**28 April 2021**

**COUNTRY COVID-19 INTRA-ACTION REVIEW**

**FACILITATOR’S MANUAL**





**Contents**

[Introduction 2](#_Toc46405238)

[Background 2](#_Toc46405239)

[Objectives of the Country COVID-19 Intra-Action Review 2](#_Toc46405240)

[Purpose and audience 2](#_Toc46405241)

[How to use this document 3](#_Toc46405242)

[Intra-Action Review process 3](#_Toc46405243)

[Set up 4](#_Toc46405244)

[Logistics 4](#_Toc46405245)

[Resources available for a Country COVID-19 Intra-Action Review 5](#_Toc46405246)

[General facilitation tips 7](#_Toc46405247)

[What to do while facilitating 7](#_Toc46405248)

[What to avoid while facilitating 8](#_Toc46405249)

[What to pay attention to during the Intra-Action Review: 9](#_Toc46405250)

[Root cause analysis 9](#_Toc46405251)

[Note-takers tips 10](#_Toc46405252)

[Introduction session 10](#_Toc46405253)

[Session 1: What went well? What went less well? Why? 10](#_Toc46405254)

[Identify the challenges and best practices 11](#_Toc46405255)

[Session 2: What can we do to improve the COVID-19 response? 13](#_Toc46405256)

[Identify key activities to overcome challenges and build best practices 13](#_Toc46405257)

[Session 3: The way forward 14](#_Toc46405258)

[Other instructions 15](#_Toc46405259)

[Participant feedback 15](#_Toc46405260)

[Physical distancing considerations 15](#_Toc46405261)

# Introduction

## Background

An Intra-Action Review (IAR) is a qualitative review of actions taken so far to respond to an emergency to identify best practices, lessons and gaps in a national public health response. IAR relies primarily on the personal experience and perceptions of individuals involved in the response - to assess what worked and what did not, why and how to improve.

Facilitation of an IAR can be a challenging task. Discussions during an IAR can be very dynamic and energetic. Therefore, it is the facilitator’s role to keep the discussion on track towards agreed objectives, to ensure that all voices are heard and to ensure that key themes are analysed sufficiently to identify underlying factors.

## Objectives of the Country COVID-19 Intra-Action Review

An IAR provides an opportunity to review the national functional capacity of public health and emergency response systems and to identify practical areas for immediate remediation or continued improvement of the current response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The purpose of a COVID-19 IAR is fourfold:

* to provide an opportunity to share experiences and collectively analyse the ongoing in-country response to COVID-19 by identifying challenges and best practices;
* to facilitate consensus building among and the compiling of lessons learned by various stakeholders during the response to improve the current response by sustaining best practices that have had demonstrated success and by preventing recurrent errors;
* to document and apply the lessons learned from the response efforts to date to enable health system strengthening;
* to provide a basis to validate and update the Country COVID-19 strategic preparedness and response plan and other strategic plans accordingly.

## Purpose and audience

The purpose of this facilitator’s manual is to explain the IAR methodology.

Ideally, the IAR is a facilitator-led discussion involving a small group of people (10 to 20 people) to conduct a review of a limited number of identified pillars. It tends to be more informal and focuses on specific operational issues. The scope is narrow, allowing for focused learning outcomes.

It can be undertaken over half a day to a maximum of 2 days depending on country context and as defined in countries’ concept notes. This review can be conducted on-site or online to comply with the current country recommendations for physical distancing and hygiene measures.

A team responsible for preparing and conducting the review should be established with roles and responsibilities clearly defined. The IAR lead coordinator is responsible for the overall planning, conduct and follow-up of the IAR. The IAR lead coordinator will be assisted by a team with assigned tasks and responsibilities.

The essential roles are:

* IAR lead coordinator (overall IAR oversight)
* Lead facilitator and assistant facilitators (to guide and cover technical issues)
* Note-taker and report writer

Depending on the scope of the IAR, one person can be appointed to fill several roles, or several persons can fill one specific role. However, it is important to ensure that there is at least one member of the facilitation team who has technical expertise for each pillar under review.

## How to use this document

This facilitator’s manual provides guidance for facilitators on how to run an IAR. It outlines some of the key components the facilitators may need to adapt to the national COVID-19 context.

