After-Action Review (AAR)

*After-Action Reviews (AARs) are critical quality assurance milestones that NCDOT staff can leverage to assess the effectiveness of the local, regional, and statewide program. It is important for staff to understand the value of an AAR that allows involved stakeholders to conduct a post‑event assessment outside of the influence of the live event.*

**Purpose**:
Understand when an AAR should be conducted and who should facilitate.
Provide guidance for how to set-up, conduct, and document an AAR meeting.

# Overview

An AAR is a detailed, post-event analysis of the incident management and response related to a major event. Events that warrant an AAR can be a significant crash, a large-scale planned special event, or a significant adverse weather event or natural disaster. AARs provide a forum for agencies and partner agencies to recount their response and effectiveness to the specific event. Participants discuss how the overall response was handled relative to each agency’s roles and responsibilities. Discussion includes what worked well and what could be improved in advance of future events. AARs are most effective when each agency that had a role in the incident response is appropriately represented at the AAR.

Key findings and action plans should be well documented and often lead to updates to existing processes and procedures. The action items can be great content to summarize at an upcoming Interagency Team Meeting.

Note that an **AAR is different from an Interagency Team Meeting**. An Interagency Team Meeting is used to assess the overall process of incident management, while an AAR is used to assess the incident management during specific events.

AARs are best conducted in a workshop setting with a facilitated discussion as opposed to a structured meeting with multiple presentations. The intent is to foster conversation and provide an opportunity for feedback between agency representatives. Collaboration during AARs foster trust and strengthen relationships among responders; thereby improving effectiveness during future incidents. Ideally, an AAR is conducted shortly after an event, usually within one to three weeks. Results are often more effective when agencies conduct self-documentation shortly after the event in preparation for the AAR. This quick documentation of observations will help to ensure accuracy regarding the details of the event, timeliness and accuracy of notifications, success and challenges of on-scene coordination, and other event details.

# Determination for When an AAR Should be Conducted

An AAR can be conducted after any event, but range in composition and attendance based on the scale and impact of an incident. AARs should be coordinated to foster both internal and external collaboration.

Internal AARs can be conducted more frequently to review multiple smaller incidents that occur over each period and determine strategies to improve the North Carolina Department of Transportation’s (NCDOT) response. Additionally, internal AARs should be coordinated in advance of an external AAR so that the NCDOT can adequately prepare for a multi-agency discussion.

External AARs typically are coordinated after large-scale events such as major traffic incidents, evacuation operations during natural/man-made disasters, or high-profile special events. Any regional TIM stakeholder can initiate an AAR and partner with NCDOT to coordinate, host, or facilitate depending on the incident. For large-scale events, such as hurricanes that generated a statewide impact, an AAR likely will be facilitated at the statewide level.

AARs should be conducted after new regional project implementations, such as an Integrated Corridor Management (ICM). Regional stakeholder agencies should assemble and discuss the effectiveness of the implemented ICM strategy and potential improvements to the ICM decision response. Please reference the ICM Chapter for additional details.

The following criteria provide guidelines for events that warrant an AAR. Host agencies should use their best judgement when scheduling an AAR, balancing the need for a debriefing with the potential impact on day-to-day resources. An excessive number of AARs can dilute the impact and create a numbness with participants if actionable outcomes are not executed.

**Major incidents**:

* Traffic incident with a duration of more than two hours

AND

* Traffic incident involving hazardous materials, a fatality or multiple fatalities, infrastructure damage, or full road closures in one direction on a multilane facility (Interstate, primary or high-volume secondary route)

**Natural/man-made disasters (often initiated at the statewide level)**:

* Hurricanes
* Snowstorms
* Heavy rain/flooding
* Wildfires
* Acts of terrorism
* Any event that requires an evacuation

**Other event characteristics that could warrant an AAR:**

* Activation of recently implemented technology (ICM, Ramp Meters, etc.)
* Significant multi-agency coordination
* High-profile planned special event (National Special Security Event, large concerts, festivals, etc.)
* Multi-state coordination

