Informal Action Review
Tips for developing an approach for informal action reviews

What is an informal action review?
The BP model of experiential learning (see case study in section 3 of the guide) includes learning practices before, during and after each phase of an initiative. The informal action review is a low investment/high benefit tool considered most useful **during** each phase.

Why use an informal action review?
In governments, there are often no formalized knowledge-generating and -sharing processes within and across programs and projects. This is a simple, structured approach that can be applied to increase learning.

What to do:
- Establish a house rule of **no rank**. During the action review, all are trusted equals.
- At each logical pause (e.g., after a half-day meeting or the first days of a pilot) have a good facilitator lead a candid 3-5 minute conversation focused on:
  - What did we set out to do?
  - What actually happened?
  - What have we learned from that?
- Don’t assume that deviations from a plan are bad.
- Focus on learning, not judging.

As a default, do not record anything. Only document if the group thinks that is important to capture a point for lessons learned.

Rationale:
- This technique was developed and refined in the military (US Army). The developers found that this quick, easy, immediate, **regular** practice enhanced learning, saved lives and complemented other more formal knowledge tools.
- The developers emphasize the importance of no rank and no documentation.
- Because the developers used the technique in combat, the term “after action” review was coined, but the technique is an effective tool while work is ongoing.
- Some organizations document, but the original undocumented approach may be most beneficial, in part because it emphasizes the open, frank, egalitarian intent of the tool.

When?
As a regular part of core business activities
Could begin to establish practice as a habit now

Benefits:
Enhances individual and collective learning and continuous improvement, providing detail often not found in lessons learned

Pitfalls to avoid:
Trying to turn the review into a more sophisticated process
Not getting or staying in the habit of doing the reviews

To learn more: