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**United Nations**  
**Department of Peace Operations**  
**Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs**  
**Ref. DPO 2020.11 / DPPA 2020.2**

## **Policy**

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# **Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning**

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Effective date:

Contact: DPO/DPET/PBPS/KMG and DPPA/PMD/GLU

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## DPO-DPPA POLICY ON KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

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### A. PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

1. This policy sets out the guiding principles of knowledge management and organizational learning in DPO and DPPA and in their field missions. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of managers and personnel and defines the available systems and tools to ensure the effective capture, dissemination and use of knowledge to continuously improve guidance, planning processes, training and operations.
2. As highlighted in the vision statement for the UN peace and security pillar (2020), a culture of mutual learning and of promoting innovation are foundational to the successful delivery of the pillar's common goals to "prevent violent conflict and its negative impacts; to contribute to its transformation and resolution; and to help build strong, inclusive and resilient societies that will deepen peace outcomes for generations to come."<sup>1</sup> Effective organizational learning is critical to the success of the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative; the DPPA 2020-2022 Strategic Plan; effective conflict prevention, peacemaking, and sustaining peace efforts; and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The Secretary-General has repeatedly emphasized knowledge sharing and the identification of best practices to strengthen the UN's

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<sup>1</sup> See [Vision of the UN Peace and Security Pillar](#), 2020.

collective impact.<sup>2</sup> The UN Security Council<sup>3</sup> and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34)<sup>4</sup> have also emphasized the need for information sharing and lessons learning.

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## **B. SCOPE**

3. This policy applies to all personnel, including management, in DPO and DPPA and in DPO-led and DPPA-led field missions.<sup>5</sup> Compliance with this policy is mandatory.
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## **C. POLICY**

### ***C1. Core Principles***

4. Knowledge management is everyone's responsibility: All managers and personnel shall demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning and knowledge sharing by regularly capturing, sharing and using lessons learned. Managers shall create an enabling environment and incentives for personnel to share knowledge and to integrate lessons learned into their activities, including by allocating resources and time for these activities.
5. Enabling an honest reflection on failures: Senior managers shall promote an organizational culture that acknowledges failures as an integral part of learning processes. It is the responsibility of all managers to create a safe environment that allows for the candid and open admission of errors and a commitment to learning from them. The purpose of lessons learning is to enhance the organizational body of knowledge; it does not serve to penalize individual or collective underperformance.
6. Enabling innovation, embracing technology for knowledge sharing and encouraging peer-to-peer learning: Leaps in organizational effectiveness occur when personnel are empowered to spearhead bold new practices and tools, and when these innovations are documented and widely shared. All personnel are encouraged to document and showcase their experience, knowledge and innovations through peer-to-peer networks, virtual or in-person platforms and lessons learning tools.
7. From lessons learned to lessons applied: To enable continuous improvements in performance and effectiveness, new lessons and best practices shall be continuously integrated into guidance development, training curricula, and business and planning processes. All personnel shall consult official guidance as well as lessons learned and best practices before undertaking any significant project or activity, and when developing

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, "Note by the Secretary-General: Response by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled 'Knowledge management in the United Nations system'" A/72/325/Add.1.

<sup>3</sup> Security Council Resolution S/RES/2436 (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations A/72/19.

<sup>5</sup> In field missions, this includes all civilian and uniformed personnel under the authority of the Head of Mission.

organizational guidance.<sup>6</sup> References to lessons learned and best practices shall be included as standard in any submission of a proposed activity or guidance document to senior mission leadership or the Offices of the Under-Secretary-General(s) (OUSG) for DPO and/or DPPA.

8. Learning in partnership and across institutional boundaries: In line with the vision for the UN peace and security pillar, DPO and DPPA personnel should share knowledge and engage in joint lessons learning with partners across the UN system, including by leveraging system-wide and cross-pillar platforms for knowledge exchange. Where appropriate and beneficial to the objectives of the pillar, lessons learning with external partners is encouraged.
9. Investing in organizational knowledge: DPO and DPPA shall provide tools and platforms for knowledge-sharing. The departments shall also make personnel aware of the functioning of these tools and platforms, and train them in their use. Knowledge management and organizational learning shall be adequately resourced, including through the establishment of a “Policy and Best Practices Officer (PBPO)” position or the designation of a “Policy and Best Practices (PBP) focal point” in field missions.<sup>7</sup> Headquarters entities shall dedicate resources for personnel induction and training in knowledge management tools and approaches.

## ***C2. Cross-cutting Considerations***

10. Gender and Women, Peace and Security (WPS): All organizational learning initiatives, tools and processes shall be gender-responsive and integrate Women, Peace and Security (WPS) considerations, including, wherever relevant, opportunities to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls, in line with relevant policies.<sup>8</sup>
11. Youth, Peace and Security: Wherever relevant, all organizational learning activities, tools and processes shall take into consideration the specific role, concerns and needs of the youth, including opportunities to promote the full and meaningful participation of young people, in line with relevant policies.
12. Human rights and protection considerations: Wherever relevant, organizational learning initiatives, tools and processes shall integrate human rights and protection concerns in line with relevant policies, including those related to the protection of civilians, children, women and girls and other marginalized, vulnerable and/or discriminated groups such as refugees, internally displaced persons, minorities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See DPO-DPPA Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on Guidance Development (ref: DPO 2019.30 / DPPA 2019.09), para 4.

<sup>7</sup> Field missions without a Policy and Best Practices Officer (PBPO) position are strongly encouraged to designate a Policy and Best Practices focal point (PBP FP).

<sup>8</sup> DPO-led peacekeeping operations are guided by the Policy on Gender Responsive United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Operations (2018.01). DPPA-led special political missions and other entities and non-mission settings are guided by the June 2019 DPPA Women, Peace and Security Policy.

<sup>9</sup> While these are examples, due consideration should be given to the specific situation to identify the relevant and evolving human rights and protection concerns relevant to each context.

### **C3. Organizational Learning Process**

13. When to capture lessons: Any significant activity, incident or event (e.g. that involves multiple personnel/offices/departments, and/or significant resources, and/or that is likely to reoccur) shall be followed by a timely exercise to capture personnel experiences and good practices, identify opportunities for improvements and recommend actions to tackle inefficiencies. Certain major activities, incidents and events<sup>10</sup> shall require a written lessons identification exercise and a time-bound follow-through process as governed by other organizational policies.<sup>11</sup> Sections in missions and at Headquarters are encouraged to set up a regular, routine exchange at working level to identify lessons, good practices, ideas for knowledge sharing and guidance needs.<sup>12</sup> Various tools to capture best practices and lessons are available in the knowledge management toolbox.<sup>13</sup>
14. What to do with identified lessons: A lesson is only fully *learned* once a change has been implemented or a successful practice has been embedded in the Organization. Upon completion of a lessons learning exercise on a significant activity, incident or event, a senior manager and/or senior management forum<sup>14</sup> shall validate the findings and designate a unit, a personnel member and/or a follow-through mechanism (e.g. a working group) to implement lessons in a time-bound manner. The tasking authority shall continuously monitor whether the course of action sustains positive practice or improves organizational performance.
15. Regular review of priority lessons by DPO and DPPA at Headquarters: Senior management shall regularly review priority lessons identified and learned to inform guidance development, training curricula and business and planning processes, facilitated by the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training (DPET) of DPO and/or the Policy and Mediation Division (PMD) of DPPA. When appropriate, both departments shall also share and discuss selected priority lessons and policy implications with other parts of the UN system, partner organizations,<sup>15</sup> and in exchanges with Member States, including through the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) and other mechanisms.
16. Regular review of priority lessons by field missions: Mission management shall ensure that similar periodic reviews of priority lessons learned are undertaken to ensure their follow-up and implementation. Policy and Best Practices Officers and focal points in field missions should facilitate the senior-level engagement on priority lessons learned, assisted by DPET and/or PMD as relevant.

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<sup>10</sup> These activities, incidents and events include instances of casualties, attacks on peacekeepers and/or civilian staff, new mission planning or mission transition or review processes, significant budget savings achieved or overspending, or any other development that carries a potentially significant risk (e.g. reputational, political, fiduciary or security) for the UN.

<sup>11</sup> The United Nations Crisis Management Policy and the Policy on Casualty Evacuation in the Field (DOS/2020.07), for example, require an after-action review whenever crisis management procedures have been activated.

<sup>12</sup> Where available, sections should involve the PBPO, PBP focal point or Knowledge Management (KM) focal point in this dialogue.

<sup>13</sup> See Annex 2: Knowledge Management Toolbox.

<sup>14</sup> This may include the mission leadership team (MLT) in peacekeeping operations, the senior management team at section, division, office or department level, or inter-departmental mechanisms such as the Guidance Development and Learning Steering Committee.

<sup>15</sup> For example, International Financial Institutions and regional organizations.

### ***The Knowledge Management Toolbox***

17. Formal and informal tools are available to capture and share best practices and lessons identified. **Annex 2** describes the different knowledge management tools that shall be used to ensure consistency in capturing best practices and lessons learned, and appropriate management of confidential information. All personnel shall have access to these tools to enable them to effectively carry out their tasks.
18. The choice of tool should reflect the scale and scope of the activity, incident or event as well as the need to ensure that lessons identified effectively feed into planning of related processes in a timely manner. As a general rule, an exercise to identify lessons shall be as *nimble, light and action-oriented* as possible.
19. Beyond the established knowledge management toolbox, DPO and DPPA personnel may draw on additional learning methods used in other UN pillars and external entities when appropriate to support organizational learning (e.g. to facilitate real-time assessments and knowledge sharing).

