

# After-Action Review (AAR) Template

For Government Programs, Policy Implementation, and Organizational Change

## Purpose

This After-Action Review (AAR) provides a structured, non-attributional method for government managers to assess what occurred, why it occurred, and how future execution can be improved. It is intended to support mission effectiveness, leadership decision-making, and continuous improvement, not compliance or fault-finding.

This AAR may be conducted following:

- Policy or regulatory changes
- Program or project milestones
- Organizational or workforce transitions
- IT/system implementations
- Acquisition or contract execution phases
- Pilot efforts or process changes

---

## Section 1: Background & Context

*(Establishes shared understanding and avoids hindsight bias)*

Initiative / Change Title:

Sponsoring Organization / Office:

Timeframe Reviewed:

Primary Stakeholders Affected:

Operational Environment:

(e.g., staffing constraints, external mandates, competing priorities, budget pressures)

Manager Prompt:

What conditions existed at the time decisions were made that are important to remember now?

## Section 2: Original Intent and Expectations

*(Clarifies purpose before evaluating performance)*

- What problem or requirement was this initiative intended to address?
  - What outcomes or improvements were expected (mission, performance, compliance, efficiency)?
  - What assumptions were made about capacity, timing, resources, or stakeholder readiness?
  - What did “success” look like at the outset?
- 

## Section 3: What Actually Occurred

*(Separates facts from interpretation)*

- What happened during execution?
- What milestones were met as planned?
- Where did execution diverge from expectations?
- What unanticipated outcomes—positive or negative—emerged?

Evidence to Consider:

Metrics, timelines, deliverables, feedback, observed behaviors, operational impacts

---

## Section 4: Analysis — Why Outcomes Differed

*(Moves beyond symptoms to causes)*

Consider which factors meaningfully influenced outcomes:

- Leadership & Decision-Making:  
Clarity of authority, timeliness of decisions, consistency of direction
- Communication & Alignment:  
Message clarity, cadence, stakeholder understanding, feedback loops
- People & Capability:  
Skill alignment, workload, turnover, training adequacy

- Resources & Constraints:  
Funding, staffing, tools, time, external dependencies
- Processes & Governance:  
Policies, approvals, coordination mechanisms, handoffs

Manager Prompt:

Which factors were within leadership control, and which were structural or external?

---

### Section 5: What Worked Well (Sustain)

*(Protects effective practices from being lost)*

- Practices, processes, or decisions that supported mission success
- Leadership behaviors that built trust, clarity, or momentum
- Tools, communication methods, or coordination approaches worth repeating

Action:

Identify what should be intentionally sustained or institutionalized.

---

### Section 6: What Needs Adjustment (Improve)

*(Focuses on actionable improvement)*

For each improvement area, specify:

- Issue Identified:
- Recommended Adjustment:
- Owner (Role or Office):
- Target Timeframe:
- Expected Impact:

Prioritize improvements that will have the greatest effect on execution quality, not just ease of implementation.

---

### Section 7: Risks, Dependencies, and Second-Order Effects

*(Encourages strategic thinking)*

- What risks were revealed that should be monitored going forward?
  - What dependencies (internal or external) affected outcomes?
  - What second-order effects (workforce morale, workload shifts, stakeholder trust) were observed?
- 

## Section 8: Key Lessons for Future Efforts

*(Converts experience into guidance)*

- What should leaders do earlier, differently, or more deliberately next time?
  - What guidance would you offer another manager facing a similar situation?
  - What assumptions should be challenged in future planning?
- 

## Section 9: Close-Out & Accountability

AAR Facilitated By:

Date Conducted:

Participants:

Follow-Up Review Planned? (Yes / No)

Where Lessons Will Be Captured or Shared:

(e.g., SOP updates, leadership forums, training, playbooks)

---

## Leadership Guidance

An effective AAR:

- Focuses on systems and decisions, not individuals
- Encourages professional candor and reflection
- Produces clear, owned follow-up actions
- Strengthens future execution and leader credibility



AARs are most valuable when they are treated as a leadership discipline, not an administrative task.