# Intra-Action Review process

The IAR should be adapted accordingly to the public health event under review, including the objectives, the scope and the participants involved. The key components that need to be included are:

* **Objective observation:** Establish how actions were implemented during the event during the review period, in contrast to how they were supposed to or usually happen, according to established plans and procedures;
* **Analysis of gaps and contributing factors:** Identify gaps between planning and practice. Analyse what worked and what did not work, and why;
* **Identify areas of improvement:** Identify actions to strengthen or improve performance and how to follow up.

Below is an example of the methodology that should be adapted based on countries’ concept notes. As mentioned previously, the IAR should be conducted over an approximate period from half a day to a maximum of 2 days.

**Introduction:** The IAR begins with an overview of the country response to establish a baseline for the review, including a presentation on the current country COVID-19 strategy and response plan; desk review of COVID-19 relevant documents (e.g., policies, response plans, guidelines, and activity reports) and relevant indicators pre-identified. Additionally, interviews with key stakeholders can help in establishing the baseline of the review. This is also the moment to understand the capacities that existed prior to the COVID-19 response, the new capacities developed for and during the COVID-19 response, and the actual response timeline to date.

**Session 1.** **What went well? What went less well? Why?** Based on the overview of the ongoing response, the discussion will start to identify and analyse what worked, what did not work so well and why. Participants will collectively analyse actions undertaken during the COVID-19 response to date to identify the best practices and challenges encountered, their impact on the response and why they occurred (the enabling/limiting factors). The focus is not on identifying who is responsible for what happened but more on what happened and why.

**Session 2. What can we do to improve the COVID-19 response?** Participants will identify and develop activities to address the causes of the challenges identified in the current COVID-19 response, as well as activities to institutionalize best practices. Participants will not only recommend activities but also a timeline for implementation, assign responsibility to the focal point in charge, identify eventual support needed, and propose indicators to monitor progress. Participants will have to ensure activities are harmonized, realistic and achievable.

**Session 3.** **The way forward.** Finally, it is preferable to prioritize the recommendations to ensure simple and high impact recommendations (i.e. “quick wins”) can be implemented for immediate remediation. An implementation plan for these activities should be developed which should include immediate and mid or long-term activities to improve the ongoing COVID-19 response. Participants should strongly consider the establishment of a follow-up team and develop a process to document progress in implementing the key activities identified. They will also agree on the best way to engage the senior leadership team throughout the process to support the implementation of the recommendations.

# Set up

## Logistics

Depending on the COVID-19 context and possible constraints, the IAR can take place on-site or online; with the following logistic considerations for either modality:

### ON-SITE REVIEW

Necessary logistics at the workshop venue may include:

* One large meeting room that can accommodate the number of participants in the group:
* Desktop computer or laptop
* Projector and screen
* Paper flipcharts and markers
* Translation services (if needed)
* Attendance list
* Lunch and coffee break(s)

Given the current COVID-19 situation, it is vital to ensure that during the IAR, physical distancing and the basic hygiene measures in practice in the country are respected. We encourage the use of an online format for the IAR, especially if community transmission remains high in the country.

### ONLINE REVIEW

* The lead facilitator will be responsible for ensuring that each participant receives information related to the online platform used to conduct the IAR (name of the platform and login codes to access the online event) with adequate notice before the IAR.
* Each participant needs:
* Proper IT equipment: including a large screen (avoid connection via smartphone) and a reliable internet connection to ensure audio quality and capacity to visualize the screens shared by the facilitators;
* If required, create an account on the dedicated platform and perform video and audio tests prior to the IAR.

## Resources available for a Country COVID-19 Intra-Action Review

To support the planning and the conduct of a country COVID-19 IAR, a set of supplementary tools is available for consideration by IAR organisers (Table 1).