### ***Leveraging Technology Solutions for Knowledge-Sharing and Innovation***

20. The Policy and Practice Database (PPDB) is the official repository for guidance and lessons learned products as well as knowledge management tools and templates for DPO and DPPA. The PPDB provides UN personnel access to guidance and organizational learning resources, including reports and audio-visual and interactive material. The PPDB may be complemented by mission-specific as well as other organizational knowledge platforms. Managers shall promote awareness of these platforms among personnel at Headquarters and in field missions.
21. In the Strategy on New Technologies (2018), the Secretary-General calls on the UN to support the use of new technologies to achieve the Sustainable Development Agenda in alignment with the objectives and values of the UN Charter. To this end, DPO and DPPA shall actively enable the use of new technology through the training of personnel, by increasing knowledge and staying current with technological advancements.<sup>16</sup>
22. Multimedia and accessibility: UN personnel are strongly encouraged to explore the use of various media and technological tools to capture and share best practices and lessons learned (e.g., videos, audio or virtual/augmented reality), cognizant of bandwidth and technical limitations in field locations. DPO and DPPA shall ensure that available technical solutions are applied to make knowledge and lessons more widely accessible, including for persons with disabilities.

### ***Informal (“Tacit”) Knowledge-Sharing and Peer-to-Peer Learning***

23. Managers shall allow and encourage personnel to engage in peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and informal learning interactions. DPO and DPPA shall create platforms and opportunities for active knowledge sharing. Brownbag lunch events and seminars, including to debrief following the completion of a significant activity, should be encouraged wherever possible. Senior mission leaders departing their mission assignment shall be invited to speak at an

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<sup>16</sup> Secretary-General’s Strategy on New Technologies (2018), p. 5.

informal debriefing at UN Headquarters organized by DPET or PMD. Similar debriefing opportunities are encouraged at mission level prior to the departure of a senior mission leader.<sup>17</sup>

24. **Communities of Practice (CoP):** All functional areas are strongly encouraged to leverage the different Secretariat-wide online tools and set up and/or maintain CoPs, including by appointing facilitators/e-moderators to stimulate discussions by making periodic interventions. The Guidance and Learning Unit (GLU) in PMD, the Knowledge Management and Guidance team (KMG) in DPET and the DPO-DPPA Information Management Unit (IMU) can advise on establishing and maintaining a CoP.

### ***Training on Knowledge Management***

25. All in-briefing and other induction programmes for civilian and uniformed senior managers<sup>18</sup> shall include a segment on knowledge management and organizational learning, including an explanation on their responsibilities to create an enabling environment for organizational learning. All senior managers shall be provided a tailored package of key guidance and knowledge products, as part of their in-briefing at UN Headquarters.
26. Induction programmes for all new personnel shall include a component on knowledge management and organizational learning which provides them with an overview of this policy and of their individual knowledge management responsibilities. Managers shall ensure that all incoming personnel receive a list of key guidance and relevant lessons learned materials (as determined by them) as well as a handover note from their predecessor.<sup>19</sup>
27. DPET, PMD, PBPOs and PBP focal points in field missions shall offer specialized training and briefings on learning methods and knowledge sharing platforms to enhance the capacity of UN personnel to contribute to organizational learning.

### ***Transparency, Dissemination and Handling of Sensitive Information***

28. Without prejudice to the confidentiality requirements set out below, knowledge management products shall, as a matter of principle, be available to as wide an audience within the UN as possible in order to enable organizational learning. Formal knowledge products shall be made available through the PPDB, with a default classification level of unclassified.
29. If a report contains sensitive content, security classification in accordance with Secretary-General's Bulletin on Information Sensitivity, Classification and Handling (ST/SGB/2007/6) shall be provided. If missing, the document security classification shall be determined by

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<sup>17</sup> This follows recommendation 4 of the Note by the Secretary-General: Response by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Knowledge management in the United Nations system" A/72/325/Add.1

<sup>18</sup> Including Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, Special Envoys, Personal Envoys, Special Advisors, Special Coordinators, Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, Deputy Special Envoys and Coordinators, Force Commanders, Police Commissioners and Chiefs of Staff in field missions, as well as Under-Secretaries-General, Assistant-Secretaries-General, Military Adviser, Police Adviser, and Directors at UN Headquarters.

<sup>19</sup> In field missions, this should include the contact details and information about the role of the Policy and Best Practice Officer or focal point.

DPET or PMD, in consultation with the relevant offices as appropriate. Documents classified as confidential or strictly confidential shall be made available by DPET and/or PMD to requesting personnel or offices on a case-by-case basis, in coordination with relevant offices.

30. All knowledge management toolbox reports shall remain internal to the United Nations. However, lesson learning initiatives undertaken with a wider audience and publication in mind, and/or conducted in partnership with external entities, may be shared with external audiences by the Directors of DPET and/or PMD, in consultation with the OUSGs of DPO and/or DPPA where relevant. Internal lessons learned reports may be re-used for external products, as agreed with the appropriate offices within the Organization.
31. In the spirit of transparency, DPO and DPPA learning exercises shall produce executive summaries, should the sharing of full reports not be feasible.

#### D. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

32. **Field mission leaders** shall ensure that Policy and Best Practices Officers (PBPO) and/or PBP focal points are appointed within their missions. The Office of the Chief of Staff must ensure the PBPO post is budgeted for and/or a focal point is assigned.<sup>20</sup> Assisted by PBPOs and focal points, mission management is responsible for promoting knowledge sharing and organizational learning across the mission by creating a conducive environment and by supporting and overseeing the work of PBPOs and PBP focal points. This includes facilitating their access to sources of information (e.g. meetings, documents, code cables) required to plan and perform their functions effectively. Field mission management shall be responsible for considering and, if appropriate, ensuring follow up to recommendations contained in knowledge products.
33. **Senior managers at DPO and DPPA** shall be responsible for ensuring that a knowledge management (KM) focal point is designated in their respective office or division. Principals shall be responsible for promoting knowledge management and organizational learning through the creation of a conducive environment and the active application of lessons learned. Senior managers shall be responsible for considering and, if appropriate, ensuring follow-up to recommendations emanating from organizational learning exercises.
34. **Policy and Best Practices Officers (PBPOs)** shall be responsible for training personnel on the use of knowledge management tools, promoting and facilitating the production and sharing of reports as well as the use of online platforms for knowledge sharing. In addition, PBPOs shall provide other learning and research services and shall be responsible for coordinating guidance development in their mission as per their Terms of Reference. PBPOs shall be located within the Office of the Chief of Staff or, if appropriate, within another office with a mandate over the whole mission.
35. **Policy and Best Practices focal points (PBP FPs)** shall serve as knowledge management resources in addition to their core functions, in missions/offices without a full-time PBPO. Their role as focal points shall be a permanent but part-time addition to their workload, and duly reflected in the focal point's overall work plan. Their supervisors shall allow them to set

<sup>20</sup> The creation of a full-time PBPO at the level of P4 or P3 depends on the size and structure of the mission.



aside time and resources for this task. A focal point may also be appointed in the mission support component to support missions-specific guidance development and learning on operational support matters.

36. **Military and Police Policy and Best Practices Officers (M-PBPOs and P-PBPOs) or focal points:** The mission's Military and Police Components, where present, shall designate M-PBPOs and P-PBPOs, respectively, or focal points. In doing so, the Head of the Military or Police Component shall take into account the rotation timeline in order to ensure that the M-PBPO / P-PBPO or focal point serves in the mission for 12 months where possible. Uniformed focal points, like their civilian counterparts, shall serve as knowledge management resources in addition to their core functions. Their role as focal points shall be a permanent, but part-time, addition to their workload.
37. **All personnel, including managers,** shall share their specialized knowledge through participation in CoPs, other forms of tacit knowledge sharing, the drafting of best practices reports as well as by contributing to guidance development. They shall be responsible for consulting best practices resources with a view of integrating lessons and best practices into their daily work. All managers are strongly encouraged to include the 'commitment to continuous learning' competency in all vacancy announcements and performance appraisals. Managers shall make their personnel aware of knowledge management tools and resources and encourage personnel under their supervision to contribute to organizational learning.<sup>21</sup>
38. **The Guidance Development and Learning Steering Committee (GDLSC)** shall periodically review lessons identified and learned to inform guidance development and set priorities for lessons learned exercises of cross-cutting relevance for DPO and DPPA.<sup>22</sup>
39. **DPET** and **PMD** shall be responsible for promoting knowledge management and organizational learning across DPO and DPPA. This includes processing and disseminating reports, supporting and coordinating the activities of the PBPOs and PBP focal points, their induction and training, as well as providing them with methodological guidance. In coordination with the Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT) and with IMU, as relevant, DPET and PMD shall be responsible for coordinating the development and maintenance of knowledge sharing systems, tools and templates.
40. **Training branches** (including DPET/Integrated Training Service (ITS), PMD/GLU, Office of Military Affairs (OMA), Police Division (PD), Integrated Mission Training Centres/Training Units and U7s) are responsible for including a session on knowledge management and organizational learning in all induction programmes for civilian and uniformed senior managers and personnel more broadly.

