCP annual reports
2.5 Update translation framework	Completed by the policy's effective date	Updated translation framework
2.6 Monitor compliance of disclosure requirements	Ongoing basis (at least annually)	Monitoring reports of Public Information and Disclosure Unit and PCP annual reports

<sup>a</sup> ADB. Development Effectiveness Review. <http://www.adb.org/defr>


Source: Asian Development Bank.

## About the Asian Development Bank

ADB's vision is an Asia and Pacific region free of poverty. Its mission is to help its developing member countries reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people. Despite the region's many successes, it remains home to two-thirds of the world's poor: 1.8 billion people who live on less than \$2 a day, with 903 million struggling on less than \$1.25 a day. ADB is committed to reducing poverty through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration.

Based in Manila, ADB is owned by 67 members, including 48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

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