# Facilitator and Participants

Typically, the Host agency will initiate the process to schedule an AAR, prepare and distribute background material, and invite participants. They also should identify an appropriate Facilitator, such as one of the Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Coordinators or from a TIM partner agency like NCSHP. The Facilitator should be someone that did not have a significant role in the response as to prevent bias in the discussion while also allowing that individual to stay fully engaged in the discussion. The Facilitator should have adequate knowledge of TIM roles and responsibilities in order to foster effective discussion during the AAR. The Facilitator should ensure that each action item resulting from the discussion is assigned to someone of an authority level to implement recommendations from lessons learned. The Facilitator should be capable of facilitating a multi-agency meeting and effective time management skills for a multi-topic discussion. Lastly, the Host agency or Facilitator should identify an effective scribe for capturing the discussion during the AAR.

## Purpose and Focus

The Facilitator should remind all participants of the purpose of the AAR and encourage them all to:

* Be candid, honest, and clear about the information presented
* Have open minds to allow everyone to participate
* Accept suggestions for improved operations
* Avoid blaming, being negative, or accusing other participants during the review
* Offer ideas and helpful suggestions
* Discuss how decisions were made, what influenced decisions in the field, how response strategies and decisions were communicated to other responders (or communications centers), and other aspects of how the overall incident was managed
* For larger events, individual agencies should be encouraged to conduct an internal pre-meeting to prepare for the larger multi-agency discussion.

## Internal NCDOT AAR Participants

NCDOT can also conduct an internal AAR focused on a standalone self-assessment or in preparation of a larger AAR of a multi-agency incident response. This setting may allow more transparency and openness among NCDOT partners. In either case, internal participants should include key regional representatives who had a role in the incident response. Participants might vary based on the size and other details of an event, but likely will include:

* Division or Regional Representation (from each of the affected counties and regions either by incident location or experienced traffic impacts, such as queuing or secondary crashes)
	+ Traffic Operations Engineer
	+ Transportation Management Center (TMC) Operations Manager
	+ TMC Floor Supervisor – on duty during incident
	+ TMC Operators – on duty during incident
	+ County Maintenance Engineer(s) (CME)
	+ Incident Management Engineer (IME)
	+ IMAP drivers that responded to the incident
	+ Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Engineer
	+ Regional Operations Manager
	+ Systems Engineer
	+ Regional TIM Coordinator
	+ Safety Engineer/Safety Officer
* Statewide Representation (invited if applicable)
	+ TMC Operations Manager
	+ Assistant Traffic Specialist (ATS)
	+ State Traffic Operations Engineer
	+ State Traveler Information Engineer
	+ State Incident Management Engineer
	+ State ITS Operations Engineer
	+ State Traffic Systems Operations Engineer
	+ State Maintenance

## External AAR Participants

Large events should include broader participation from key partner agencies that were involved in responding to the incident. It is suggested that the size and participation in the AAR support an effective cross-section of attendees. To achieve this, attendees should be limited to those that were involved in the response. Involving too many additional participants may stifle the open conversation and diminish the effectiveness of the AAR. External agencies that could participate include:

* Fire Department
* Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
* State and local law enforcement
* Emergency Management/Emergency Services Director
* Local transportation agencies
* Other involved agencies

Participation from additional stakeholders could be warranted based on their involvement in specific events. These stakeholders could represent:

* Venue/parking operators
* Transit operations
* Neighboring state traffic operations, maintenance, or law enforcement

# AAR Preparation

In advance of the AAR, the Facilitator should gather pertinent data about the incident (e.g., clearance time, response time, incident duration, incident reports, scene photos, who responded, etc.). The Appendix includes a data collection form that NCDOT should distribute to partner agencies and participants in advance of the AAR to capture information related to the experienced incident timeline. The TMCs can access data that will support the NCDOT in reconstructing the incident timeline. The NCDOT Traveler Information Management System (TIMS) database stores a majority of the incident timeline, including timestamps for notifications, responder arrivals, significant changes in the response, and other incident factors. Supplemental data can also be requested from other agencies, such as law enforcement Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) feeds or incident reports. Potential data sources are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. AAR Data Sources

| Data | Description | Data Source |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Incident timeline | Detailed chronological documentation of significant events during the incident | TIMS entries and information from operators or other key staff;CAD data from law enforcement or fire  |
| Incident details | Description of incident impacts and responder processes | Law enforcement incident or crash report, including photos;Incident Commander debrief/report;towing and recovery documents |
| Dynamic Messaging Signs (DMS) messages | Detailed list of messages used and timeframes of posting/removing | Vanguard software |
| Responding agencies | List of which agencies responded; initial notification and updates of the incident; could also include timeline of arrival/departure | TIMS, law enforcement/fire CAD |
| Data Visualizations  | Data collected from various sources to create a visual that can help to explain incident trends for post event analysis | ClearGuide; Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS)  |

ClearGuide and RITIS allow users to create visualizations based on existing data. An NCDOT focused training session for ClearGuide can be found at this link: [https://youtu.be/wioytB4Ag10](https://pda.ritis.org/suite/?url=https%3A%2F%2Furldefense.com%2Fv3%2F__https%3A%2Fnam03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com%2F%3Furl%3Dhttps*3A*2F*2Furldefense.com*2Fv3*2F__https*3A*2Fyoutu.be*2FwioytB4Ag10__*3B!!HYmSToo!IKMEiCSIRb6YXKXhZPHU4fogak-XyhWbmmHDpeL9OfV8TYMvaameVhPsaFaZh4otRQ*24%26data%3D02*7C01*7CAmanda.good*40kimley-horn.com*7Cbda8e5ddee92412ef5bb08d858c89578*7C7e220d300b5947e58a81a4a9d9afbdc4*7C0*7C0*7C637356965810537364%26sdata%3DVFlFAZROY5bieCFqxW*2FnFp1n9ayjGNhNdvul3SRzpAc*3D%26reserved%3D0__%3BJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSU!!HYmSToo!JCbSJTIYx_ep9wjehHzI_1ygSzH9EMKXj2oBpm10Kj-Gjtawb885TTtMP6jMpJzYnA%24&data=02%7C01%7Camanda.good%40kimley-horn.com%7C52a114815146408d908908d85afda394%7C7e220d300b5947e58a81a4a9d9afbdc4%7C0%7C0%7C637359393105082617&sdata=1gjkKk%2FLYM4TjJ1LzI%2BafeoDZP7HamFz6YZnrZt27fA%3D&reserved=0). The RITIS Probe Data Analysis (PDA) Suite can be found at this link: [https://pda.ritis.org/suite/](https://nam03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/). Refer to their respective user manuals for additional directions and information.

# Suggested AAR Meeting Format, Rules, and Agenda Template

The AAR is intended to be an open and interactive discussion among participants with first-hand knowledge and participation as part of the incident being discussed. The Facilitator has an important role in engaging participants, directing the conversation toward constructive actions, and creating an environment that encourages active participation by all attendees. The Facilitator should identify a notetaker that can effectively document the discussion so the Facilitator can focus on managing the conversation and the direction of the meeting. General guidelines for the meeting format include:

* Facilitator to schedule the AAR shortly after the incident/event (no later than three weeks post-event)
* Facilitator to distribute invitations and confirm agency participation prior to the meeting
* When applicable, NCDOT should conduct an internal AAR in advance of the larger multi-agency meeting.
* Duration of the meeting can be one to three hours, depending on the complexity of the incident/event
* Location of the AAR meeting should be scheduled at one of the key responder agencies’ offices, with a conference room large enough to hold invited participants
* Appropriate audio-visual equipment to share photos, graphics, maps, or other details that will help to support the discussion
* Assemble a presentation of the incident timeline based on the data collected from each agency’s input
* Define clear roles for the Facilitator, scribe or notetaker, and other key support roles for the meeting

General rules of an AAR meeting should include:

* Structure that promotes a high level of interaction
* Sustained engagement and feedback from the participants
* Solution-based conversation and input, not just individual critiques of activities
* An agreement that no repercussions will occur based on the discussion

The Appendix includes two agenda templates. The first is a standard template that provides a baseline for the AAR. The second template is an annotated agenda that the Facilitator can use as a guide for managing participation and outcomes for each portion of the agenda. The annotated agenda is intended for the Facilitator, notetaker, and any key participants to whom the Facilitator has assigned specific roles. The primary components of the agenda include:

1. Introductions
2. Event Overview and Performance Discussion
3. Open Discussion on Event Response and Lessons Learned
4. Action Item Review
5. Adjourn
6. Post-AAR Follow Up

# Post AAR Documentation and Follow-Up

Once the feedback from the AAR has been consolidated and reviewed, the Facilitator should develop a summary report that can be sent to all participants. The summary should focus on action items derived during the meeting to support improved future incident response. It is important that the Facilitator consider sensitive information that was discussed during the AAR and document appropriately within the meeting summary. Some notes may be summarized at a higher level with an understanding that the owning agency will execute the action items as determined within the meeting.