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<sup>21</sup> In line with the recommendation 3 of the "Note by the Secretary-General: Response by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled 'Knowledge management in the United Nations system'", A/72/325/Add.1.

<sup>22</sup> The GDLSC was established in 2019 to set priorities for strategic guidance development/revision and institutional learning across the UN peace and security pillar. It is convened bi-annually and is co-chaired by the Directors of DPET and PMD.

## E. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

41. For purposes of this policy, the following definitions shall apply:

<i>Best Practice:</i>	Way of carrying out an activity that has proven its effectiveness across contexts and situations and is therefore institutionally recognized as the optimal course of action.
<i>Good Practice:</i>	A practice or activity that has proven successful in a specific situation and setting and that may be recommended to be replicated in other situations, with the potential to become an institutional “best practice”.
<i>Knowledge Management:</i>	A set of processes by which an organization gathers, organizes, disseminates, and analyses its experiential knowledge, drawing upon and mining unstructured information throughout the organization in order to form a body of institutional knowledge.
<i>Lessons Learned:</i>	Applied or considered lessons identified from past actions, projects and/or operations. Lessons can be positive or negative, in that they may recommend that an approach be replicated or avoided in the future.
<i>Organizational Learning:</i>	Process of creating, retaining, and transferring knowledge within the organization that allows the organization to stay effective in an ever-changing environment.

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## F. REFERENCES

### Normative or Superior References

- Security Council Resolution 2167 (2014).
- Security Council Resolution 2436 (2018).
- The future of United Nations peace operations: Implementation of the recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. Report of the Secretary-General (A/70/357, S/2015/682).
- Joint Inspection Unit: Knowledge Management in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2016/10).
- Note by the Secretary-General: Response by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Knowledge management in the United Nations system” A/72/325/Add.1.
- Secretary-General’s Strategy on New Technologies (2018).

- Vision of the UN Peace and Security Pillar, 2020.

#### **Knowledge Management related Guidance**

- DPO-DPPA Policy on Guidance Development (DPO 2019.29 / DPPA 2019.08).
  - Standard Operating Procedure on End of Assignment Reports (EoAR) (DPO 2020.12 / DPPA 2020.3)
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### **G. MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE**

42. In field missions, the implementation of this policy shall be the responsibility of the Head of Mission assisted by the Chief of Staff, the Policy and Best Practices Officers, Policy and Best Practices focal points, DPET and PMD.
  43. At Headquarters, the implementation of this policy shall be the responsibility of all heads of divisions under the overall authority of the Under-Secretaries-General of DPO and DPPA.
  44. DPET and PMD, with the support of civilian and uniformed Policy and Best Practices Officers and focal points in field missions and at UN Headquarters, shall monitor the overall implementation of this policy. A mid-term review shall be undertaken one and a half years following the adoption of the policy to assess progress made and the need to adjust the policy and its systems and tools to ensure that these are fit for purpose. Findings and recommendations shall be presented to the Guidance Development and Learning Steering Committee, DPO and DPPA more broadly, and field missions for follow-up, as required.
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### **H. CONTACT**

1. The contacts for this policy are DPO/DPET/PBPS/KMG via [peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org](mailto:peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org) and DPPA/PMD/GLU via [dppa-policy@un.org](mailto:dppa-policy@un.org).
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### **I. HISTORY**

45. The first DPKO policy on Knowledge Sharing was approved on 26 June 2006 and subsequently revised twice.
  46. The first DPA Learning and Evaluation Framework was approved in February 2013 and subsequently revised twice.
  47. This is the first joint DPO-DPPA Policy on Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning, applicable to both departments and their field missions and offices. It supersedes the previous documents mentioned in paragraphs 45 and 46.
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**APPROVAL SIGNATURE:**

**NAME, TITLE, DEPARTMENT**



Ms. Rosemary A. DiCarlo  
Under-Secretary-General  
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**DATE OF APPROVAL:**

13 August 2020

**APPROVAL SIGNATURE:**

**NAME, TITLE, DEPARTMENT**



Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix  
Under-Secretary-General  
for Peace Operations

