

## **Lesson Overview**

This lesson explains how to develop an After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP), as well as how to conduct an After Action Conference.

## **Lesson Objectives**

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe the purpose of an After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP).
- List the components of an AAR/IP.
- Explain how to write an analysis of a capability.
- Identify the purpose and structure of an After Action Conference.
- Describe the purpose of the Improvement Plan and the Improvement Plan Matrix.

This lesson should take approximately 40 minutes to complete.

## **The Draft After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP)**

The development of a draft After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) is the fourth step of the exercise evaluation and improvement planning process.

## **The Purpose of Improvement Planning**

As you have learned, exercise evaluation assesses a jurisdiction's strengths and areas for improvement in target capabilities.

Improvement planning is the process by which the observations and recommendations recorded in the draft After Action Report (AAR) are resolved through development of concrete corrective actions. These corrective actions are prioritized, tracked and analyzed by program managers as part of a continuous Corrective Action Program (CAP).

Through this process, evaluation leads to a disciplined process for implementing corrective actions and continually improving preparedness.

## **The Purpose of the Action After Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP)**

All discussion-based and operations-based exercises result in the development of an AAR/IP. The AAR/IP serves multiple purposes. Specifically, it:

- Records what occurred during the exercise.
- Provides feedback on the achievement of capabilities and associated activities.
- Suggests recommendations for improved preparedness.

Perhaps most importantly, the AAR/IP is a tool to establish consensus and buy-in on next steps.

The Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) has defined a standard format for the development of an AAR/IP.

By using this format, jurisdictions ensure that the style and the level of detail in their AAR/IP is consistent with other jurisdictions. Consistency across jurisdictions allows the nation-wide emergency preparedness community to gain a broad view of capabilities.

### **Development of the Draft After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP)**

As directed by the Lead Evaluator, the Evaluation Team drafts the After Action Report (AAR) using the evaluative products discussed in Lesson 5. These products include the exercise event timeline, narratives, and Exercise Evaluation Guide (EEG) Analysis sheets.

Other sources of data for the draft After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) include:

1. Data from the hotwash, the Controller/Evaluator Debriefing, and Participant
2. Feedback Forms.
3. The plans and procedures of participant organizations.

The plans and procedures of participant organizations are used to compare intended outcomes with actual events.

### **After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP)**

Specifically, the suggested After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) format includes:

- Executive summary.
- Exercise overview.
- Exercise goals and objectives.
- Analysis of capabilities demonstrated.
- Conclusion.
- Improvement Plan (IP) matrix.

Additional appendices may include lessons learned; a participant feedback summary; an exercise events summary table; performance ratings; and an acronym list.

Learn more about each component of the AAR/IP.

1. **Executive Summary.** This section is a one- to two-page synopsis highlighting the exercise scope, successes, and areas for improvement.
2. **Executive Overview.** This section provides background information on the exercise date and time, location, type, hazard, participating organizations, and evaluation methodology.
3. **Exercise goals and objectives.** This section lists the goals and objectives that were identified during the design of the exercise. The goals and objectives are based on the Target Capabilities List (TCL) and Universal Task List (UTL), and should mirror the Exercise Evaluation Guides (EEGs).

1. **Analysis of capabilities demonstrated.** This section provides an analysis of capabilities that were evaluated during the exercise. The analysis should include a detailed assessment of the jurisdiction's ability to perform activities and tasks associated with these capabilities.
2. **Conclusion.** This section summarizes the key findings of the After Action Report (AAR) and describes the implication of these findings on future action.
3. **Improvement Plan (IP) matrix.** This section should be presented in Appendix A of the After Action Report (AAR). The Improvement Plan (IP) matrix lists each area for improvement that was identified by evaluators in the AAR. Each area for improvement is accompanied by the following:
  - a. Capability.
  - b. Observation Title.
  - c. Recommendation.
  - d. Corrective Action Description.
  - e. Capability Element.
  - f. Primary Responsible Agency.
  - g. Agency Point of Contact (POC).
  - h. Start Date.
  - i. Completion Date.

Note: The details of the IP matrix will be determined by participating jurisdictions or organizations during the After Action Conference. Although the draft AAR may include suggested improvements, it should not include concrete action items for improvements.

### Writing an Analysis of a Capability

Each analysis of a capability should include the appropriate capability, its title and number from the Target Capabilities List (TCL), and the activities that correspond to it. Each activity should be followed by:

- **Observations.** The observations section should include an overall narrative outlining performance of the activity. It should also include a brief description of specific evaluator observations, which can be positive (a strength) or negative (an area for improvement). If the After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) includes multiple observations about a single performance measure, it should individually list each observation and the analysis and recommendations associated with it.
- **References.** The references section should cite documents that relate to the observation (for example, an Exercise Evaluation Guide (EEG), a plan, a procedure, or a mutual-aid agreement).
- **Analysis.** The analysis section should apply root-cause analysis to address whether the jurisdiction possesses the plans, policies, procedures, trained personnel, equipment, mutual-aid agreements, etc., to perform the activity. Where areas for improvement exist, evaluators should list the consequences of action or a lack of action by the jurisdiction.