A sample AAR Report outline is included in the Appendix. The meeting summary typically includes two components:

1. Successes – summarizes the successes discussed during the AAR
2. Activities – summarizes action items for NCDOT, Divisions, and partner agencies to help mature the State’s response for future and similar events. These action items typically are categorized by the following:
* Policy and Administration
* Lessons Learned
* Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)
* Technology Resources

Once the summary has been received by the participants, they are expected to reinforce the action items and conduct any necessary activities prior to the next incident or based upon an agreed upon timeline. The regional champion can monitor the progress of action items, but all stakeholders should be committed to the TIM Program. Since participants represent multiple agencies and do not exist within a single chain of command, it is important to foster a shared accountability within the regional stakeholders. A follow-up on action item progress should occur based on the defined deadline within each action item. Some actions, such as additional training or major revisions to regional coordination processes could be achieved through a collaboration with regional Interagency Team Meetings. If additional follow-up is needed, Facilitators can conduct a follow-up with certain participants and action item owners.

It also is important for the region to determine a document management protocol for how the summaries will be shared and where they will be archived. The availability of the summaries also must balance the need for security and privacy of agency processes. The historical information assembled during the AAR is valuable to future events and should be maintained in an accessible manner. An archiving folder named “AAR” is located on the Z: Drive. Within the “AAR” are subfolders named for each region/division.

* Triad Region (Divisions 7 and 9)
* Metrolina Region (Division 10 and 12)
* Mountain Region (Division 13 and 14)
* Division 1
* Division 2
* Division 3
* Division 4
* Division 5
* Division 6
* Division 8
* Division 11

The AAR summary should be saved in the corresponding regional folder with a file name that includes the date and the name of the event – see examples below:

* YYYY-MM-DD Crash with fatality.docx
* YYYY-MM-DD Snow Storm.docx
* YYYY-MM-DD Overturned Truck.docx

APPENDIX

**After-Action Review (AAR) Agenda**

Time:

Date:

Location:

Facilitator:

1. Roll Call and Introductions

*(Agency representatives should introduce themselves and briefly discuss their role in the incident)*

*(Circulate sign-in sheet)*

2. Incident Overview

*(Facilitator should obtain consensus on the summary of the incident)*

3. Agency Roles Discussion

*(Each participating agency should provide a brief overview of how they were notified, when they arrived, and what their general responsibilities and actions were during the incident)*

4. Open Discussion on Event Response/Lessons Learned

*(Facilitated discussion focused on successes, challenges, and areas for improvement)*

5. Action Items

* Summarize actions
* Identify “owner” for actions

6. Adjourn

**After-Action Review (AAR)**

*Annotated Agenda*

Time:

Date:

Location:

Facilitator:

1. Roll Call and Introductions

*Ask the participants to introduce themselves, including what organization they support and their role within the event.*

*(Circulate sign-in sheet)*

2. Incident Overview

* *Provide a summary of the event and review the incident timeline and details.*
* *Guide the discussion and have participants present the incident activities in chronological order based on when they arrived on the scene.*
* *Each participant should discuss his or her agency’s involvement prior to the open discussion portion of the review.*
* *Ensure that each agency represented at the AAR has an opportunity to provide their perspective on activities. Note any changes or modifications to the timeline or sequence of events.*

*Potential materials: Incident timeline presentation, maps, photos, crash reports, and other pertinent information.*

3. Agency Roles Discussion

*Facilitate discussion about the successes, challenges, risks, and opportunities that the event presented to agencies and responders.*

*Encourage all agency participants to share their perspectives on how the response evolved, what worked well, and what could be improved for future events. Each participating agency should provide a brief overview of how they were notified, when they arrived, and what their general responsibilities and actions were during the incident.*