**DATE OF APPROVAL:**

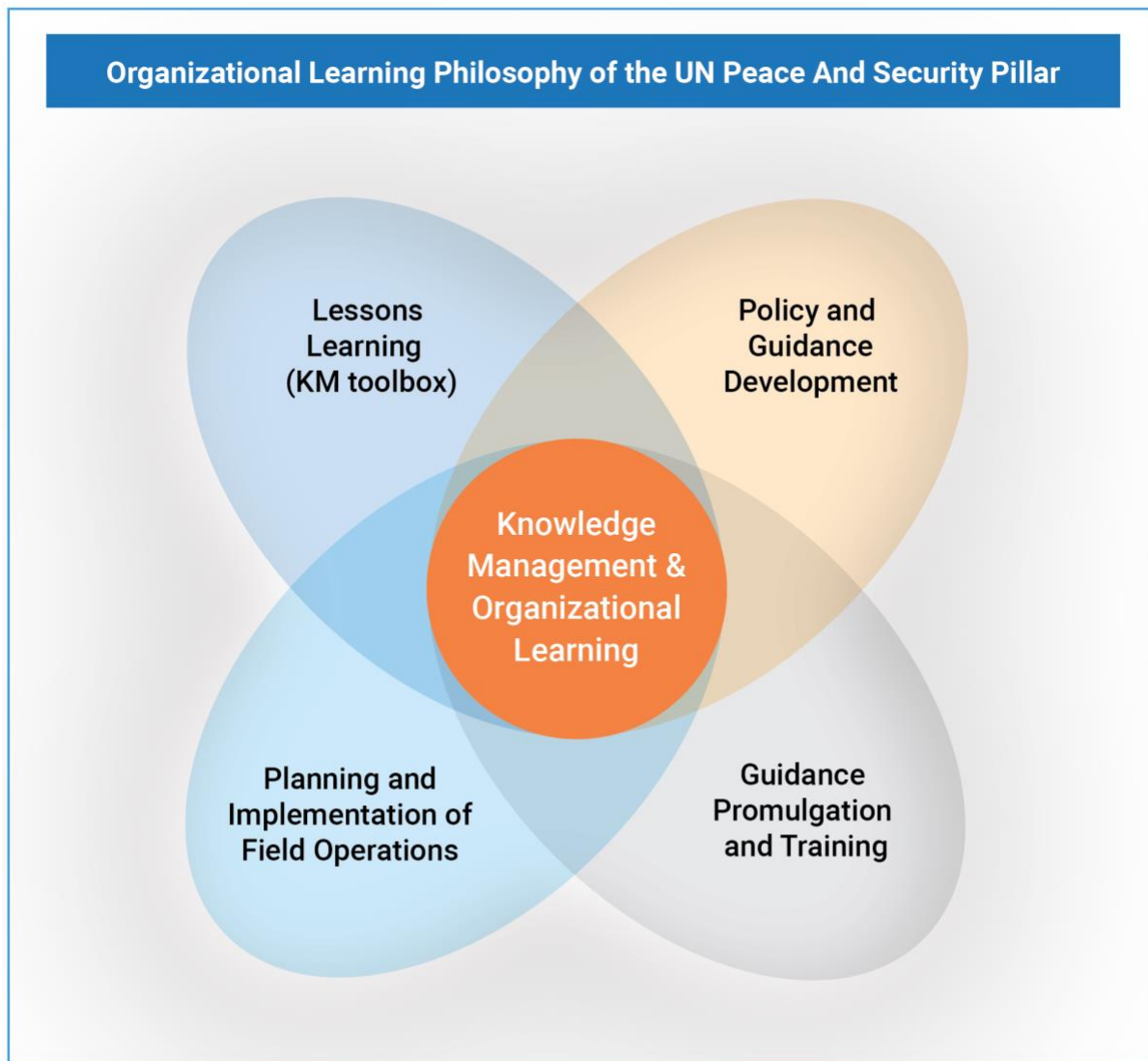
13 August 2020

## Annex 1

### Organizational Learning Process

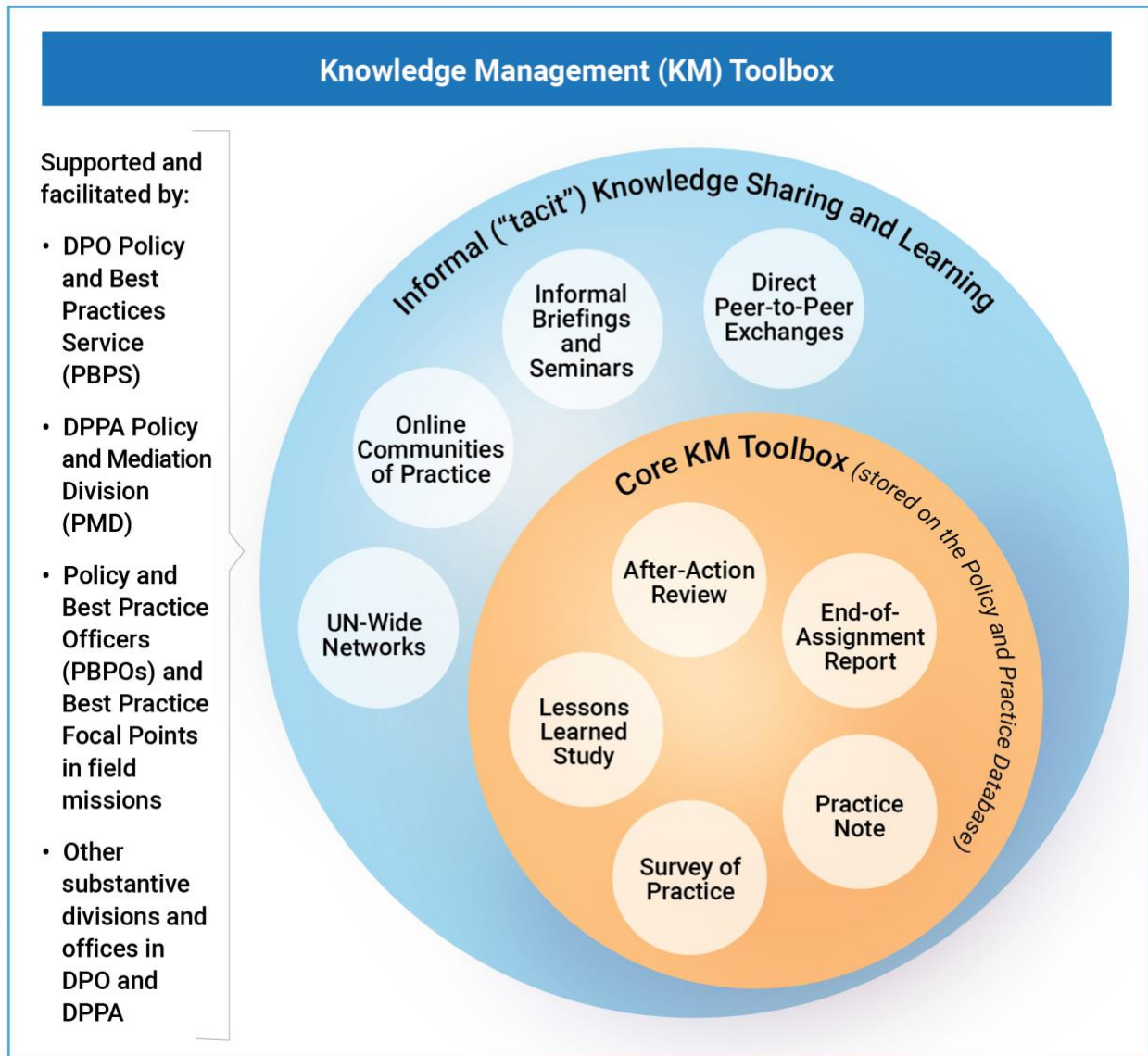
Organizational learning is a continuous process that enhances the organization's collective ability to accept, make sense of, and respond to internal and external change. Organizational learning requires systematic integration and collective interpretation of new knowledge that leads to collective action and involves risk taking as experimentation.<sup>23</sup>

The below diagram encapsulates the organizational learning philosophy of the UN peace and security pillar. It denotes that the four depicted core components are interconnected and continuously inform each other in different, often non-sequential, ways.



<sup>23</sup> This definition is adapted from Businessdirectory.com.

Knowledge Management Toolbox<sup>24</sup>



a. An After-Action Review (AAR) is an analysis of an action, activity or project that allows personnel to reflect on what went well and areas of improvement, and to identify concrete

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that some learning activities may not fall strictly within the set of tools listed below. As stated in paragraph 19, in such cases personnel are encouraged to draw on additional learning methods employed in other UN pillars and external entities when appropriate to support organizational learning (e.g. to facilitate real-time assessments and knowledge sharing).

recommendations for follow-up to enhance similar actions, activities or projects going forward. An AAR can be a brief discussion or longer exercise depending on the topic at hand and is most often conducted through a guided group discussion. An AAR reference note and templates are annexed to this policy.

- b. Practice Notes review and analyse good practice in a specific area of peacekeeping or special political missions. They can range from short descriptive accounts of how a mission or office is carrying out a certain task, to broader documents intended to assist UN personnel by describing established practices in a variety of business areas, while taking into account regulatory frameworks and policies. Practice Notes can therefore also fill a gap between established good practice and formal guidance.
- c. Surveys of Practice are comparative descriptive snapshots of how practitioners carry out a certain function or activity, either across sections within a mission/office or across different missions/offices. They are used to provide options, lessons and best practices to missions on issues that other missions have dealt with before but for which there is little or no official guidance, or to document how an existing guidance is being implemented.
- d. A lessons learned study is an in-depth analysis of a specific process, theme or functional area with the objective of drawing lessons to improve relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of subsequent processes or efforts in DPO- or DPPA-led field missions or at UN Headquarters. A reference note and templates for lessons learned studies are annexed to this policy.
- e. End of Assignment Reports (EoARs) are personal, analytical accounts by senior personnel in the DPO and DPPA of best practices, challenges and lessons identified in mandate delivery across the UN peace and security pillar, and recommendations for how to address any gaps identified going forward.<sup>25</sup> EoARs are mandatory for all senior DPO and DPPA personnel, both at HQ and in the field. A separate Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on EoAR describes accountabilities and procedures for the preparation and handling of EoARs.
- f. Handover notes are not strictly speaking a learning tool but serve to ensure business continuity. Handover notes are created by personnel who are about to leave their positions temporarily or permanently. These notes assist their successor to carry out their duties.

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<sup>25</sup> This practice of producing EoARs is in line with recommendation 4 of the “Note by the Secretary-General: Response by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled ‘Knowledge management in the United Nations system’”, A/72/325/Add.1.

## Annex 3

### AFTER-ACTION REVIEWS Reference Note and Templates

1. This Reference Note provides guidance on the planning, conduct, dissemination and follow-up on After-Action Reviews undertaken by the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), including DPO- and DPPA-led field missions. It forms part of efforts by DPO and DPPA to foster a harmonized approach to knowledge management (KM) across the UN peace and security pillar and to improve performance for subsequent processes.
2. An After-Action Review (AAR) is an analysis of an action, activity or project that allows personnel to reflect on what went well; identify areas of improvement and concrete recommendations for follow-up to enhance similar exercises going forward.<sup>26</sup> AARs can also contribute to teambuilding. AARs are not a performance review tool and should be conducted in a spirit of openness, honesty and learning.
3. AARs are part of the DPO-DPPA knowledge management toolbox to capture lessons and enhance the effectiveness of the Organization, in line with the DPO-DPPA Policy on Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning (ref. DPO 2020.11 / DPPA 2020.2).

#### SCOPE

4. The procedures and provisions outlined herein are strongly recommended for all DPO and DPPA civilian and uniformed personnel in field missions, at Headquarters and in offices away from Headquarters.

#### PROCEDURES

##### 5. When to undertake an After-Action Review

5.1. AARs should be part of any significant action, activity or project at UN Headquarters or the field level. An AAR should for example be undertaken if:

→ The action, activity or project is a departmental and/or field mission mandate priority.

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<sup>26</sup> AARs differ from Lessons Learned (LL) Studies in that the scope and timing of an AAR is usually more limited and more immediate, following the action, activity or project under review. LL Studies are in-depth analysis of a specific effort, process, theme or functional area with the objective of drawing lessons to improve relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of subsequent processes or efforts in field missions or at Headquarters. For more information, see the Reference Note and Templates for Lessons Learned Studies in Annex 4 of the Policy on Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning.



- Lessons from practitioners in a particular area are required to inform the development and review of guidance and training in DPO and/or DPPA, or in field missions, as well as in mission planning processes.
- The action, activity or project constitutes a major event or innovation for a DPO or DPPA field mission(s) and or DPO-DPPA divisions/offices.
- The action, activity or project is likely to recur over time or take place in another division/office and/or in another DPO or DPPA field mission, i.e. lessons should be collected to replicate best practices, identify guidance gaps, training needs and avoid repeating mistakes.
- Another policy or guidance applicable to DPO and DPPA field missions (such as the UN Crisis Management Policy) that calls for a mandatory AAR following a significant event, instances of casualties, attacks on field mission personnel, new mission planning or mission transition or review processes, and significant budget savings achieved or overspending.
- Other issues that typically require an AAR involve incidents that have implications for:
  - the safety and security of UN personnel, assets or premises.
  - the mission's political engagement at any level.
  - the mission's relationship with host country authorities.
  - the procedures regarding major areas of its mandate or cross-cutting priorities (such as human rights, PoC and gender).
  - the mission's ability to effectively implement such priorities with regard to support and operational considerations, and for which the response by the mission is either not covered by existing guidance or was not conducted according to existing guidance.

5.2.AARs should ideally be initiated within two weeks of the completion of an action, activity or project, to capture lessons while the team of relevant staff members is available, and memories are fresh. For reviews of the UN's crisis response or other events potentially requiring urgent corrective actions, AARs should be initiated immediately following events. AARs can also be conducted during an activity or project as a preliminary stock-taking exercise to enable real time learning and course correction. The completion of an AAR should, when possible, be integrated into the planning process for a major activity or project.

