## Exercise: Practice for After-action Reviews

**Overview**

An after-action review (AAR) is a structured review process, or debrief—usually a meeting— for project teams to reflect on an event or task they have just accomplished and analyze what happened and why, what worked well, and what can be done better or differently in the future.

The purpose of this exercise is to provide participants an opportunity to think through the kinds of questions addressed by AARs and to apply the practice to an event or situation participants have experienced.

**Objectives**

1. To understand the benefits of using AARs to capture experiences and learnings.
2. To become familiar with the concepts covered and findings in a typical AAR.
3. To identify opportunities to use AARs in participants’ own work.
4. To make a commitment to apply the AAR practice to a specific situation in the near future.

**Time**

Total: 60 minutes

**Activity Steps**

1. Distribute a copy of the handout to each workshop participant, and have everyone respond to the first eight questions independently. (20 minutes)
2. Break participants into small groups and have small group members share their responses and insights with each other. (30 minutes)
3. Ask each participant to think of an event or activity they are currently working on in which the team would benefit from an AAR upon completion, write it down here, and commit to making the AAR happen. Reserve a few minutes for individuals to share ideas with the large group.

**Exercise Worksheet**

Think of an event or activity on which you recently worked with a team. Take 20 minutes to respond to the first eight questions on your own. After you have responded independently to these questions, you will have 30 minutes to discuss the findings with your small groups.

1. Describe in one or two sentences the activity or event you will review.
2. What did your team set out to do? What were the anticipated results?

1. What did you actually do? What were the actual results?

1. If there were differences, what caused them?

1. What worked? Why?
2. What didn’t? Why not? In other words, what could have been done differently?
3. What are some future opportunities to apply what was learned?
4. How would the responses to these questions vary if you had conducted a full AAR with the entire team involved in this event or activity rather than answering the questions independently?

Finally, think of an event or activity you are currently working on in which the team would benefit from an AAR upon completion. Write it down here, and commit to making the AAR happen. Share your idea with the rest of the workshop participants!