**Table 1. Supplementary tools available to help in planning and conducting a country COVID-19 intra-action review**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **TOOL NUMBER** | **SUPPLEMENTARY TOOL** | **DESCRIPTION** |
| **01** | Concept note template | Outlines the key elements (i.e. the scope, objectives and date of the review; key participants; methodologies; proposed budget; IAR team members and their roles) needed to prepare for an IAR. |
| **02** | Facilitator’s manual | The manual includes instructions and recommendations for facilitators about how to organise and conduct an IAR. The manual highlights some of the key components that may need to be adapted to the national COVID-19 context. |
| **03** | Generic agenda template | This template for an agenda can be adapted depending on the format of the IAR (e.g. online or onsite) and the number of technical areas or pillars to be reviewed. |
| **04** | Generic presentation | This generic presentation can be adapted to the specific context of the country to facilitate the process of a country COVID-19 IAR. |
| **05** | Generic COVID-19 IAR trigger question database | This resource file has more than 600 trigger questions from which facilitators can select to stimulate reflection and discussion within the group and that can be tailored according to the needs of the review. |
| **06** | Note-taking template | **6a.** This template can assist note-takers in capturing the discussions during each step of the IAR, and the notes can later help with writing the report. |
| **6b.** For COVID-19 vaccination IAR, please note there is a specific note-taking template available. |
| **07** | Final report template | **7a.** This template can be used by the report writer to summarise in a structured manner the analyses and recommendations arising from the review. |
| **7b.** For COVID-19 vaccination IAR, please note there is a specific final report template available. |
| **08** | Participant feedback form | This form can be used to collect feedback from the participants at the end of the IAR about how it was conducted and how useful it was. |
| **09** | Participant feedback form summary table | This is an Excel file that can be used to analyse participants' feedback. |
| **10** | Exemplar story template | This template can be used by countries to document what worked during their COVID-19 response. These exemplar stories should be shared broadly with other countries, WHO and partners to enable peer-to-peer learning of best practices or new capacities implemented in the country. |
| **11** | Conducting safe onsite COVID-19 IAR during the pandemic | This checklist summarizes some of the key considerations for conducting COVID-19 IAR onsite, including a sample COVID-19 symptoms self-declaration form for participants. |
| **12** | Conducting safe online COVID-19 IAR during the pandemic | This checklist summarizes some of the key considerations for conducting COVID-19 IAR online, including online facilitation tips. |

IAR: intra-action review.

The tools listed above can be downloaded on the following webpage: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Country_IAR-2020.1>

# General facilitation tips

## What to do while facilitating

* Maintain an impartial perspective and use open-ended questions to guide the discussion (refer to the “Generic Country COVID-19 IAR Trigger Question Database” in the IAR Package).
* Maintain the structure and focus of the discussion and mediate any potential inter-personal conflict during the discussion.
* Partner with the participants to establish norms early in the process e.g.
  + It is possible to disagree and hold different perceptions of the issues.
  + Focus on learning – “getting it right” vs. “being right” The IAR is not an evaluation of performance but an opportunity to learn from challenges and best practices.
  + Invite openness and curiosity – “what can we do to help each other to stay open and honest in this experience?”
  + Focus on issues and making progress, avoiding personalized, shaming language
* Focus on issues related to the IARs objective and scope, but allow for some flexibility in the discussions. Often, particularly through the use of approaches such as root cause analysis, additional deeper issues may emerge. It is important to let these issues be fully explored without losing sight of the expected output.
* Guide participants towards identifying corrective actions and solutions, while facilitating the process of seeking agreement on key themes.
* Establish ground rules and remind participants of these when needed to mitigate any disruptive behaviour during the IAR.
* Recommend participants to be specific in the development of recommendations and actions.
* Encourage active participation from all participants, including participants who may not feel comfortable expressing their views.
* Manage time well by starting on time, ending on time and avoiding substantial changes to the agenda.

### SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR ONLINE REVIEW

The IAR lead will make sure that:

* All participants are connected and are able to see the shared screen before starting the review (it may be ideal to have an IT assistant who can guide participants for any technical issues).
* Clear instructions are provided on how participants will interact, such as “the lead facilitator will lead the discussion and give the floor to the participants one by one”, and “participants should use the “mute” button to avoid signal interferences”.
* The note-taker shares his/her screen using the note-taking template as the discussion progresses.

## What to avoid while facilitating

* **Critiquing, criticizing or judging performance**. The IAR is not an evaluation of an individual or team’s performance, and this perception should be avoided at all costs. It is also not an external evaluation of a country’s performance. Unless otherwise stated, the emphasis of the IAR should always be on learning and improvement.
* **Focusing on the negative**. An IAR is as much focused on the recording and analyzing of what worked well, as well as what did not work well. Identified best practices should be analysed to understand how they can be institutionalized or applied more widely to have a greater impact.
* **Lecturing**. While the IAR is about learning, lecturing participants should be avoided. Lessons should be drawn from experience and consensus of participants, not facilitators.
* **Allowing your own opinion or experiences to influence or disrupt the group conversation**.

### SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR ONLINE REVIEW

The IAR lead will make sure that:

* IT issues will not interfere with the discussion (It may be ideal to have an IT assistant who can assist participants with technical issues).
* Participants do not speak unless invited by the lead facilitator.

## What to pay attention to during the Intra-Action Review:

* **Differences of opinion or perceptions among participants** regarding the structures, standard operating procedures and communication mechanisms. These differences may lead to issues, such as the identification of inconsistencies between coordination processes, and insufficient awareness among technical experts.
* **Lack of coherence in coordination and information sharing** between (a) individual sectors, (b) levels or entities within the health sector, (c) civil society/community and (d) partners (UN and NGOs) during all stages of the emergency response (detection-assessment-response-recovery).
* **Existing legal and organizational frameworks and structures** at national and subnational levels with specific responsibilities to emergency response. Secondary legislation, such as regulations and standards, should also be noted.
* **Ability to scale up** surge capacity from regular operations to emergency operations in terms of activation and process for scaling up capacity for the response.
* **Accessibility of resources** to ensure not only the availability but the access to necessary resources for response activities.
* **Timeliness of informing (and involving, if appropriate) the National IHR Focal Point (IHR NFP)** is critical in case the event has potential cross-border consequences or satisfies any of the criteria in the IHR (2005) Annex 2;
* **Linkages to existing global or regional information systems**.
* **Availability of multi-hazard emergency response plans and multi-hazard alert systems**, including the coordination between various sectors.

## Root cause analysis

Root cause analysis (RCA) is a method used to identify the causal factors that led to success or failure with regards to a specific issue or problem identified. The root cause is a factor which leads to a particular outcome (good or bad). The removal of this factor will prevent the outcome from occurring. The purpose is to address the root cause if necessary, to prevent a negative outcome or to identify root causes for best practices. These best practices can then be applied systematically or in different contexts or areas. The purpose of the RCA is to focus the interventions on those that have a long-term impact rather than relying on quick fixes.

In practice, RCA is simply the application of a series of well-known common-sense techniques which can produce a systematic approach to the identification, understanding and resolution of underlying causes. This can be summarized in the following steps:

* Define and understand the problem
* Identify the root cause
* Define what could be the corrective action
* Confirm the solution

RCA should be used when a problem is identified that clearly requires a deeper examination or for which the “why” of the problem has not been answered.

## Note-takers tips

* The note-taker’s role is important during the IAR. A note-taking template has been provided to assist with this process and can be found in the IAR Package and adjusted accordingly.
* The note-taker should record the discussion on the paper flip charts if the IAR is an on-site review, or capture the discussion on the provided template by virtually sharing his/her screen with all participants if the IAR is an online review. When possible, the note-taker should also try and keep a record of any other additional information that is discussed but not written down.

# Introduction session

The IAR begins with an overview of the country response to establish a baseline for the review, including a presentation on the current country COVID-19 strategy and response plan; the capacities that existed prior to the response; the capacities developed for and during the COVID-19 response; and the response timeline to date.

# Session 1: What went well? What went less well? Why?

**Session objective:** Based on the overview of the ongoing response, the discussion will start to identify and analyse what worked, what did not work so well and why. Participants will collectively analyse actions undertaken during the COVID-19 response to date to identify the best practices and challenges encountered, their impact on the response and why they occurred (the enabling/limiting factors). The focus is not on identifying who is responsible for what happened but more on what happened and why.

## Identify the challenges and best practices

### Material required:

* Flip chart paper or soft copy of the template to be displayed and shared with the participants (for online IAR)

### Facilitation process:

Work with the group to help them identify the best practices and challenges from the response.