## 6. Initiation and participation

- 6.1.Any team/office/unit member can propose an AAR. Staff should have their supervisor's endorsement to undertake an AAR and Directors/Section Heads should be informed of the activity.
- 6.2.AARs can also be initiated upon request of senior management at Headquarters and in field missions. In field missions with a Policy and Best Practices Officer (PBPO) or focal point (PBP FP), the PBPO / PBP FP may also initiate an AAR with the endorsement of her/his supervisor and/or senior mission management.
- 6.3.In field missions, the initiation of AARs should always be communicated to the civilian/uniformed Policy and Best Practices Officer or focal point, where available. The PBPO/FP should keep the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training (DPET) of DPO or Policy and Mediation Division (PMD) of DPPA as well as other PBPO/FPs informed to allow for learning across field entities.

6.4.DPO and DPPA field missions and DPO and DPPA HQ offices can also propose AARs to DPO/DPET and/or DPPA/PMD, or to the Guidance Development and Learning Steering Committee (GDLSC) for AARs of UN peace and security pillar-wide relevance.

6.5.Any DPO and/ or DPPA staff at Headquarters or in field missions who were involved in the action, activity or project under review (regardless of their rank or status) may be invited to participate in the AAR. Other UN departments and entities as well as external partners may also be involved, when relevant.

## **7. Planning and Methodology**

7.1.AARs are designed to be a flexible learning tool whose methodology is adaptable to the context and learning objectives. The duration and methodology of an AAR may vary, depending on the action, activity and project reviewed. For example, while an AAR discussion on the organization of a workshop may take less than an hour, an AAR on an operational activity or support to a political process may require a full-day workshop as well as other methods such as surveys, one-on-one interviews or a (limited) document review. During one-on-one interviews, participants should be informed that their contribution will be protected by the Chatham House Rule, as neither their identity nor affiliation will be revealed in connection to any detail in the report. However, in all cases the objective of an AAR remains to provide for a light methodology involving a group discussion among key stakeholders whenever possible.

7.2.Once it has been agreed to conduct an AAR, the lead team/office/unit,<sup>27</sup> in consultation with relevant stakeholders, should agree on the objectives, issues of focus, methodology, participants, length, timing and location of the AAR discussion and key questions for the exercise. For more comprehensive exercises, for example if multiple stakeholders are involved, it is recommended that a concept note or Terms of Reference (ToR) is prepared. See template below.

7.3.The lead team/office/unit should identify a facilitator to lead the discussion phase of the AAR. A facilitator promotes discussion, draws out lessons learned, and ensures the maintenance of an open environment throughout the exercise. The facilitator should have some knowledge of the subject matter and issues under discussion but should ideally not have been involved in the actual issue at hand and should be impartial. In field missions, the PBPO/FP can act as facilitator, as can other staff members. Additional guidance on AAR facilitation can be found further below.

7.4.The lead team/office/unit should also identify a note-taker who will summarize the discussions and should prepare the AAR report.

## **8. AAR report**

8.1.An AAR report should summarize the learning identified in the discussions. Key documents such as checklists, staffing tables, terms of reference, planning documents, process maps and

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<sup>27</sup> The lead office should, in most cases, be the office that 'owned' the process/activity under examination, or that was/is most vested in the issue. Where this is not clear or where the issue may have cross-cutting or mission-wide relevance, the lead office could, for example, be the Office of the Mission Chief of Staff or the Office of the SRSG/Head of Mission.

any other illustrative flowcharts may be attached as annexes. Emphasis should be placed on producing a short succinct report with clear identification of good practices, innovations, gaps and actionable recommendations, within a timeframe of no more than four weeks from the inception of the AAR. A suggested AAR report template is included below.

- 8.2. The note taker or facilitator should share a copy of the AAR report with all participants for comments and feedback and to ensure that the learning is accurately reflected. As learning documents, AAR reports do not require clearance by the Head of Entity. However, the overall contents of the report should be agreed upon and validated by the AAR participants, including the manager of the team/office/unit that initiated the AAR.
- 8.3. All final AAR reports shall be gender-responsive and, where relevant, integrate Women, Peace and Security (WPS) considerations, including, opportunities to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls, in line with relevant policies.
- 8.4. Where relevant, AARs should integrate human rights and protection concerns in line with relevant policies, including those related to the protection of civilians, children, women and girls and to other marginalized, vulnerable and/or discriminated groups such as (but not limited to) refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), persons with disabilities, minority communities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people.

## 9. Classification

- 9.1. To facilitate organizational learning, teams are encouraged to classify AAR reports as 'unclassified' whenever possible, in line with the classification scheme outlined in ST/SGB/2007/6. In order to allow for the AAR report to be widely disseminated, it is possible to cover confidential issues in a short addendum to the report, to be shared only with a specific, clearly defined target group and/or senior management.
- 9.2. All AAR reports must include the following disclaimer to ensure that the document is understood as a product of an organizational learning process, and not confused with official guidance:

*This report is not an official document and does not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations Department of Peace Operations or the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.*

## 10. Dissemination

- 10.1. Once finalized, the AAR report should be disseminated to all participants and to relevant DPO and/or DPPA Divisions/Offices at Headquarters and field missions. Special political missions should send their AARs to the Guidance and Learning Unit (GLU) in PMD/DPPA ([dppa-policy@un.org](mailto:dppa-policy@un.org)), and peacekeeping operations should send their AARs to the Knowledge Management and Guidance Team (KMG) in the Policy & Best Practices Service (PBPS) in DPET/DPO ([peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org](mailto:peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org)). GLU and KMG shall upload AAR reports to the Policy and Practice Database (PPDB) in accordance with their classification level. GLU and KMG may also include AAR reports in newsletters or use other dissemination tools.

- 10.2. Regardless of their classification, in principle AAR reports are UN-internal documents. Depending on the issue, the field mission, DPO and DPPA can exercise flexibility in sharing unclassified AAR reports with other relevant UN departments and entities, and with other partners if the AAR was conducted jointly with them. Similarly, field missions can share unclassified AARs with other relevant UN entities within the Area of Operations, or another UN entity that deals with the subject matter.
- 10.3. If it is in the interest of the Organization, AAR reports or certain elements can be shared with external partners with external audiences by the Directors of DPET or PMD, in consultation with the OUSGs of DPO and/or DPPA where relevant. Certain elements of internal lessons learned reports may be re-used for external products, as agreed by the author and the appropriate offices within the Organization. In consultation with the drafting office or mission, AAR reports may be uploaded to the Peacekeeping Resource Hub to facilitate joint learning with Member States, in particular Troop and Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs).
- 10.4. Access to confidential and strictly confidential AAR reports shall be considered on a case-by-case basis by GLU and/or KMG, in consultation with the relevant field mission through the mission's PBPO/FP, where applicable, or with the lead office within DPO/DPPA. Release of a confidential or strictly confidential report shall be made on a need-to-know basis in accordance with ST/SGB/207/6.

## **11. Follow-up to After-Action Reviews**

- 11.1. The findings of an AAR should feed into organizational learning and the development of guidance and training. When an AAR presents significant findings and recommendations with broader implications for field missions, for the UN peace and security pillar, or for the United Nations at large, these should be tabled for discussion and follow-up by senior management at the appropriate level, either through ad-hoc mechanisms or existing bodies such as the Guidance Development and Learning Steering Committee. Where appropriate, senior management should agree on follow-up actions with clearly assigned responsibilities.
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## **MONITORING**

12. The implementation of these procedures is monitored and supported by the Guidance and Learning Unit in the Policy and Mediation Division (GLU/PMD) of DPPA and the Knowledge Management and Guidance Team in the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training (KMG/DPET) of DPO.
  13. In field missions, the Mission Chief of Staff, with support from the PBPO/FPs (where relevant), should monitor the production of AARs in accordance with these procedures. This can include keeping a register of completed AARs and other lessons learning products, including on follow-up to AAR recommendations. Such a register should also be maintained for audit purposes.
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## After-Action Review Report Template

A copy of the After-Action Review report in *Microsoft Word* format should be sent to [dppa-policy@un.org](mailto:dppa-policy@un.org) or [peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org](mailto:peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org) for uploading onto the Policy and Practice Database (PPDB) and dissemination as appropriate. Visit [PPDB.un.org](http://PPDB.un.org) for examples of AARs and other guidance documents.

**Name/date of action/activity/project:**

**Date of AAR:**

**Summary:** Summary of the main findings (max. 130 words).

**Date or Duration of event/project:** Indicate whether the AAR covers only part of an action/activity/project.

**AAR participants:** Names/ titles. Please include facilitator, the note-taker and possibly staff members interviewed before or after the AAR discussion.

**Methodology:** Briefly mention how the AAR was conducted.

*Description of action/activity/project for which the AAR is conducted*

**Background:** Include a concise background on the action/activity/project under review. This section could include a brief history of the action/activity/project and facts and figures.

**Objectives of the event/project:** Indicate the intended or stated objective of the action/activity/project. If there is a lack of consensus among the participants on the objectives, this should be noted.

**Achievements/results of the action/activity/project:** Summarize the main achievements and results of the action/activity/project. Include achievements that led towards meeting the objectives, as well as other unintended results (positive or negative).

**Process mapping & methodology:** The purpose of this section is to provide an account of how the action/activity/project was conducted in order to facilitate replication tailoring and foster organizational learning. Useful project documents such as checklists, staffing tables, terms of reference, planning documents, assessment sheets, may be attached as annexes.

