



Learning and Evaluation Framework (LEF) Guide: Early Learning Assessments (ELA)

What are LEF Guides?

LEF Guides provide “how to” guidance on learning and evaluation in the Asian Infrastructure investment Bank’s (AIIB) [Learning and Evaluation Framework](#) (LEF). The [Complaints-resolution, Evaluation and Integrity Unit](#) (CEIU) issues and updates the LEF Guides, as necessary. These are stored in the CEIU portal on [Connectivity](#), the AIIB intranet and also uploaded to the AIIB website. As LEF Guides are prepared for use by Bank staff, some intranet links do not function for external readers.

I. Purpose of this Guide

1. *LEF Guide: Early Learning Assessments* (LEF Guide: ELA) applies to AIIB early learning activities conducted or commissioned by CEIU.
2. CEIU is mandated by its [Terms of Reference](#) to conduct Early Learning Assessments (ELA) that are resourced through the CEIU annual workplan and budget. CEIU undertakes ELA of selected, ongoing AIIB financings within its learning and evaluation function, guided by the [Learning and Evaluation Framework](#). These financings may be for Board-approved projects or for projects for which the Board has delegated its authority to approve to the President under the Regulation on the Accountability Framework.
3. This *Guide* outlines the process that CEIU may use to initiate, conduct, disseminate and store an ELA. It describes why the process is important and key points to consider in selecting and undertaking an ELA.

II. Responsibility for the Guide and Contacts

4. This *Guide* was approved and can be updated by the Managing Director, CEIU (MD-CEIU). Questions on its use can be directed to CEIU staff working on the LEF or the CEIU LEF email account lef@aiib.org

III. Why Early Learning Assessments?

5. As a young Bank, AIIB aims to learn quickly from its own experience and the practices of its cofinancing partners. AIIB's Corporate Strategy also calls for creation of a Bank-wide culture that values, acquires and uses learning for continued institutional improvement. CEIU also contributes to this process of deriving lessons, including by conducting ELA.
6. ELA aim to derive and share findings that help:
 - Improve AIIB's capacity to produce positive results, avoid negative outcomes, and promote timely lesson-learning and sharing to strengthen current and future projects, processes and practices.
 - Determine whether and how effectively Bank policies, the projects' (implicit) theory of change,¹ AIIB's Project Prioritization and Quality (PPQ) guidance, Project Results and Monitoring Framework, and lessons identified as relevant, are being applied.
 - Ensure projects are well placed for learning and future Project Learning Reviews after project completion (see LEF Guide: PLR).
7. ELA do so by taking a snapshot of a project in implementation to quickly capture and document high-quality, evidence-based, and useful findings and lessons. ELAs are not evaluations or project completion assessments. As such, they apply only those OECD-DAC evaluation criteria that are relevant and meaningful for each particular ELA, recognizing that the project is still in implementation and will experience further change before project completion. A full list of OECD-DAC evaluation criteria is listed in LEF Guide: ELF Evaluation Criteria.
8. Of course, project participants constantly derive their own lessons on project practices and results. CEIU ELA contribute to this process through providing a dedicated space for concentrated reflection, discussion, debate among perspectives, mutual learning, and documentation of tacit insights and experience. This process helps test and lend credibility to individual insights and turn individual learning into institutional learning.

IV. How Projects Are Selected for ELA

A. ELA Selection Considerations

9. CEIU collaborates with AIIB project teams to annually undertake ELA for selected projects to address aspects of strategic importance to AIIB's portfolio. CEIU decides on the number of ELA to be conducted each year (currently two per year) through a consultative process with Management. The Board and Management may request the addition of one or more ELA in particular years, e.g., to target timely or thematic issues.

¹ A theory of change is also referred to as a logic model or explicit design rationale. It is the representation of how an initiative [project] is expected to achieve results, together with an identification of the underlying assumptions made. A project may already have a theory of change. If not, evaluators may develop one for *ex ante* project assessment (L. Mora Imas and R. Rist. 2009. [The Road to Results](#). World Bank. Washington. pp. 150-152).