*Be prepared to prompt input from individuals that may be reluctant to participate. Some guiding questions and topics for the Facilitator include:*

* ***Communication***
	+ *How well did your agency communicate both internally and externally throughout the entire event?*
	+ *Was there any duplication of effort between agencies?*
	+ *Were decisions made during the event response adequately communicated to your agency?*
	+ *Were there conflicting communications during the event response?*
	+ *Were there gaps in communications that made it difficult to carry out your responsibilities during the event?*
* ***Resource utilization***
	+ *Did your agency utilize available resources efficiently?*
	+ *Did your agency have enough resources?*
	+ *Are you all aware of the resources that can be used to support incident management (such as IMAP, local agency maintenance teams, etc.)?*
* ***Incident management procedures***
	+ *Did your agency follow established standard operating procedures (SOPs)?*
	+ *What procedures or SOPs were particularly effective?*
	+ *Are all agencies aware of roles and responsibilities of the different responders?*
	+ *Were there gaps or challenges in procedures that could have been handled differently?*
	+ *What modifications to existing procedures should be considered before future incidents or events?*
	+ *Are there specific training needs that the region should explore to improve a multi-agency response to incidents?*
* ***Coordination***
	+ *Did your agency coordinate with other agencies?*
	+ *What aspects of coordination worked well?*
	+ *Did your agency experience any coordination challenges during the event?*
	+ *What ways should agencies coordinate differently in the future, so the coordinated response can be more effective?*

4. Open Discussion on Event Response/Lessons Learned

*Capture the impact from the incident scene*

* *How congestion or flow was impacted,*
* *if there were any secondary incidents that occurred, and*
* *if there were challenges for certain responders to safely secure the scene or access the scene.*

*Guide conversation to identify the “root cause” of some of the issues and challenges identified during the discussion. Drill down to details that will help uncover root cause issues that can be specifically addressed and hopefully mitigated for future incidents.*

*Focus on determining specific, tangible actions that can be carried forward toward improving one or more aspects of future events. Actions could be process or SOP updates, changes in notification processes, better understanding of roles and responsibilities, or improved awareness of tools and resources that are available to support responding agencies.*

5. Action Items

*Round out the discussions by summarizing the incident, key challenges, and successes; documenting action items; and obtaining agreement from the group on the actions and next steps. For each action, there should be a responsible person (or persons) who “own” that action and agree to work on addressing it.*

* Summarize actions
* Identify “owner” for actions

6. Adjourn

**AAR Report Summary**

AAR for *\_\_\_\_(Name of Incident/Location of Incident – example, Injury Crash on I-40*)

Date and Time Range for Event:

Location and Region for Event:

Date AAR Meeting was Held:

AAR Prepared By: (Facilitator and Key Authors)

Facilitator Contact Information:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name: |       | Agency: |       |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Phone Number: |       | Email: |       |

**AAR Incident Details**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date: |       | Time: |       | TIMS Record #: |       |

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| Cleared Time: |       | Total Duration: |       |

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| Location: |       |

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| County: |       | Municipality: |       |

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| Lead Agency: |       | CAD/Crash Record #: |       |

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| Incident Commander: |       | Weather: |       |

**Incident Overview Narrative Summary:** (Provide a brief description of the incident, highlighting key activities, how events unfolded; include timelines for when responders arrived and left, when traffic control was implemented, when changes occurred during the response, and other notable events to describe the overall response to the incident)

**Roadway Closures:** (List any roadway closures and detour routes implemented and used)

**Responding Agencies:** (List all agencies that participated in response to this incident; identify lead agency and incident commander)

**Best Practices and Successes:** (Identify TIM best practices utilized during the incident as well as successful practices that were identified during the AAR, e.g., traffic control, safety vest use, communication/coordination among responders, etc.)

**Lessons Learned and Areas for Improvement:** (Identify possible areas for improvement, procedures and SOPs that might need to be updated or modified, processes that could be improved, etc.)