*Findings of the AAR*

**Best practices/what worked well:** Note activities or approaches that worked well, specifically those that, in the group's opinion, could or should be adopted, repeated and tailored by others conducting a similar exercise in the future.

**Lessons learned/what did not work well or could be improved:** Note activities or approaches that proved to be problematic, specifically those that, in the group's opinion, should be avoided by others conducting a similar exercise in the future. Key challenges can also be raised.

**Recommendations:** Provide recommendations on how best to execute the action/activity/project under review. Recommendations should be specific, clear, actionable, achievable (what-who-when). Consider identifying areas where policy development could provide a solution. It might be useful to classify according to the group/level to whom the recommendation is addressed (e.g. Headquarters/field).

**Keywords associated with this AAR:** Identify some keywords to be associated with the AAR for search purposes on the Policy and Practice Database.

**AAR annexes and background documents:** List relevant background documents, such as terms of reference, project management documents, or guidance relevant to the action/activity/project.

**Contacts:** Include the following text or footnote: "The contact person/s for this AAR is/are [include names, phone numbers, email addresses]. Comments are welcome. If you would like to add a comment, please write to [contact person cited below] and/or GLU/PMD/DPPA at [dppa-policy@un.org](mailto:dppa-policy@un.org) or KMG/PBPS/DPET/DPO at [peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org](mailto:peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org). Please mention your name, function, mission/office and the title of the report."

*This report reflects the personal views of its authors and does not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations Department of Peace Operations or the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.*

## ***Terms of Reference (Template)***

### **Title of AAR**

(Note: A ToR may only be required for larger AAR exercises)

#### **Background**

- Provide a short overview and rationale for the After-Action Review. Explain briefly what the AAR is about. Keep it in 1-2 paragraphs maximum.

#### **Objectives, Scope and Timeframe of the AAR**

- Clearly identify and define what is expected from the AAR.

#### **Participants**

- List the envisaged group of participants.

#### **Methodology**

- Specify procedures and workflow to carry out the AAR and describe any additional methods to conduct the AAR (e.g. survey, one-on-one interviews, document research)

#### **Responsibilities**

- Define the responsibilities: Who calls the AAR and invites participants? Who takes care of administrative arrangements for the group discussion? Who facilitates? Who takes notes during the discussion? Who drafts the report?
- If additional methods are used to conduct the AAR, describe who will be responsible for them

## Tips for AAR Facilitator

### ***Setting the scene for the AAR discussion***

- Explain the purposes and principles of an AAR: Emphasize that it is a learning exercise and not a performance review or evaluation.
- Remind participants that confidentiality must be respected and encourage a spirit of openness, trust and respect.
- Point out that all members will be treated as equal participants and that diverse opinions and perspectives are welcome (it is permissible to disagree – also with supervisors/superior officers or colleagues).
- Set out any agreed time frames (e.g. a one-hour discussion) and other ground rules, for example regarding the length of individual contributions.
- Consider using participatory and visualization methods to stimulate discussions. E.g. ask participants to write down answers to a certain question on cards or visualize ideas in mind maps or on flipcharts - encourage contributions by all participants.

### ***Identifying best practices, areas of improvement and recommendations***

- Helpful questions to involve participants in the AAR discussion and to foster agreement on the events that occurred may include: “What actually happened?” “What did we actually achieve?” “Is there a difference between the initial objectives and the actual outcome? If so, why?” It may be useful to use a flow chart or identify specific tasks, deliverables or decision points.
- A discussion on the methodology, sequence and tools used in the course of the action, activity or project can be useful to others conducting similar exercises in the future. The AAR report should, where possible, cite references to relevant guidance that was used, and/or whether any guidance gaps emerged that should be addressed by the Organization.
- Ask questions to identify best practices in the undertaking of the action, activity or project. For example, the facilitator/discussion leader may ask “What went well? Why?” or “What do you think are actions that are worth repeating in a similar project? Why?” It may be more constructive to start out with identifying these good practices rather than initially focusing on deficiencies, bottlenecks and challenges.
- Ask questions that help identify areas of improvement. Typical questions may include: “What could have been done better? Why and how?” “What should we do differently next time? Why and how?”. The questions should not focus on the negative but rather on how things could be improved for future actions, activities and projects. Should participants not be forthcoming, the facilitator may ask each member to write his/her comments anonymously, to be shared with the whole group. Another useful discussion tool could be to ask the members to rate the project/action on a scale of one to ten and ask them to describe what would have made it a “ten” for them.
- Probe participants to identify actionable recommendations (who-what-when) for future activities/process of a similar nature. For example, instead of “More time is needed for planning”, the recommendation should say, “Office X to convene at least three meetings over a period of two weeks prior to event Y for planning.” It is advisable to focus on a small number of recommendations upon which the team involved in the AAR can act, instead of broad recommendations addressed to the Department, the United Nations or its organs. For example, “Office X to convene at least three meetings over a period of two weeks prior to event Y for planning” instead of “DPO/DPPA should invest more resources in Z.” In line with the WPS policy, the AAR should aim to include gendered analysis, sex disaggregated data and/or information on women’s participation.

### ***Wrapping up***

- At the end of the discussion, the team should identify colleagues and/or teams at Headquarters and in the field with whom the AAR report should be shared and decide on how this should be done. The facilitator or discussion leader may ask “Who needs to know or could benefit from the learning?” and “How can we share?”



## Annex 4

### LESSONS LEARNED STUDIES

#### Reference Note and Templates

1. This Reference Note provides guidance on the planning, conduct, dissemination and follow-up of Lessons Learned Studies undertaken by the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), including DPO- and DPPA-led field missions. It forms part of efforts by DPO and DPPA to foster a harmonized approach to knowledge management (KM) across the UN peace and security pillar and to improve performance for subsequent processes.
2. A lessons learned study is an in-depth analysis of a specific effort, process, theme or functional area with the objective of drawing lessons to improve relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of subsequent processes or efforts at Headquarters or in field missions.<sup>28</sup> Lessons learned studies allow DPO and DPPA to learn from past experience, reducing the likelihood of repeating mistakes and increasing the probability for future success. Lessons learned studies serve internal learning purposes, inform the planning of current or future processes and efforts, and can support policy development. They include a clear methodology, adopt an evidence-based approach to increase the robustness of the study and cover a longer time period than AARs or other KM tools. The findings of a lessons learned study rely on an analytical framework to help answer research questions and produce concrete actionable recommendations.
3. Lessons learned studies are part of the DPO-DPPA knowledge management toolbox to capture lessons and enhance the effectiveness of the Organization, in line with the DPO-DPPA Policy on Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning (ref. DPO 2020.11 / DPPA 2020.2).

#### SCOPE

4. The procedures and provisions outlined herein are strongly recommended for all DPO and DPPA civilian and uniformed personnel in field missions, at Headquarters and in offices away from Headquarters.

#### PROCEDURES

##### Step One: When to undertake Lessons Learned Studies

5. Lessons Learned Studies should be part of assessing any significant effort, process, country file or thematic area at UN Headquarters or the field level. Lessons Learned Studies should for example be undertaken if:
  - The effort, process, country file or thematic area is a departmental and/or field mission mandate priority.

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<sup>28</sup> Other knowledge management products include After Action Reviews (AAR) which are an analysis of an action, activity or project that allows staff to reflect on what went well; identify areas of improvement and concrete recommendations for follow-up to enhance similar exercises going forward. For more information, see the Reference Note and Templates for After Action Reviews in Annex 3 of the Policy on Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning.

- The Guidance Development and Learning Steering Committee (GDLSC) identifies the need for a study to meet a pillar wide learning opportunity or persistent challenge. A departmental Director or Head of Mission may also initiate a Lessons Learned Study.
- A particular DPO and/or DPPA effort or process that requires a large-scale comparative study (using quantitative and/or qualitative analysis) and/or a longer timeframe of focus.
- Lessons from practitioners in a particular area are required to inform the development and review of guidance and training in DPO and/or DPPA, or in field missions, as well as in mission planning processes and transitions.

## **Step Two: Initiation and Participation**

6. Lessons learned studies can be initiated by any DPO and/or DPPA office at Headquarters or in field missions. Lessons learned studies can also be initiated by the peace and security pillar Guidance Development and Learning Steering Committee (GDLSC) which is mandated to identify learning priorities for both departments.
7. Studies can be undertaken internally by missions or departmental staff as well as by consultants or in collaboration with external partners such as think tanks and academic institutions. Equally, if a project or action will be carried out closely with another field mission or UN partner, that entity may be invited to take part in the study. However, to ensure independence and objectivity, the lead author of a study should not have been directly involved in the process or engagement being studied.
8. Lessons learned studies should, wherever possible, contribute to established departmental priorities (e.g. as formulated in strategic plans or other strategy documents) and/or to priorities set out by the GDLSC.

