# After-action Review: Sample Output

*Questions 1to 3 should be used to guide every after-action review. Questions 4 to 6 can help elicit additional details and insights and can help the team consider how to apply lessons learned to future endeavors.*

1. **What did we set out to do? What were the anticipated results?**

We conducted a rapid literature scan examining the achievements of key outcomes as part of integrated programming between HIV and other health areas as well as non-health areas for a donor. The donor requested a rapid turnaround as they needed the information to inform country operational plans for the next funding year. The request came to us around December 22, right around/before the holidays, with a deadline of January 16. Some preliminary work was done at the end of December to flesh out search terms , but the real work didn’t start until January 5.

Initially, the anticipated work entailed: (1) a small team of five researchers/writers reviewing about 600 articles retrieved through PubMed using a narrow set of search parameters to enable the rapid review; (2) the team selecting relevant articles from this set and entering pertinent information into a summary spreadsheet; and (3) delivering to the donor one synthesis document summarizing the findings from the selected articles, written by two of the team members.

1. **What did we actually do? What were the actual results?**

Once we started working on the literature scan in January, we had to immediately stop what we were doing due to changing priorities and understandings among the donor team. After several conversations with the donor, we changed our process and deliverables to the following: (1) We conducted two PubMed searches, the first targeting articles specifically related to integrated programs, which yielded about 50 articles, and a broader second search for HIV and other health and non-health areas but limited to meta-analyses and systematic review articles, which yielded some 70+ review articles. (2) Two of the team members reviewed the articles from the first search and synthesized the key findings in a document, table, and accompanying PowerPoint presentation. (3) Another member was added to the full team, for a total of six people, to review the articles from the second search, synthesize the key findings in a document, table, and accompanying PowerPoint presentation. The due date was pushed back to January 22. At least three more people were also pulled onto the project during the final stage to extract statistics from the articles.

1. **If there were differences, what caused them?**

The differences in what we set out to do and what we actually did were due to changing priorities and understandings among the donor team. Our initial critical conversations with the donor unfortunately often involved different staff members, with some leaving for vacation only to return and overturn the decisions made during their absence. Furthermore, the research question that the donor was really interested in was impossible to achieve in the constrained time frame we had (or possibly in any time frame), so it was difficult to get everyone on the same page as to what a practical yet useful research question might be.

We were excited to take on this work, particularly as it related to integration, as we thought it could strategically position us to take on and lead this type of work moving forward. Therefore, we were very flexible in accommodating the donor’s needs and requests.

1. **What worked? Why?**

* Above all else—a great team all around: everyone went above and beyond, everyone had great capabilities (brilliant), great attitudes (very unique).
* The team lead was a great manager: positive outlook set a great tone, very organized, able to set priorities, always looking ahead and planning resources, etc.
* Daily Skype check-ins – a lot of learning went on during daily communication, ensured we were all on the same page, helped raise our spirits, daily recalibrating.
* Daily priority list from team lead so it wasn’t overwhelming.
* Spreadsheet to organize all information from studies.
* Collaborating on the Google Doc, creating separate Google Docs for appendices, acronyms, references, etc.
* Focus on review articles, particularly Cochrane reviews.

1. **What didn’t? Why not? In other words, what could have been done differently?**

* Identifying/developing the file sharing systems up front, formatting, agreeing on what a synthesis looks like.
* Manager should not be responsible for writing a section.
* Devote more time/resources to each section.
* Felt like some time was wasted on reviewing initial articles that weren’t very useful in the end; perhaps better to glance at all articles first before diving into the most useful ones.
* Need to get the statistics right from the beginning (writer should be responsible because data checkers had a difficult time reading some of the articles).
* If data checkers are used again, they need to have more guidance/examples.
* Focus on a specific list of health outcomes that we’re interested in and synthesize that information only.
* Identify specific exclusion criteria.
* Rank rigor of each study/article.
* Have more time set aside to have a back-and-forth with donor before starting the synthesis, e.g., to identify outcomes, etc.
* Make sure everyone understands the research question correctly. Share example article(s) to make it clear what the research question is.
* Related to that, two people should review the same abstracts to decide whether to get full text or exclude. And 2 people should quickly review the full texts to make a decision to exclude or include.
* Perhaps focus on shorter list of health areas.
* Managing the scope: be clear about the research question, clarify who are the key decisions, what’s the deadline for making changes to the SOW (incorporate it into the timeline), specify exactly what the deliverables are, be more directive with the donor.
* Consider using reference management software (e.g., Endnote, Refworks).
* Keep track of article counts in a spreadsheet (excluded, included, cited).
* Store and organize full-text articles better.

1. **What are some future opportunities to apply what was learned?**

The donor is looking to us for a second literature review phase, with initial discussions expected to occur in February.