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Preparedness&Response
ONE HEALTH IN ACTION

Disease Outbreak After-Action Review Toolkit



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INTRODUCTION

An after-action review (AAR) is a leadership and knowledge-sharing tool that fosters collective learning for enhanced capacity and performance. Learning from experience is essential to support preparedness and response capacity and performance, and the knowledge gleaned from AARs can be used in planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating similar efforts.

A disease outbreak AAR follows an outbreak investigation or emergency response. AARs are qualitative exercises that enable multiple stakeholder groups to review what happened during the outbreak, assess their response against performance standards, and agree on necessary actions to improve performance, and, subsequently, response outcomes. It is particularly important to better understand the performance of the national One Health platform in promoting a One Health response during the outbreak. The AAR provides a good opportunity for the platform to assess its contribution to the outbreak response against its mandate and agree on actions to address capacity gaps or improve performance.

The AAR's scope is determined largely by the nature and magnitude of the outbreak as well as the perceived learning opportunities. A clearly defined scope and objectives drive the AAR agenda, and determine the format and learning outcomes that can be expected.

This toolkit will guide One Health Platform representatives through the process of planning and executing an AAR following a disease outbreak. In addition to an explanation of and step-by-step process for an AAR, this toolkit also contains helpful tips and important considerations in the text boxes placed throughout the document.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

The step-by-step process described below provides an overview of the different phases of the AAR process. Each phase overview also includes timeline suggestions and tasks for the representative from the National One Health Platform (NOHP) and the facilitator. A list of the AAR tools contained within this toolkit is presented in the text box to the right. The tools within this toolkit are designed to be adaptable to different country contexts, outbreak investigations, and emergency responses.

▶ AAR OBJECTIVES

The objectives of a disease outbreak AAR are for the stakeholders to:

- Review what happened during the public health event and response activities
- Examine the roles and performance in the outbreak response
- Determine how the stakeholder groups can improve preparedness and response outcomes
- Agree on actions necessary to achieve improved outcomes

The disease outbreak AAR aims to answer the following questions:

- To what extent did the stakeholder groups perform as per relevant strategies/protocols?
- How did the stakeholder groups collaborate to promote a One Health/multisectoral response? What was the outcome?
- Where and how can the stakeholder groups respond differently for an improved outcome?

▶ AAR TOOLS

This toolkit contains the following tools, which can be adapted for each country's specific context:

- Facilitator SOW
- AAR meeting agenda
- PowerPoint for use during AAR
- AAR Report Outline



STEP I: DEFINING THE SCOPE

To ensure that the approach is appropriate for each individual situation, a first step in the process of preparing for an AAR involves assembling relevant background materials and adapting and customizing a scope of work for the activity based on the desired learning outcomes.

Research and background materials should inform AAR preparation and adaptation of tools to ensure that the AAR is based on pertinent and accurate information. The NOHP representative is responsible for collecting background materials (which may include SitReps) from the outbreak as well as any documentation on the platform's response activities. Other useful materials may include information-sharing memoranda of understanding, One Health policies, the One Health strategy, and protocols, among other documents. When collecting materials, the NOHP representative should consider gender-related perspectives that may be important in the AAR (see text box).

Once the NOHP representative has finished collecting materials, the facilitator will review all materials as well as the AAR tools. After this review, the facilitator and NOHP representative should agree on specific AAR objectives, discussion questions, and the AAR report outline. Once they reach agreement on these foundational elements, the facilitator and NOHP representative should adapt and finalize the AAR agenda and PowerPoint template.

GENDER CONSIDERATIONS

- Does documentation collected for the AAR capture sex-disaggregated data?
- Are other sector- or disease-specific gender analyses available that may be relevant to the review?

Three Weeks Before

1. NOHP representative(s) develop a SOW based on the desired learning outcomes.
2. Hire a facilitator (see the [Facilitator SOW](#)).

Two Weeks Before

1. NOHP representative gathers relevant background data and documents.
2. Facilitator reviews background materials and AAR tools.
3. NOHP representative and facilitator consult with key stakeholders to agree on specific objectives, discussion questions, and the [AAR report outline](#).