10. ELA are purposefully selected to address aspects of strategic importance to AIIB's project portfolio. CEIU has prepared and discussed ELA selection considerations with AIIB senior management² and the Board. These include:
- newly introduced instruments, procedures or practices
 - a new country
 - a new sector
 - anticipated to yield lessons
 - reflecting a high level of Bank commitment
 - of strategic interest
 - representative of a thematic cluster
 - of specific stakeholder interest, e.g., a delegated approval project
 - project disbursement (*over 20% below 70%*)³
 - maintaining balance in relation to past ELA (see past ELA listing [here](#)).
11. Initial considerations are itemized (but not ranked) to support development of an ELA short list and rationale. These considerations can be adjusted in different years to maintain some balance and avoid concentration or gaps in coverage across sectors, team leaders, sovereign or nonsovereign loans and cofinanced or stand-alone projects. Projects which are largely disbursed and with operations almost completed are not desirable for ELA. AIIB's President and the Board are informed of the final selection made by MD-CEIU.
12. Under these considerations, both AIIB Board and senior management can identify matters of particular interest within a given year or more generally. For example, selection has included one or more projects that are:
- (a) co-financed (2018 ELA)
 - (b) nonsovereign (2019)
 - (c) stand-alone (2020), financial intermediation (2020), COVID-19 crisis recovery-related (2020), or a thematic cluster of projects (2021).

V. Undertaking an ELA

13. ELA typically focus on six main questions:
- (i) Are there findings and lessons on the project's **relevance** and **strategic fit** in terms of AIIB's corporate strategy, sector strategies, and developing portfolio?
 - (ii) What are the findings and lessons from project identification, processing, due diligence, project preparedness, and monitoring, including in terms of the project's (implicit) theory of change, results monitoring framework and measurability of results (evaluability)? This will also involve looking at relevant AIIB policies or guidance for risk management, such as those relating to the Environmental and Social Policy, financial management and procurement.

² CEIU staff working on LEF typically consult the Vice-presidents for Policy and Strategy, Investment Operations, AIIB's Corporate Secretary, Chief Economist and the Advisor to the Office of the President.

³ This is indicated in the weekly Approved Investment Portfolio Disbursement information prepared by Office of the Controller.

- (iii) To what extent is project implementation proceeding in line with the expectations described in the approved Project Document (and any subsequent changes in scope)? If the project is proceeding differently to expectations, why? To what extent could such changes have been anticipated?
 - (iv) What **value-addition** or benefits is AIIB providing or gaining through participation in the project? Are there ways AIIB could derive additional benefits?
 - (v) Are there any actions, analysis, due diligence or changes which, if undertaken, could have enhanced the delivery of positive results and reduced or avoided negative outcomes?
 - (vi) What processes are in place to bring knowledge to, and derive lessons from, project identification, processing, and implementation, including for environmental and social safeguards? Have lessons or noteworthy points been identified from processing and implementation to date?
14. In addition to these six main questions, ELA remain flexible and context driven. As a result, supplementary questions can also be considered based on context and learning needs.

A. Key Steps

15. An ELA is undertaken by a CEIU ELA team. This consists of a CEIU Early Learning Assessment Coordinator (ELA Coordinator) and one or more consultant technical specialists (ELA consultant) with specific skills required for the ELA that are not present within CEIU. This use of consultants for specific inputs to ELA development and knowledge transfer reflects CEIU's lean approach to staffing. It is also based on a model of institutional learning and ownership in which consultants provide inputs and CEIU staff shape and incorporate these into their preparation of ELA outputs.
16. The ELA team prioritizes participatory approaches in carrying out an ELA to help build staff capacity, institutional memory, identification with the ELA process and its results. The ELA team works closely with present and past AIIB project team members of the selected ELA project through its Investment Operations Project Team Leader. The ELA process can engage with the client (if interested to be involved) and meet with people in the project area, where possible.

B. Terms of Reference (TOR)

17. CEIU drafts (a) the CEIU ELA coordinator (evaluation staff of CEIU) TOR and (b) a sector-specific technical consultant TOR to provide specialist inputs to the ELA process. Both TORs are discussed with the ELA Project Team Leader and related line manager(s) for clarity, transparency and coordination.

C. Consultant Recruitment

18. This step is undertaken solely by CEIU and AIIB's corporate procurement unit. Each consultant is managed by the responsible CEIU ELA coordinator.

D. Background Research

19. The ELA team collects information and conducts interviews within AIIB, with relevant peer institutions, specialists and practitioners. Based on document review and initial discussions (deskwork), the ELA team will document a proposed scope and workplan for conducting the ELA, identifying any aspects or issues that may merit a more in-depth look.
20. CEIU can access all staff and information necessary to carry out the ELA. However, for the team member's convenience and ELA efficiency, the ELA coordinator generally requests the ELA Project Team Leader to provide an initial cache of electronic project files.
21. The contracted ELA consultant is governed by AIIB's Staff Rules and Code of Conduct in relation to responsible handling of materials and information made available during the consultancy. However, the ELA coordinator will clarify the status and handling of materials provided by the project team to ensure commercial confidence.
22. The ELA team works with the Project Team Leader to carry out ELA interviews with project team members and other Bank staff in AIIB headquarters, and with other stakeholders e.g., cofinanciers, clients, consultant monitors or contractors, as needed.

