Instructions for After Action Review Survey (Public)

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After Action Reviews (AARs) are a best practice for knowledge sharing and learning. As described on the BetterEvaluation website, an After Action Review is a simple tool to facilitate an assessment of organisational performance by bringing together a team to discuss a task, event, or activity, in an open and honest fashion.[1]

I. The After Action Review Survey

These instructions are for administering a simple After Action Review survey. The AAR survey takes the basic questions of an After Action Review and includes them in a Google survey form for AAR participants to complete and submit. As a result, it differs from the typical AAR due to its reliance on individual written responses instead of in-person (or virtual) interactive facilitated discussion. It also differs from a typical survey due to its inclusion of typical AAR questions and mostly narrative response options for these questions.

An example **After Action Review survey form template** can be found here on USAID Learning Lab: https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/after-action-review-survey

Interactive After Action Reviews are generally preferable to an After Action Review survey. The AAR survey is offered here as a *substitute* for an interactive AAR (when an interactive AAR is not feasible or otherwise advisable) or as a way to *complement* an interactive AAR. As a complement to an interactive AAR, possible options for the AAR survey include:
1. Administering the survey *prior to* the interactive AAR in order to generate content that may be discussed in more depth at the interactive AAR;
2. Administering the survey *after* the interactive AAR in order to provide another opportunity to articulate ideas not expressed at the interactive AAR or to express ideas generated after reflecting on the interactive AAR process; or
3. Administering the survey for individuals who were unable to attend the interactive AAR.

II. Steps to Administer an After Action Review Survey
1. Identify the Task/Event/Activity that is the focus of the AAR.
2. Identify the individuals who will receive the AAR survey and obtain their email addresses.
3. Adapt the example **After Action Review survey form template** for your specific AAR.
   a. Copy the text from the example AAR survey form and save it in a Google Form (or other simple online survey tool). Use the "Paragraph" question type in Google Forms for most of the main questions in the AAR survey.
   b. Add the name of the task/event/activity that is the focus of the AAR in the title of the survey form.
   c. Edit the introduction with relevant details of the task/event/activity, purpose of AAR, expectations regarding anonymity and confidentiality, and how the results will be used. *Tip: Be as clear as possible in the introduction if you are going to share access to response data or if you are going to share verbatim responses. Many people have a default expectation (based on previous experiences with surveys) that all surveys are anonymous and that only summarized data will be shared, not individual responses.*

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[1] The summary of After-Action Reviews on the BetterEvaluation website is based on Ramalingam, B. (2006) *Tools for Knowledge and Learning*, ODI Toolkit. London: ODI. (https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/188.pdf)

d. Add or edit specific demographic questions. *Tip: Only include demographic questions that you will actually use in post-survey analysis.*

e. Add or edit specific After-Action Review questions. *Tip: Don't be tempted to add too many questions. A longer survey may lower your response rate. Keep it short and simple.*

4. After the task/event/activity that is the subject of the AAR, send an email to identified respondents with a link to the survey form and a deadline for completion. *Tip: Send the email as soon as possible after the task/event/activity and give no more 2-3 days to respond so that the respondents' reactions are easily recalled.*

5. Send a reminder email 24 hours before the deadline. *Tip: Extend the deadline another day or two if the response rate is low when the deadline is reached.*

6. Close the survey.

7. Share results. Options for results presentations include:

a. Easy report version: Share a link to the full set of responses (no additional work required). If choosing this option, be sure to make it clear in the introduction of the survey that access to the response data will be shared.

b. Simple report version: Pull verbatim results and default graphs into a document and share (minimal work required).

c. Analytic report version: This could take a variety of forms. It may include, for instance, separating verbatim responses by demographic category and summarizing the main themes from the responses (moderate to extensive work required).

Tip: Keep the analysis limited. This is not a tool designed to generate data for statistical analysis or in-depth qualitative coding. The value of this tool comes as much from obtaining a single individual response that makes a salient point as it does from getting a general summary of the respondents' perspectives.

III. What are the potential benefits of an After Action Review Survey?

- It can often be difficult to convene participants in person (or even virtually) due to scheduling difficulties, different locations and time-zones, etc. After Action Review surveys don't require convening.

- The After Action Review survey is easy to administer. It does not do not require facilitation skills, note-taking, or synchronous summarization of respondent statements. It also does not require familiarity with technology necessary for virtual After Action Review discussions (such as Google Meet).

- After Action Review surveys can help avoid well-known obstacles to successful AAR meetings, such as dominating participants, groupthink, etc.

- After Action Review surveys can help elicit responses from individuals who might be less likely to speak-up in an After Action Review meeting.

- After Action Review surveys require participants to write down their answers to AAR questions. This ensures that you are accurately and transparently capturing participant responses.

- After Action Review surveys can easily add some quantifiable data to an After Action Review.

IV. What are the potential downsides to an After Action Review Survey?

- Surveys don't benefit from positive interactive dynamics of After Action meetings (such as participants noting when they agree or disagree with points made by others and the possibility of reaching consensus on issues of importance).

- There is very little flexibility in surveys. Once it is written and distributed, you can't adapt it based on responses in real-time like a facilitator can during an interactive AAR. It is much harder to ask follow-up questions to a survey than in person.

- Writing out responses to an After Action Review survey can be harder or less interesting for some participants to complete compared to showing up to an AAR meeting, leading to lower response/participation rates.
- Participants may be more comfortable skipping a survey than they are with skipping an AAR meeting, leading to lower response/participation rates.
- AAR surveys are not as instantaneous as some interactive AARs. (Interactive AARs can occur right after the completion of an event and report development can start as soon as the AAR meeting is over). AAR surveys typically allow for some time to respond, which can lead to recall problems with participants and longer time to complete the report.
- AAR surveys require email addresses of all participants.
- Depending on decisions made about the AAR survey, the analysis and presentation of the results could be more work compared to an interactive AAR.