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After Action Review: Lesson Learned

(<project name>)

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**Notes to the author:**

This template offers guidance to the author, boiler plate text and fields that should be replaced with elements specific to the pilot or programme:

* guidance is in **blue** and can be removed from the completed template
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# Contents

[Contents 2](#_Toc129611466)

[1. Purpose of After-Action Review 3](#_Toc129611467)

[1.1 Description 3](#_Toc129611468)

[1.2 After Action Review Summary 4](#_Toc129611469)

[1.3 Who should use After Action Review? 4](#_Toc129611470)

[2. After Action Review Guidance 4](#_Toc129611471)

[2.1 Planning an After-Action Review 5](#_Toc129611472)

[2.2 Organising the AAR discussion. 5](#_Toc129611473)

[2.3 Conducting an After-Action Review 6](#_Toc129611474)

[2.4 Sharing the AAR Results 6](#_Toc129611475)

[3.0 After Action Review Report Template 7](#_Toc129611476)

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| **Key Pilot Information** | |
| **Flexible Learning Programme Workstream** | **E.g., Lifelong Learning** |
| **Faculty / School / Dept** | x-University |
| **Pilot Start Date:**  **Pilot End Date: ￼** | 2022  31 December 2025 |

# 1. Purpose of After-Action Review

## 1.1 Description

A simple, but powerful method for rapid post-project assessment. After-Action Review is useful for assessing a project during and after its completion. Sharing the results from your after action can help teams learn your successful strategies and avoid pitfalls you have worked to overcome.

AARs (After Action Review) can work across the following areas.

* Assessment
  + What was expected to happen?
  + What actually happened?
  + What went well and why?
  + What can be improved and how?
* Analysis
  + What were the successes and failures of the pilot project?
  + What were the contributing factors to the success or failure?
  + What lessons were learned during the pilot project?
  + How can the project be improved?
* Evaluation
  + Were the goals and aims of the pilot project met?
  + How did the stakeholders react to the project?
  + What were the key performance indicators (KPIs) used to measure the success of the project?
  + What was the return on investment (ROI) of the project?
* Recommendations
  + What are the recommendations for future projects?
  + How can the team apply the lessons learned to future projects?
  + What are the key takeaways from the pilot project?
  + What are the next steps for the project?

This guide will focus on assessment but may develop the guide to include other areas as needed.

## 1.2 After Action Review Summary

Organisational learning requires that teams continuously assess their performance to identify and learn from successes and failures. The After-Action Review (AAR) is a simple but powerful tool to help you do this. Conducting an AAR at the end of a project, pilot or event can help you and your team capture your learning for wider organisation benefit. Sharing the results from your AAR can help future teams learn your successful strategies and avoid pitfalls you have worked to overcome.

An AAR in its assessment form is centred on four questions: What was expected to happen? What occurred? What went well and why? What can be improved and how? An effective AAR’s characteristics include: An open and reflective discussion that includes multiple perspectives from a team. A focus on ways to sustain, replicate and scale what was done well and the development of recommendations on ways to overcome obstacles.

## 1.3 Who should use After Action Review?

This tool is for all teams who want to focus on experimentation and learning to support strategic implementation of continuous improvement. Regardless of project outcomes, there are always successes to document and lessons to learn. The entire project team should attend the AAR as everyone’s voice counts. When should we use the AAR tool? This tool can guide your team in conducting an AAR shortly after a project or program ends. The same approach can also be used with less structure or formality midway through a project for the benefit of the team if the work isn’t progressing as the group would like. What time and resources do we need to use this tool? Formal AARs are ideally conducted with a facilitator, while spontaneous or informal AARs can be led by a member of the project team. The time needed to conduct an AAR varies. A formal review may take 1 to 2 hours. Informal AARs may be conducted in whatever time your team can allot. A conversation as short as 15 minutes might find barriers to your progress and strategies to overcome them.

# 2. After Action Review Guidance

This guide will help you to conduct a formal After-Action Review. An AAR should include:

###### advanced planning

###### a facilitator who, ideally, is not a member of the team

###### a report that captures the lessons learned

Once the team has decided to conduct an AAR, the facilitator (or responsible team member) should schedule the session, ideally, within 2 weeks of project completion. For best results: Conduct the team meeting in person, rather than by Teams. Ensure participation with a mix of team members If an outside facilitator is being used, he/she should meet with the team leader to become familiar with the work before conducting the session.

## 2.1 Planning an After-Action Review

Once the team has decided to conduct an AAR, the facilitator (or responsible team member) should schedule the session, ideally, within 2 weeks of project completion.

If an outside facilitator is being used, he/she should meet with the team leader to become familiar with the work before conducting the session. How much time should we plan for our AAR? The time you allot for your AAR will depend on a variety of factors, including the critical nature of the event or project and the resources available to your team (including the availability of team members). It is recommended that you set aside a time equal to 20 minutes per team member. If necessary, the review can be continued on a second meeting day.

Should we have an outside facilitator? Outside facilitators may be more effective. They are less likely to get caught up in the content of the conversation and can encourage all team members to take part in the conversation. If there is not an external facilitator available, a team member can fill this role. When a team member serves as a facilitator, it is important to ensure that they take part in the discussion as both facilitator and team member. Self-facilitation is a little tricky but with proper attention, it can be done successfully.

#### Meeting roles

Note taker: Assign a team member to take notes on the flip charts. If the AAR is an hour or longer, consider having team members rotate this job so everyone can take part fully.

Timekeeper: Assign times to the sections of the AAR in advance and ask someone to play the role of timekeeper (this is important - it is easy for groups to get lost in conversation and not have time to cover all sections of the review)

## 2.2 Organising the AAR discussion.

There are several approaches that can be used to organize the AAR discussion. The facilitator should consider the options and choose an approach before the session. By key events, themes, or issues When there is a logical set of themes or events, it may be useful to organise an AAR discussion around them.

If this is not possible look at the chronology of events. When there is not a logical choice of themes or events, a chronological review can be easy to structure and understand. It follows the flow of the activity from start to finish. By covering actions in the order, they took place, participants may more easily recall what happened.

## 2.3 Conducting an After-Action Review

###### Introducing and “setting up” the AAR

The task of the facilitator (or AAR leader) is to guide the group through a review of the project, using a standard set of questions:

###### What was expected to happen?

###### What did happen?

###### What went well and why?

###### What can be improved and how?

Start by reminding the team of the purpose and context of this meeting:

###### The goal is to guide and improve the work of future project teams.

###### The AAR does not grade success or failure.

###### There are always weaknesses to improve and strengths to sustain.

###### Participants should share honest observations about what actually happened without assigning blame or praise.

## 2.4 Sharing the AAR Results

The greatest benefit of an AAR comes from applying the lessons learned to future work and teams. The AAR Report Template offers a format for summarising the findings of your AAR. Some steps a team leader or facilitator can take to increase the likelihood of having an impact on future work include Provide a clear summary of concrete and actionable recommendations that will improve the process. Identifying tasks and topics requiring leadership attention. Share the AAR report with your governance group or other right person or fora.

# 3.0 After Action Review Report Template

Background:

Team/Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Project/Event Reviewed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Review: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

##### Participants

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Role Title | Role in Team |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

##### Summary

##### What was expected to happen?

##### What did happen?

|  |
| --- |
| Please provide a summary of your project or event |
|  |

##### What went well and why?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Successes | How to Support Success in the Future |
|  |  |
|  |  |

##### What can be improved and how?

What could have been done better? What can we do differently in similar situations in the future to ensure success? What would be your advice to future project teams?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What can be improved | Recommendations |
|  |  |
|  |  |