- **Recommendations.** The recommendations section should describe steps that must be taken to address areas for improvement. If the observation is a strength, evaluators can use this section to identify potential best practices and lessons learned.

### **After Action Conference Dry Run**

Once the draft After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) is complete, members of the Exercise Planning Team and evaluators meet to review the draft. This meeting is a “dry run” before the full After Action Conference. Its purpose is to:

- Provide a peer review of the draft AAR/IP.
- Address whether the exercise met its goals and objectives, or whether time constraints or unforeseen circumstances prevented this.
- Review the AAR/IP before it is presented to the full audience.

The outcome of this meeting is the finalized After Action Conference “read ahead” package. This package should include the draft AAR/IP, conference agenda, and presentation.

### **The After Action Conference in the Exercise Evaluation and Improvement Process**

Conducting the After Action Conference is the fifth step of the exercise evaluation and improvement planning process.

### **The After Action Conference**

Following completion of a draft After Action Report (AAR), the Exercise Planning Team, Evaluation Team, and other stakeholders meet for an After Action Conference. The purpose of the After Action Conference is to review and refine the draft AAR.

As part of the After Action Conference, attendees develop an Improvement Plan (IP) that articulates specific corrective actions by addressing issues identified in the AAR.

The refined AAR and IP are then finalized as a combined AAR/IP.

Note: The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recommends that exercise managers mark AAR/IP materials For Official Use Only (FOUO) and establish a plan to determine the release of these documents to the media or general public.

### **Structure of the After Action Conference**

Ideally, the After Action Conference should be scheduled for a full day, within several weeks of the end of the exercise. It should be held at a convenient location or at the site where the exercise took place.

The Conference should be highly interactive. Attendees should be invited to validate observations and recommendations, and to provide insight into activities that may have been overlooked or misinterpreted by evaluators.

The conference should include a facilitated discussion of ways in which participating organizations can build upon the strengths identified in the jurisdiction.

### **Completing the Improvement Plan (IP)**

A key purpose of the After Action Conference is to hold a facilitated discussion on how to implement recommendations for improvement. The outcome of this discussion is a list that identifies corrective actions, the organization responsible for completing them, and a timeline for completion.

When compiled, the corrective actions and timelines make up the Improvement Plan (IP). This IP converts After Action Report (AAR) recommendations into specific, measurable steps that result will in improved preparedness.

The complete IP is included in the final AAR/IP as a table that summarizes next steps. Participating organizations/agencies will use it to execute improvement planning.

### **Completing the Improvement Plan Matrix**

Conference attendees typically use an Improvement Plan (IP) matrix as a tool to complete the IP. For every improvement recommendation, attendees must complete nine categories on the IP matrix:

1. Capability.
2. Observation Title.
3. Recommendation.
4. Corrective Action Description.
5. Capability Element.
6. Primary Responsible Agency.
7. Agency Point of Contact (POC).
8. Start Date
9. Completion Date.

Note: Recommendations and corrective actions should correspond to those listed in the After Action Report (AAR). You will learn more about the process of identifying corrective actions in Lesson 7.

### **The Improvement Plan Matrix and the Improvement Plan**

The Improvement Plan (IP) is distinct from the IP matrix. The Improvement Plan (IP) is a narrative that describes changes to be undertaken as a result of lessons learned during the exercise. It describes who will make these changes, as well as the details of their implementation. In contrast, the IP matrix is a tool used to generate the IP narrative, and to gain consensus on improvement actions.

The IP matrix is included in the final AAR/IP as a table that summarizes next steps.

### **Lesson Summary**

In this lesson you learned:

The purpose of an After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) is to record what occurred during the exercise, provide feedback on the achievement of capability outcomes and associated activities, define corrective actions, and establish consensus and buy-in on next steps.

After Action Report/Improvement Plans (AAR/IPs) include:

1. Executive summary.
2. Exercise overview.
3. Exercise goals and objectives.
4. Analysis of capabilities demonstrated.
5. Conclusion.
6. Improvement Plan (IP) matrix.

The analysis of capabilities includes a detailed assessment of the jurisdiction's ability to perform activities associated with these capabilities.

When complete, the draft AAR/IP is presented in the After Action Conference, a forum that allows evaluators to share key findings for feedback and validation.

The After Action Conference includes a facilitated discussion of how to implement the recommendations for improvement. The outcome of this discussion is an Improvement Plan (IP).

The purpose of the IP is to convert AAR recommendations into specific, measurable corrective actions. By tracking progress of these corrective actions, participating organizations and agencies contribute to a Corrective Action Program (CAP).