



After Action Review

Powerful in all situations

Highly recommended in all situations

Highly recommended in some situations

Purpose: Assessment of successes, challenges, and learnings.

When to use: As soon as possible post-convening and as an ongoing tool during a system change programme.

Who is this for: Convener(s) and facilitator(s).

The After Action Review (AAR) is a structured process for assessing the outcomes of an intervention, and identifies areas for improvement for those involved in the planning, design and delivery of the convening. It was originally developed by the U.S. Army, but its use has extended to the business and social change sectors as a knowledge management tool and a way to build a culture of accountability.

For further considerations on assessing the success of the convening itself, its wider impact and nurturing ongoing relationships, see [Module 8, Assessing Impact](#).

Benefits

AAR provides an opportunity to the conveners as well as the facilitators to review both successes and challenges during the convening and to discuss the learnings together as a group to create a growth mind-set and help to improve future convenings. Furthermore, sharing the results from AAR can help future teams learn successful strategies and avoid pitfalls you have worked to overcome.

Potential challenges

Considering AAR as negative criticism or fault-finding activity: this requires creating understanding among participants on the purpose and benefit of the AAR. Participants need to understand that AAR is not a session to blame or appreciate someone. It is simply to learn from what happened, so what worked well can be sustained and what did not can be improved.

Biases: the team may focus only on the successes of the convening and miss the opportunity to learn from the experience. For effective results participants have to be open and honest. It is not a space to critique or complain, but to maximise their experience and to learn from each other.

Participation: outspoken persons may influence the discussion, but people might have a different perspective, and everybody might have something important to contribute. Give equal opportunity to all team members to speak and encourage those who are shy and remain passive.

Disagreements: the learning session might lead to divergent perspectives on issues. In cases of disagreements, try to build consensus or maintain both perspectives in the report.



How to use

Step 1 | Organising AAR team

Unless you are the only one organising and facilitating the convening, include everyone involved in organising the convening during the discussion. It might be useful to invite a representative from convening participants on the AAR. The discussion can be facilitated by the convener or the facilitator. Assign a note taker to capture discussion points.

Assign roles for follow up

The team leader and facilitator should discuss in advance the process for writing up the AAR outcomes. Share this with the team, ask for volunteers if desired. Clarify for the team who will receive copies of the exercise.

Step 2 | Guiding the AAR discussion

This part of the meeting will be a conversation. Make sure that the team clearly understands the purpose of the exercise. There are two options: asking the probing questions and let the conversation develop; or, if the team is more subdued, identifying the issues first and then choosing the ones to work on as a team. You may also consider giving time for each person to answer the questions individually as preparation for the session or before opening the discussion.

Start the discussion by asking the following guiding questions in this order:

1. What was supposed to happen?
2. What did actually happen?
3. What did you learn?
4. What will you do differently next time?

See suggested guiding questions on page 3 and a template for the exercise on page 4.

Step 3 | Closing the AAR discussion

To close the AAR session, summarise the key points identified during the discussion. The session should end on a positive note, linking observations to recommendations for future improvements. Let the team know what the plans are for reporting and sharing the lessons learned during the AAR.

Step 4 | Implementing the recommended actions

The ultimate goal of AAR is not only assessing the successes and challenges of the convening. It requires sharing of learnings and implementation of any and all recommendations identified during the AAR process based on the context of the convening. The recommendations should be considered when the next convening is planned.



Guiding the AAR discussion

What was supposed to happen?	What did actually happen?
Start by asking what the project team originally set out to do. Encourage details. Some useful prompts include: › What was the purpose and objectives? (Refer back to Module 1, Purpose-Led Convening) › Who did we want to engage? › What was the original timeframe? › What outcomes and outputs were intended? › What decisions were to be made? › What enablers and barriers were expected? › What gender and inclusion issues were anticipated?	It is important that AAR participants focus on what transpired without determining what was good and what was bad. It is also important that full participation is encouraged so that everyone can add their perspective of what happened. Resolve inconsistencies in the story and/or fill in gaps in the story. Tips include: › Give participants a couple of minutes to think before anyone speaks. › To get maximum participation from the group, try going around the room to give everyone a chance to speak or asking quieter members for their ideas first. › Focus on the facts. Feelings need to be acknowledged, but future recommendations have to be based on agreed facts. › Ask them to give specific examples.
What did we learn?	What will we do differently next time?
It is important for the AAR team leader to help the team look into the reasons behind its success and specify the contributing factors and circumstances that could be used and adapted by other teams in similar situations. Always start with the good points. Some useful prompts include: › What were the successful steps taken towards achieving your objective? › What went really well in the convening? › What should we be seeking to build on?	Identify the stumbling blocks and pitfalls, so they can be avoided in the future. Any recommendations should be practical actions that can be implemented. Some useful prompts include: › What were the successful steps taken towards achieving your objective? › What went really well in the convening? › What should we be seeking to build on?



After action review

What was supposed to happen?	What did actually happen?
What did we learn?	What will we do differently next time?