One Week Before

1. NOHP representative and facilitator adapt [AAR agenda](#) and [PowerPoint](#).



STEP 2: IDENTIFYING PARTICIPANTS AND CONFIRMING LOGISTICS

Once the scope and objectives of the AAR have been determined, work closely with government partners and other key stakeholders to identify who should be present at the AAR and set a date that accommodates participation from key individuals. Participants should include representatives from all relevant One Health sectors. Special consideration should be given to ensuring a balanced gender perspective among participants, as well as the inclusion of vulnerable groups (see text box).

The NOHP representative and facilitator should work together to specify and confirm the logistical details surrounding the AAR meeting.

Three Weeks Before

1. NOHP representative confirms AAR date and secures appropriate venue.
2. NOHP representative coordinates with government partners to extend invitations to participants.

One – Two Weeks Before

1. NOHP representative confirms participant attendance

Three – Five Days Before

1. Facilitator visits the venue, ensures proper room setup, and tests equipment.
2. NOHP representative prints relevant materials for distribution and obtains all necessary supplies for the AAR meeting.

▶ GENDER CONSIDERATIONS

- What opportunities exist to identify and invite women and members of other affected groups to the AAR, either in-person or through pre-workshop surveys?
- Can gender (or women's) ministry representatives, gender focal points, or other gender experts (women or men) participate in the AAR to deepen the discussion of any gender disparities in the response?
- What are the barriers to including diverse population groups? What can be done to better engage them in future activities?

STEP 3: EXECUTING THE AAR

The AAR meeting is structured as a facilitated one-day workshop where participants review what happened, what was learned, and what actions should be taken. The facilitator is responsible for the overall management of the actual AAR meeting, ensuring inclusive participation for a balanced and comprehensive outcome. A note taker is needed to assist the facilitator during the event to record discussions, including important timelines, lessons learned, and agreements. The [AAR meeting agenda](#) and accompanying [PowerPoint](#) are organized as follows:

Introductions

The AAR typically begins with a key government representative (e.g. the One Health platform chair) formally opening the meeting. The chair will underline the collaborative nature of the AAR by asking participants to introduce themselves and to describe their affiliations and roles in the outbreak investigation or emergency response.

Chronological Timeline of Events and Facilitated Look Back

The workshop will then lead participants in establishing a chronological timeline of events related to outbreak and response activities. Looking back on this time, participants will examine their roles and performance, including key decisions and impact. Discussions will focus on topics such as collaboration, public communications, ability to reach all affected populations, and other critical performance areas.



Applying Lessons Learned

Participants will engage in a discussion to determine where learning can be translated into improved capacity and performance. Participants should identify where strategies, policies, or standard operating procedures need development or revision. Participants should also identify where additional training or other support may be needed, as well as any material inputs that may be needed to strengthen future outbreak response.

Agreements

Participants reach agreement on actions to be taken, individuals who will be responsible for these actions, a timeline for applying lessons learned.

STEP 4: FINALIZING THE REPORT

The AAR report is an important output of the AAR process, as it documents lessons learned, agreements, and future actions, as discussed by meeting participants. This information will become the basis for the platform's decisions on policy and planning.

In the week following the AAR meeting, the facilitator and NOHP representative should collaborate to finalize the report format and content based on the AAR discussions, highlighting actionable recommendations and developing a plan for follow-up steps. The NOHP representative will then circulate the draft report to AAR participants for review and feedback before finalizing.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

REFERENCES

1. [USAID After-Action Review Guidance, 2012](#). This guidance provides information on conducting an AAR, including goals, assumptions/requirements, how-tos, lessons learned/best practice, and resources.
2. [Outbreak Communications Guide, National Public Health Information Coalition, 2015](#). This guide describes actions to be taken before, during, and after an outbreak.
3. [WHO Outbreak Communication Planning Guide, Geneva, 2008](#). This planning document is for national public health authorities and covers outbreak planning and preparation activities.
4. [WHO Simulation Exercise Manual, Geneva, 2017](#). This manual provides guidance, templates, tools, and checklists related to disease outbreak simulation exercises. It was designed to be a “ready reference toolkit.”