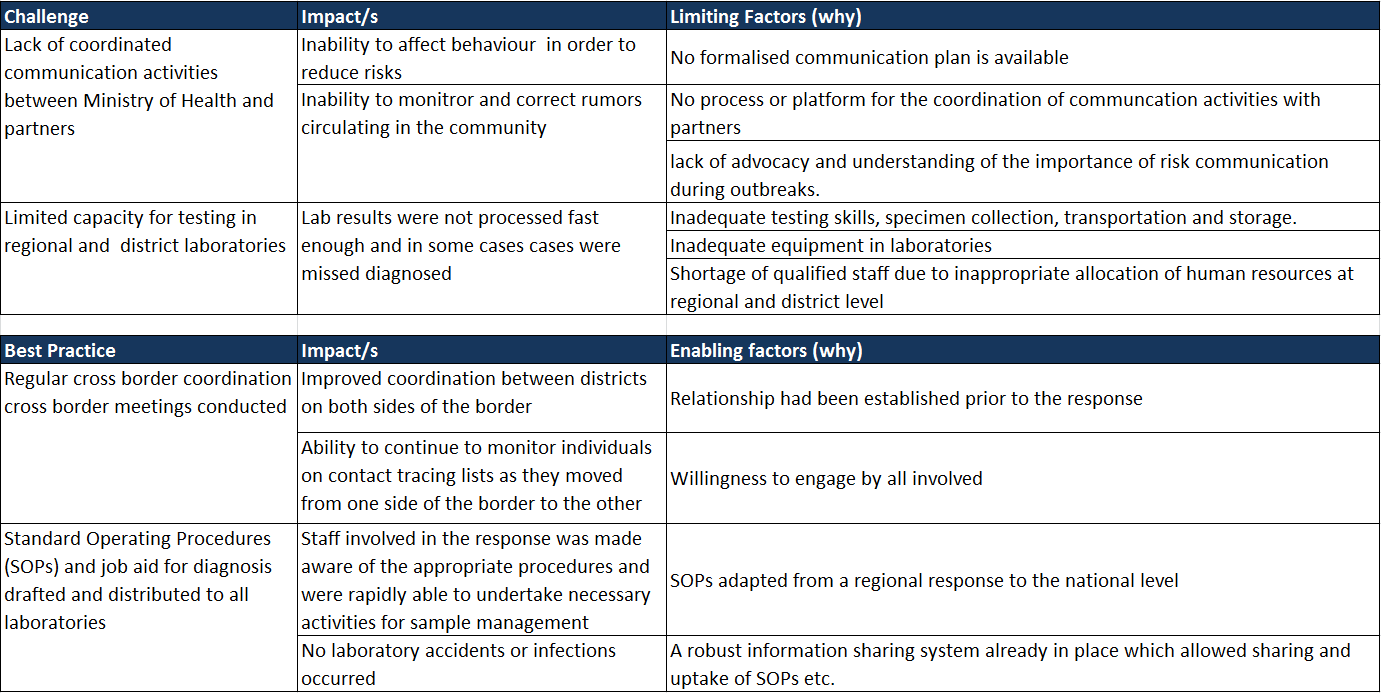
For all best practices and challenges, enabling/limiting factors should describe the conditions and reasons which led to the best practices and challenges encountered during the response. See the example below for more information.

**Use of Trigger Questions**: Trigger questions should have been shared with each facilitator as a hard/soft copy during the facilitator’s briefing. During the IAR planning phase, the facilitators should prepare and select relevant questions to stimulate reflections and discussions within the group and according to the pillar(s) selected for the review. It is important not to show the list of selected questions with the participants during the review and avoid using them as a Q&A session. Instead, the facilitators should refer to them and use the questions when needed to stimulate reflections and discussions within the group. The trigger questions help to ensure that the most important themes of the function under review are covered. Finally, the participants do not need to work through and answer each trigger question. The trigger questions should serve as a reference to keep the group on track and ensure all aspects of a function are being considered.

**Root cause analysis (RCA):** During this session, facilitators should apply RCA principles to progressively unpack the reasons as to why something did or did not happen. This includes asking “why” repeatedly (up to 5 times) to explore the deeper reasons why something did or did not happen, to reveal the root cause of the issue.

**Outputs from this session:**

Through the discussions, the participants should note down the key challenges and best practice, impacts and factors (as shown below) as a group consensus. The note-taker can document these on a paper flipchart or online screen.



**Definitions of terms used in the IAR:**

**CHALLENGE:** job, duty or situation that is difficult during the COVID-19 response, as you had to use a lot of effort, determination, and skill to be successful.

**Example:** *an identified challenge may be that laboratory results were not processed rapidly enough. Limiting factors (the why’s) initially might be identified as samples did not arrive early enough or that logistics systems were not in place. By applying the “five why’s” method, the facilitator may discover that in fact, the root cause of the issue was that there was no fuel for the vehicles used to deliver the samples to the laboratory.*

**BEST PRACTICE**: Something that was done during the COVID-19 response which improved performance or had a positive impact.