**Summary of Action Items and Next Steps:** (Identify actions that came out of the AAR; include action owner and any next steps. Actions should address root cause issues or be something tangible that can be implemented/changed that will result in an improved response going forward)

Attachments:

**Photos, Maps, Visuals**

**AAR Attendee List**

**Incident Responder – Incident Information Form**

Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in this After-Action Review. By filling out the form below, you will be able to jog your memory regarding various aspects of the event. Completing this form is appreciated, please fill out the parts that apply to your agency’s response.

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| **Agency** |       |

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| --- | --- |
| **Name** |       |

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| **Date of Incident** |       |

Who notified you of the incident, when and how?

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When did you arrive on the scene?

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What was your role at the scene?

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What resources/services did you provide?

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Was Incident Command established? If yes, did you identify yourself to the Incident Commander and check into an established command post?

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What was your initial scene assessment upon arrival?

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Was a Public Information Officer at the scene?

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Were detours or other traffic related issues noted regarding the incident?

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If this was a Quick Clearance/MOVE (G.S. 20-161) activation, were you the Law Enforcement concurrence representative? If yes, who was the NCDOT representative with whom you concurred, was it on scene or by phone?

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What suggestions can you offer in improving response operations?

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What additional information can you provide to help with future responses of this nature?

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Please describe your on-scene observations.

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Please describe any problems you encountered and how you resolved them.

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Additional comments (Lessons Learned, Recommendations)

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**NCDOT Incident Responder – Incident Information Form**

Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in this After-Action Review. By filling out the form below, you will be able to jog your memory regarding various aspects of the event. Completing this form is appreciated, please fill out the parts that apply to your agency’s response.

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| **Agency** |       |

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| --- | --- |
| **Name** |       |

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| **Date of Incident** |       |

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| **Name of Incident Commander** |       |

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| **Agency of Incident Commander** |       |

Who notified you of the incident, when and how?

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When did you arrive on the scene?

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What was your role at the scene?

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What resources/services did you provide?

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Was Incident Command established? If yes, did you identify yourself to the Incident Commander and check into an established command post?

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What was your initial scene assessment upon arrival?

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Was a Public Information Officer at the scene?

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Were detours or other traffic related issues noted regarding the incident?

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If this was a Quick Clearance/MOVE (G.S. 20-161) activation, were you the NCDOT concurrence representative? If yes, who was the Law Enforcement representative with whom you concurred, was it on scene or by phone?

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What suggestions can you offer in improving response operations?

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What additional information can you provide to help with future responses of this nature?

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Please describe your on-scene observations.

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Please describe any problems you encountered and how you resolved them.

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Additional comments (Lessons Learned, Recommendations)

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**Incident Commander – Incident Information Form**

This report should only be completed if you served in the role of Incident Commander. In some cases, an incident will involve multiple Incident Commanders throughout the duration of the incident and as it escalates. If you served in this role and were relieved, please complete this form for the period of time you served as the Incident Commander.

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| **Agency** |       |

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| **Name** |       |

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| **Incident Date** |       |

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| **Notification Time** |       |

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| **Arrived on Scene** |       |

Describe your initial scene assessment upon arrival.

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Describe your initial Incident Action Plan.

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Describe any assignments given to achieve strategic goals and tactical objectives for your Incident Action Plan.

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Describe your plan to manage the safety of resources and personnel at the scene.

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Please identify any problems encountered and how you feel they can be resolved.

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Identify any Incident Command System problems that you encountered at the scene.

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What recommendations do you have that may improve operational or administrative effectiveness?

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Diagram the Incident Command System organizational structure as it existed at the scene:

**Additional Supporting Agency – Incident Information Form**

Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in this After-Action Review. By filling out the form below, you will be able to jog your memory regarding various aspects of the event. Completing this form is appreciated, please fill out the parts that apply to your agency’s response.

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| **Agency** |       |

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| **Name** |       |

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| **Incident Date** |       |

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| **Notification Time** |       |

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| **Arrived on Scene** |       |

What was your initial scene assessment upon arrival?

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What was your role at this incident?

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Was Incident Command established at the scene? If yes, did you identify yourself to the Incident Commander and check into an established command post?

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What directions were you given?

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Please describe your observations and actions at the scene.

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Please describe any problems you encountered and how you resolved them.

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Additional comments (Lessons Learned, Recommendations)

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