## **Step Three: Assessment discussions, initial study design and formulation of terms of reference**

9. Assessment discussions with concerned stakeholders should determine the priority level, relevance and appropriateness of the planned study. Factors to consider include whether the study is likely to lead to direct improvements in the work of DPO or DPPA, or of the field missions, and whether it will identify meaningful and actionable recommendations.
10. The availability of sufficient human and financial resources<sup>29</sup> for a lessons learned study should be carefully considered with due regard to staff time, consultancies, travel and other possible requirements such as workshops.
11. Based on the assessment discussions, Terms of Reference (ToR) should be elaborated to determine the parameters of the study. The ToR (see sample template below) should include the following elements:
  - Background;
  - Rationale and objectives, link to priority objectives of the department or the UN peace and security pillar;

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<sup>29</sup> Extra-budgetary resources can be made available, upon request and subject to the approval of the Under-Secretary-General, for studies conducted by DPPA and missions administered by DPPA.

- Scope (subject material and period to be covered);
- Methodology (outline of initial proposed methodology);
- Expected outputs;
- Required specialist skills and experience to undertake or support the study;
- Timing, resources and administrative requirements (realistic resource allocations and sources of funding; potential travel costs);
- Dissemination (possible dissemination strategies for different audiences, including specification of whether external/public dissemination is foreseen);
- List of possible interlocutors (if identified in assessment discussions).

#### **Step Four: Design of the research methodology**

12. When elaborating the design of a lessons learned study, the lead author should ensure that the study meets the terms of reference while being open to changes in the study design to incorporate unforeseen findings. Key elements for consideration include:
  - Drawing upon the objectives in the terms of reference, the main lines of inquiry for the study;
  - Relevant primary and secondary sources such as internal and external reports, statements, mission and meeting records, guidance material, legal and policy documents, articles, intranet pages, websites and internal platforms;
  - Other means of information gathering from primary sources such as interviews, workshops, focus group discussions, surveys or roundtables, as appropriate;
  - Travel and related administrative requirements.
  
13. Depending on the scope of the study, authors should draft a research framework or a list of research questions, particularly when undertaking studies examining a theory of change or trying to identify causality. An activity tracking tool or matrices to monitor progress of the study, including possibly individuals interviewed, documents collected, key findings and recommendations, can also be considered.
  
14. As part of the research design, an inception report may be required. Staff members and consultants should share the inception report with relevant stakeholders and incorporate comments prior to the research and analysis phase.

#### **Step Five: Research and Analysis**

15. Staff members and consultants conducting lessons learned studies are encouraged to follow the following basic research approach:
  - Familiarize themselves with the subject using primary and secondary sources;
  - Adapt the study design and relevant documents such as interview guides, as necessary;
  - Conduct interviews, focus group discussions, surveys and/or other research as per the research design;
  - Undertake a preliminary result briefing with the client(s) who requested the study and with the relevant key stakeholders to seek feedback on the preliminary results;
  - Based on the information and feedback collected, prepare a first draft of the report;
  - Conduct further research, as necessary;

- Draft the report.
16. During focus group discussions or interviews, at the outset, the study's author should state the purposes and principles of the study,<sup>30</sup> emphasizing that it is a learning exercise and not a performance evaluation or investigation. The study author should set ground rules of confidentiality and encourage a spirit of openness and point out that all members will be treated as equal participants. Suggested questions for the study author that help identify lessons learned and recommendations applicable to the exercise are included below.
  17. If travel is required, staff members or consultants should ensure that the relevant field-based personnel are involved in the process as early as possible and that key interviewees or meeting participants are available. Relevant Divisions/Offices should also be briefed and be ready to support field travel. Formal correspondence may be sent to the field advising of the proposed visit and requesting a focal point for follow up and logistical support. The staff member leading the study may want to follow up with the focal point to schedule interviews or meetings and coordinate logistical arrangements. Those who wish to contribute to the lessons learned studies but are unable to attend in person may share their views through other communication channels.
  18. The author(s) may undertake preliminary results briefings with the client(s) and key stakeholders at the end of research and analysis phase.

#### **Step Six: Preparation of lessons learned report: structure and content**

19. A suggested structure for a lessons learned study is outlined below, as well as in the template. Lessons learned studies will typically include:
  - a) An executive summary outlining the main findings and recommendations of the study;
  - b) A background section, including information on the rationale, objectives and scope of the study, the methodology applied and the expected outputs;
  - c) The main body of the study, including a short summary of the key issues analysed, broken down into sub-issues, as necessary. Sub-issues should be divided into a description of the findings on the issue and an analysis of these findings including on lessons learned and good practices;
  - d) A conclusion section, including a brief summary of the main findings of the study, pointing out any areas that require further study, as necessary;
  - e) Specific, clear, actionable, achievable and meaningful recommendations. Authors should refer to the terms of reference to ensure that recommendations are within the scope of the study;
  - f) Staff members or consultants conducting lessons learned studies may elaborate a draft implementation plan or implementation tracker, listing specific, clear, actionable, achievable and meaningful recommendations contained in the main body of the study. This plan or tracker would subsequently have to be consulted and agreed, typically once the study is completed (see below "Dissemination, archiving, accessibility and follow-up"); Where applicable, recommendations could be categorized into three groups: critical recommendations, important recommendations and opportunities for improvement.

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<sup>30</sup> Principles can include confidentiality between participants, use of the Chatham House rule, agreeing to a level playing field discussion.

- g) Attachments: Staff members or consultants should include the terms of reference, acronyms and abbreviations, a list of interviews or other meetings, a bibliography and other relevant material in this section. They may provide further information on the methodology or additional detailed findings, as relevant.

20. Lessons learned studies should, where possible, not exceed 20 pages, excluding the executive summary and attachments.

### **Step Seven: Consultations on the preliminary report**

21. The author(s) should circulate and/or present a first draft of the study to relevant stakeholders, and incorporate comments received into the final report.
22. If there are several authors, editorial control and inclusion of comments shall be based on consensus amongst them. Should the authors disagree on conclusions and recommendations, this shall be reflected in the report.

### **Step Eight: Dissemination, archiving, accessibility and follow-up**

23. Before the finalization of lessons learned study, consideration should be given to its dissemination, including the publication of the executive summaries (see para. 26). Dissemination tools include presenting the findings and recommendations in the GDLSC meetings, brownbag seminars and other meetings, uploading reports onto the Policy and Practice Database (PPDB) available at [ppdb.un.org](http://ppdb.un.org), sharing via code cable, and broadcasts to DPO and DPPA personnel via the Policy and Practice Newsletter.
24. As a general rule, all lessons learned studies should have a default classification level of unclassified to promote knowledge sharing and organizational learning. Exceptionally, studies can be classified as partially or fully confidential or strictly confidential should they contain information that is considered sensitive in accordance with ST/SGB/2007/6. Information deemed sensitive shall include information which, if disclosed, is likely to endanger the safety and security of any individual, endanger the security of member states or prejudice the security or proper conduct of any operation.
25. Once a study is finalized, the study author should prepare a note to the relevant USG(s), with copies to the Directors of the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training (DPET) and/or the Policy and Mediation Division (PMD), highlighting key findings, good practices, key recommendations, and a dissemination strategy. As relevant, the note could include an implementation tracker of accepted recommendations (see attached template) if agreed upon by the relevant stakeholders. The development and reporting to the GDLSC on an implementation tracker is required, where relevant, for studies mandated by the GDLSC and/or by DPO and DPPA senior management.
26. All DPO and DPPA lessons learned reports shall contain executive summaries<sup>31</sup> that can be disseminated inside and outside of the Department, should sharing full reports not be feasible.

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<sup>31</sup> In December 2018, the DPA Learning and Evaluation Board decided to disseminate findings of knowledge products (evaluations, lessons learned exercises, assessments, etc.) by making executive summaries of all DPPA- led learning and evaluation exercises widely available, should sharing full reports not be feasible. This decision was subsequently approved by the DPPA USG.

When developing executive summaries, the authors should be mindful of the intended audience (e.g.: donors or other member states) and exercise discretion as to whether any potentially sensitive study findings and/or recommendations will require amendments.

27. Copies of lessons learned studies shall be shared with the Knowledge Management and Guidance team in DPO/DPET ([peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org](mailto:peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org)) and with the Guidance and Learning Unit (GLU) in DPPA/PMD ([dppa-policy@un.org](mailto:dppa-policy@un.org)) in their capacity as knowledge management focal points for DPO and DPPA, respectively.
28. GLU and/or KMG shall make all lessons learned studies available to staff in DPO, DPPA and in field missions via the Policy and Practice Database (PPDB). Access to confidential and strictly confidential lessons learned studies shall be considered on a case-by case by GLU or KMG in consultation with the relevant DPO or DPPA Division/Office. Release of a confidential or strictly confidential study shall be made on a need-to-know basis in accordance with ST/SGB/2007/6.

## **MONITORING**

29. The implementation of these procedures is monitored and supported by the Guidance and Learning Unit in the Policy and Mediation Division (GLU/PMD) of DPPA and the Knowledge Management and Guidance Team in the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training (KMG/DPET) of DPO.
  30. In field missions, the Mission Chief of Staff, with support from the PBPO/FPs (where relevant), should monitor the production of lessons learned study in accordance with these procedures. This can include keeping a register of completed lessons learned study and other lessons learning products, including on follow-up to study recommendations. Such a register should also be maintained for audit purposes.
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## Lessons Learned Study Template

A copy of the lessons learned study report in Microsoft Word format should be sent to [dppa-policy@un.org](mailto:dppa-policy@un.org) or [peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org](mailto:peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org) for uploading onto the Policy and Practice Database (PPDB) and dissemination as appropriate. Visit [PPDB.un.org](http://PPDB.un.org) for examples of lessons learned studies and other guidance document.

