CONTINUITY COUNCIL

QUICK GUIDE

After Action Report and Improvement Planning Guide

Purpose

After Action Report (AAR) Purpose

An after-action review (AAR) is a way of assessing how well an exercise or disruption response met the goals and needs of the organization and where it helped to identify gaps where additional development could make the plan more useful and easier to use in the future.

While the name implies that the assessment is completed only at the end of a disruption, for a long-term disruption, regular mid-term "after"-action check ins should be conducted to ensure that valuable input isn't lost over time.

Example: A work-around may have been cobbled together a week into the disruption that made workers less frustrated, but if their initial aggravation or reduced capabilities aren't documented a permanent solution cannot be analyzed to improve the response during the next event.

There are templates online that can be used to structure your after-action plan, but you will need to tailor the format a bit for each individual event. Drill down to root needs or causes to ensure you find a solution that works.

When building your AAR plan goals outline:

- What was expected to happen?
- What actually occurred?
- What went well and why?
- What can be improved and how?
- What will this cost (and how much will that investment save in money, time, and experience)?
- Your purpose and objectives
- Your audience
- A timeline of events
- A list of involved parties
- Your desired outcomes or products produced
- Expected barriers

Conducting an After-Action Report (AAR) Meeting

Conversation should be held with all personnel to their capture perspective on gaps, frustrations, successes, ideas, and potential solutions. Face-to-face communications should be used whenever possible, though surveys and other materials may also be useful. All members of staff should be invited to participate. This will allow you the best chance of understanding issues and determining solutions and will also ensure the continuity culture within your organization stays active.

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 (objective data) without assigning blame or praise. No one has all of the information or answers. Everybody has something important to contribute.
- Set an atmosphere of openness. If necessary, you can introduce ground rules or expectations for the session.
- Ask for unexpected results and discuss their impact.

Questions to help elicit useful information:	Sample ground rules for conducting an AAR
What went well and why? Given the information we had at the time, what could have been done better? Given the knowledge we have not, what are we going to do differently in the future to improve success? What would your advice be to future teams based on your experience here?	Active participation is encouraged. Everyone's views have equal value. Be creative in proposing solutions to barriers. No blame is assigned/no fault environment. Consensus should be reached where possible. No record of the discussion or quotes will be distributed without express permission. Be open to new ideas and feedback.

After Action Report: Format and Documenting

After Action Reports can be in a number of formats but should include

- Title/disruption name
- Date and time the disruption/exercise occurred
- Who participated in the event and who participated in the AAR meeting
- Synopsis of the event/disruption
- Analysis of the event and completion of objectives/goals
- At least three lessons learned
- At least three things which went well
- Agreed upon areas for improvement
- Actions to be taken for improvement and who is responsible for them

Find After Action Report templates here:

Maryland OEM Template

FEMA Disaster Specific AAR

HSEEP Template AAR

FEMA Preparedness Toolkit

HSEEP Program Information

HSEEP Youtube Videos

Improvement Plans from your After-Action Report (AAR)

Once you have identified where improvements can be made, assign responsibility for follow up to use the subject matter expertise available to you on each topic. Schedule follow up meetings to ensure the work is completed.

All of this information is then used to develop plan improvements, establish future training and exercise topics, and update the multi-year strategic plan and budget proposal.

Corrective Action Example from FEMA L1302 Continuity Program Management Course

Problem/ Issue	Current backup server is inaccessible at alternate location.	**Documentation**	• Alternate Location Functional Exercise May 2019
Solution	Purchase and install redundant server specially for essential records that can be accessed remotely and from alternate location.	**POC**	• IT Manager • Backup: Essential Records Manager
Comments	Current budget year does not support the purchase of the server. FY20: Purchase server rack FY21: Purchase server	**Milestones**	• December 2019: Purchase / install server rack • February 2020: Purchase / install server • July 2020: Run server test • Final: September 2021

FEMA Continuous Improvement Planning Toolkit