**Example**: *a best practice may be merging health taskforce meetings with Health Cluster meetings. The impact of this best practice was ensuring effective early coordination with all health partners through a Ministry-led process. The enabling factor was the early invitation of all relevant stakeholders to the health taskforce meeting, which created a sense of the importance of the contribution of NGOs and willingness of the Ministry and partners to participate in the coordination process.*

**Tips for facilitators and note-takers:**

* Ensure that discussions stay focused on what happened, not on who did what.
* Ensure that the identified impact is explicit in how this challenge or best practice influenced the course of the response.
* While the group will record the key challenges/best practices they wish to include on the flip charts, the note-taker should also capture any additional challenges/best practice, impacts and factors that are discussed in the template provided.
* For additional information on RCA, please refer to the previous page.

# Session 2: What can we do to improve the COVID-19 response?

**Session objective:** Participants will identify and develop activities to address the causes of the challenges identified in the current COVID-19 response, as well as activities to institutionalize best practices. Participants will not only recommend activities but also a timeline for implementation, assign responsibility to focal points in charge, identify support needed and propose indicators to monitor progress. Participants will have to ensure activities are harmonized, realistic and achievable.

## Identify key activities to overcome challenges and build best practices

### Set up:

* Note-taking template for the group/ online screen managed by the note-taker.

### Facilitation process:

1. For each challenge and best practice, use the associated enabling and limiting factors that have been identified. The group will also identify key activities to overcome challenges and institutionalize best practices.
2. For each activity, a line should be completed in the template with the activity description, required support, desired date of completion, proposed indicators (for monitoring the completion of the activity), responsibilities of each institution, and identify a focal point (where possible).

**Activities identified should concrete and realistic:**

* “Ensure better procurement processes in place for testing supplies” is not an activity. Instead, an activity can be “Draft, disseminate and integrate procurement SOPs for testing supplies”.
* “Build capacity of laboratory staff” is not an activity. Instead, an activity can be “Designing and delivering a 3-day laboratory training for 20 staff”.

**Tips for facilitators and note-takers:**

* Ensure that the activities identified are actionable and clear. Activities should be achievable and not an unrealistic ‘wish list’.
* This session will form the basis for the recommendations for future work. Therefore, it is vital to ensure good hand-writing and avoid the use of acronyms.
* Use the list of challenges and best practices and enabling/limiting factors as a reference point to define activities.

# Session 3: The way forward

**Session objective:** An implementation plan for these activities will be developed during this session. Among the activities, participants will identify what can be addressed immediately to improve the ongoing response; and what can be done in the mid or long-term to improve the response to the next waves of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Brainstorm the actions you feel best further the goals of your action plan, filter ideas that are out of the scope of possibility; combine redundant ideas or expand to capture similar ones; clarify what it would take to make each idea happen (be specific); and prioritize activities based on a cost & effort/ value & benefits analysis.

Participants may consider the establishment of a follow-up team and develop a process to document progress in implementing the key activities identified. This session will also be the time to agree on the best way to ensure senior leadership engagement throughout the process to obtain their support for the implementation of recommendations.

**Facilitation Process:**

1. Participants are given 30 minutes to brainstorm and identify the next steps to ensure that activities identified during the IAR are implemented moving forward;
2. The IAR facilitator should summarize the outputs and encourage discussion towards a group consensus on the next steps.

# Other instructions

## Participant feedback

Participants are asked to provide their feedback on the “Participant Feedback Form” provided in the IAR Package.

## Physical distancing considerations

Given the current COVID-19 situation, it is vital to ensure that during the IAR, physical distancing and the basic hygiene measures in practice in the country are respected. We encourage the use of online platforms for the IAR, especially if community transmission remains high in the country. If the IAR was to be conducted on-site, it is critical to ensure that meeting spaces are large enough to allow participants to be at least 1 meter apart at all time. Additional guidance on how to prevent or reduce COVID-19 transmission risks when hosting face-to-face meetings can be found on the WHO website[[1]](#footnote-1).

# OpenWHO online course

For more information on how to facilitate a COVID-19 IAR, please refer to the *Management and Facilitation of a Country COVID-19 Intra-Action Review (IAR)* online course on the following link:

<https://openwho.org/courses/covid-19-intra-action-review-en>

**©** World Health Organization 2021. Some rights reserved. This work is available under the [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo) licence.

WHO reference number: WHO/2019-nCoV/Country\_IAR/manual\_facilitator/2021.1

1. <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/advice-for-workplace-clean-19-03-2020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)