E. Site Work Plans

23. Site work plans are developed based on document review and initial discussions (deskwork). The ELA team documents a proposed scope of work for the ELA, identifying any aspects or issues that may merit a more in-depth look. This is discussed with the project team leader to jointly develop a schedule of visits to client(s), contractors, government agencies, project service providers, project area communities and field sites. The ELA team can hold meetings together with the project team or independently. Site visits also involve discussions with men, women and children living in the project area, according to the nature of the particular project.

F. Initial Report Drafting

24. The ELA team drafts an initial report using the CEIU ELA report template (Annex 1). A concise draft report will identify key lessons and pertinent findings from the six questions above.

VI. ELA Discussion and Dissemination

25. The greatest mutual learning from ELA occurs in preparation and review of the ELA discussion paper by different groups within AIIB. This typically involves:
 - (i) **Project team review.** The ELA team circulates an ELA discussion draft for comment by the project Team and their managers, led by Investment Operations. This process results in areas of agreement or clarification, and possibly also points of difference.
 - (ii) **Management review.** The ELA team prepares and submits an advanced draft to AIIB's Executive Committee (ExCom) or Management Committee for report

consideration and discussion of any different perspectives. Based on feedback from the Executive Committee/Management Committee, CEIU finalizes the ELA report for consideration by the Policy and Strategy Committee (PSC) of AIIB's Board, which meets quarterly.

(iii) **PSC review and acceptance.** The final draft ELA report is circulated to the AIIB PSC and the ELA team may receive written pre-meeting questions from PSC Members. The ELA team presents report key findings during the PSC and responds to PSC Member remarks and questions.

26. The PSC Chair reports on the PSC Meeting discussion of the ELA report at the full Board Meeting, with the ELA Team in attendance. Project team members may also join this meeting and their managers may comment or be requested by Board members to offer thoughts on the draft report.

A. Dissemination of ELA

27. ELA draw on internal information of AIIB, project client and possibly cofinanciers. The AIIB Board has determined that final ELA reports are deliberative documents of AIIB and are not publicly disclosed.
28. Final reports and findings are circulated and presented to all AIIB participants at a dissemination meeting convened by the Vice-Presidents for Investment Operations. These aim to create a "safe space" for learning that is the primary objective of the ELA approach. Lessons are also disseminated through staff induction and other training, briefs, and seminars.
29. ELA reports are accessible to all AIIB staff through the [CEIU portal](#) on the AIIB intranet. CEIU staff remain available to discuss ELA findings and will progressively extract ELA insights into a lessons-learned database.

B. Associated Knowledge Sharing

30. CEIU Terms of Reference for ELA consultants may include the requirement to present one or more CEIU Practitioner Dialogues to interested Bank staff on topics related to the project and ELA findings.
31. ELA consultants are also encouraged to draw on their resources to introduce networks, specialists and resources in peer financing and research institutions to assist CEIU and project staff in networking and capacity building.

ANNEX 1: SAMPLE ELA REPORT TEMPLATE



**ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE
INVESTMENT BANK**

PDXXXXXX-XXX
Month, Year

**Discussion draft: Early Learning Assessment (ELA) for the
Country
PROJECT**

**Early Learning Assessments are deliberative documents
of the Board and are not for external circulation.**

**[NOTE: A representative project-related image may be inserted
(consider LEF ethical guidance here in choice of image).]**

Abbreviations

1. Introduction to the xxx Project

1. ...

1. Lesson:

2. ...

2. Lesson:

3. ...

Annex 1: Early Learning Assessment (ELA) Methodology

4. **Aim.** AIIB ELA derive lessons for improved operations in current projects and future programming. In particular, they:

- review experience from processing and implementation of a selected project
- consider added value that AIIB has brought to and derived from the project
- identify lessons that could enhance future AIIB financing of a similar project, including its due diligence
- inform approaches to project-based learning and assessment of future financings

5. **Selection.** Each year AIIB Senior Management considers project disbursement rates and pre-determined ELA selection criteria to identify financings of strategic importance for AIIB's project portfolio.

6. **Participants and activities.** The xxx ELA was undertaken by staff and consulting resources from the Complaints-resolution, Evaluation and Integrity Unit (CEIU) in close cooperation with AIIB's xxx project team. This group undertook a xxx-day field visit to xxx (date) for observation and discussions. Interviews were held with the following institutions and staff:

- xxx
- xxx

7. Meetings were also requested with the xxx. However, these did not eventuate due to xxx.

- 8. Discussions were held with AIB staff involved in the Program from investment operations, safeguards, legal, procurement, financial control, operational and financial risk and workouts. Electronic meetings were also held with **xxx**.

Annex 2: Project Chronology of Key Events

YEAR	MONTH / DAY	KEY EVENTS (AIB Activities in blue)