**Participants:** List all team members participating in the lessons learned study (by title and name). Indicate who facilitated/led the discussions during the study.

**Individual who called the lessons learned study:** Names/titles.

**Keywords associated with this lessons learned study:** Identify several keywords to be associated with this study for search purposes.

### 1. Executive summary [ideally 2 pages]

1.1. Outline of main findings and recommendations of the study

### 2. Background [ideally 1-2 pages]

2.1. *Rationale for the study/problem statement and objectives*

2.2. *Scope of the study (subject material and period to be covered)*

2.3. *Methodology (description of when and how information was collected, analysed and processed, including on sources)*

2.4. *Expected outputs of the study*

### 3. Main body of the study

3.1. *Short summary of key issues analysed*

3.2. *Sub-issue I*

- Brief description of the issue
- Description of findings on the issue
- Analysis of findings, including lessons learned and good practices
- Specific, clear, actionable, achievable and meaningful recommendations regarding the issue

3.3. *Sub-issue II*

- Brief description of the issue
- Description of findings on the issue
- Analysis of findings, including lessons learned and good practices
- Specific, clear, actionable, achievable and meaningful recommendations regarding the issue

*[Continue with as many issues as necessary]*

### 4. Conclusion [ideally 1 page]

4.1. *Brief summary of main findings of the study. This section should also point out any areas that require further research.*

## 5. Attachments

- Terms of reference
- Acronyms and abbreviations
- List of interviews or other meetings
- Bibliography of documents/materials presented for review, including key policies or available guidance relevant for the exercise undertaken

## 6. Contacts

List a contact person(s) for follow up questions; include name(s), title(s), phone number(s) and e-mail address(es).

## 7. Comments received on this lessons learned study

Comments on this study are welcome. If you would like to add a comment, please write to [contact person cited below] and/or GLU/PMD/DPPA at [dppa-policy@un.org](mailto:dppa-policy@un.org) or KMG/PBPS/DPET/DPO at [peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org](mailto:peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org). Please mention your name, function, mission/office and the title of the report.”

### Footer:

*This study does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Department of Peace Operations, or of the United Nations. For inquiries, please contact the DPPA/PMD Guidance and Learning Unit at [dppa-policy@un.org](mailto:dppa-policy@un.org) or the DPO/DPET Knowledge Management and Guidance Team at [peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org](mailto:peacekeeping-bestpractices@un.org).*



## *Sample Terms of Reference*

### **Lessons Learned Study**

### **DPA<sup>32</sup> Liaison Presences**

#### **Background, rationale and objectives**

Since the Department's first Liaison Presence, the United Nations Liaison Office at Addis Ababa commenced its work in 1998, the number and size of DPA Liaison Presences have been growing in recognition of their important contributions to implementing the Department's mandate.

While feedback from partners highlights Liaison Presences' contributions to the work of the Department, including regarding partnerships with regional organizations, there is a need to collect and compile information on these presences as such a stock taking and analysis exercise has not yet been done.

Against this backdrop, the DPA USG approved a lessons learned study on DPA Liaison Presences as part of the Department's 2018 Annual Learning and Evaluation Plan. The study seeks to inform the Department's internal learning, provide information to enhance future performance, and support advocacy for continued or increased donor support and funding for Liaison Presences.

#### **Scope of study**

The study will cover all eleven stand-alone DPA Liaison Presences, which have a key liaison function as of early September 2018.<sup>33</sup> While Liaison Presences have been in existence since 1998, this study will cover the 2016 to 2018 period to ensure its timeliness and relevance.

Areas of analysis will be Liaison Presences' contributions to the three goals and related eight objectives outlined in the *DPA Strategic Plan 2016-2019*, integrating human rights and gender considerations. The study will focus on good practices, challenges and lessons learned regarding these goals and include recommendations for enhanced performance.

**Goal 1:** Strengthening international peace and security through inclusive prevention, mediation and peacebuilding processes

*Strategic Objective 1:* Setting the agenda for conflict prevention

*Strategic Objective 2:* Reinforcing conflict response and resolution

*Strategic Objective 3:* Investing in sustaining peace

**Goal 2:** Deepening and broadening partnerships within the UN and beyond

*Strategic Objective 4:* Deepening relations with UN Member States and regional organizations

*Strategic Objective 5:* Strengthening ties within the UN system

*Strategic Objective 6:* Expanding the networks of partners

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<sup>32</sup> Department of Political Affairs (DPA) became Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) on 1 January 2019 following the reform of the United Nations peace and security infrastructure, bringing together the former DPA and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office.

<sup>33</sup> These presences are located in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beijing, Brussels, Buka, Gaborone, Jakarta, Kathmandu, Kiev, Nairobi and Vienna. The Nepal Liaison Office closed on 7 September 2018. The study will not cover Liaison Presences established as part of Special Political Missions (SPMs) such as the Liaison Cell of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel in Nouakchott or the Tehran-based Liaison Office of the SPMs in Afghanistan and Iraq.

**Goal 3:** Fit for the future – ensuring organizational effectiveness

*Strategic Objective 7:* Reviewing and updating knowledge management, policy guidance and decision-making

*Strategic Objective 8:* Continued professionalization of human resources and their management

The study will also provide an overview on mandates, funding sources, locations and staffing structures of the Liaison Presences. It will not focus on lessons learned from the establishment, transition and closure of Liaison Presences.

The research will draw on data on the Liaison Presences in Brussels, Vienna, Bangkok and Jakarta collected by OUSG/DPA as part of the *Mid-Point Review of DPA's Strategic Plan 2016-2019*. Additional data on these presences will be collected if needed. Data collection will focus on Liaison Presences not visited during the mid-point review of the Strategic Plan.

**Methodology**

The study will be led by the DPA Policy and Mediation Division (PMD)/Guidance and Learning Unit in close consultation with OUSG/DPA.

The Political Affairs Officer in charge of the study will:

- Conduct a desk review of relevant documentation and engage in discussions with resource persons, as necessary
- Develop a detailed research design building on the methodology used for the *Mid-Point Review of DPA's Strategic Plan 2016-2019* and circulate it for comments
- Organize individual interviews and/or focus group discussions with selected participants such as DPA officials, UN partners as well as representatives of Member States and regional organizations (via calls or in person)
- Collect data through a survey if needed
- Analyze collected data and identify lessons learned and best practices and formulate recommendations
- Present key findings to key stakeholders (possibly in a validation workshop in the margins of the 2018 Meeting of Heads of Political Affairs Components in UN Field Missions) and integrate feedback
- Submit draft report, draft dissemination strategy (considering the report's confidentiality level), and suggest follow-up actions on key recommendations for comments to OUSG and PMD
- Submit final report with draft action plan for follow-up on key recommendations to OUSG for approval
- Ensure archiving of final report and related documents
- Support implementation of dissemination strategy and follow-up actions
- Update the Department's Learning and Evaluation Board on the exercise

**Expected deliverables**

- Research design
- Lessons learned report based on relevant DPA guidance
- Action plan for follow-up on key recommendations
- Dissemination strategy

**Timing and resources**

Work on the study will begin in August 2018 and is expected to be completed by December 2018. Dissemination and follow-up activities are expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2019. Field travel and/or the organization of data collection/validation events will be funded through DPA/PMD extrabudgetary resources, as necessary.

## DPPA Executive Summary template

### Evaluations and Lessons Learned Studies Executive Summaries for External Consumption Template

*Further to a decision of USG DiCarlo, all DPPA knowledge products (evaluations, lessons learned exercises, assessments, etc.) shall contain executive summaries that can be disseminated inside and outside of the Department, should sharing full reports not be feasible. When developing executive summaries, substantive leads should be mindful of the intended audience and exercise discretion as to whether any potentially sensitive study findings and/or recommendations will require amendments. Guidance on information sensitivity is contained in the SG bulletin on information sensitivity, classification and handling (ST/SGB/2007/6).*

#### **Background: (Max 400 words)**

- This section should contain a concise background on the context for the study and a brief history of the examined process/thematic/functional area. It should also explain the study scope, objectives and methodology used.

#### **Main findings and conclusion: (Max 500 words)**

- This section should include main findings and observations, highlighting lessons learned and good practices under each issue analyzed.

#### **Recommendations including next steps: (Max 500 words)**

- This section should summarize the main recommendations identified in the study on how to better execute the process/thematic/functional area under review. Recommendations should flow from the study findings and be specific, clear, actionable, achievable and meaningful and aimed primarily at the participants of the exercise but also the broader Organization when relevant. Note areas where policy development is needed (if applicable) and identify to whom the recommendations are addressed (e.g. Headquarters/field).

## Implementation tracker template

Implementing and monitoring key recommendations from learning and evaluation exercises

As of [date]

Name of exercise:

Key recommendation	Suggested action	Lead entity	Suggested priority <sup>34</sup> and time frame	Workstream <sup>35</sup>	Implementation stage <sup>36</sup>	Actions taken (or comment)

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<sup>34</sup> High; Medium; Low

<sup>35</sup> Substantive/Political; Policy/Guidance; Cross-cutting; Partnerships/Coordination; Administrative/Support Issues

<sup>36</sup> Not initiated; In progress; Completed; No longer applicable