

Debriefs

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Policy statement and principles

Why

New Zealand Police is a 'learning organisation'. The principles of evidence-based policing and the High-Performance Framework require us to continuously review and update policies and practice to improve performance.

The process of debriefing is how we learn from experience.

Individuals should reflect on what worked well and why, what didn't work well and why, and whether there is opportunity to improve their own performance, as well as whether policy or established practice could be improved.

We review what occurred and capture suggestions and recommendations so we can avoid repeating failures and build on success.

Debriefing directly supports [Our Business](#) by informing the lessons management process, and feeds into [Health and Safety Reviews](#) and [Coordinated Learning Reviews](#).

A debrief **should** be completed following any other police-involved incident, event, or activity.

Mandatory requirements

A debrief **must** be completed following:

- major events of national significance
- critical incidents (as defined in the [Critical Incident policy](#))
- multi-agency responses to a major events.

Mandatory debriefs should be facilitated by a person independent of the event, preferably independent of the district.

The senior officer in control of the event is responsible for:

- initiating the debrief process, and ensuring a debrief is conducted
- obtaining the final debrief report from the facilitator
- forwarding the debrief report to the Lessons Management team.

What

A well-managed debrief enables Police to identify key lessons from an event. Debriefing encourages us to learn from experience, identify opportunities to improve individual and organisational performance, and embed good practice.

A debrief is a simple, structured process during which participants review decisions and actions in a constructive manner, to identify:

- the situation
- the facts of what happened
- what worked well, and why
- what did not work well, and why
- what could have been done differently
- suggestions or recommendations that may address the identified learnings.

Everyone involved has a role to play in debriefing, and debriefs should be conducted as a matter of routine.

Our people must be able to have 'free and frank' discussions within a just culture; debriefs should not judge success or failure of individuals or assign blame. Rather, debriefs must focus objectively on issues, not individuals, and facts, not fault, to identify the root cause of successes and failures.

Decisions and actions should be considered against law, policy, and established procedures.

Recommendations arising from debriefs are subject to the lessons management process, which informs continuous improvement.

Debriefs include informal (hot) debriefs and formal debriefs. Refer [Debrief Guidelines](#) (Appendix One) for further explanation.

When

Because memory fades quickly with time, and recollection is influenced by subsequent conversations, a debrief should be conducted as soon as practicable after the event.

The nature of the event determines whether personal reflection, an informal debrief, or formal debrief is most appropriate.

An informal debrief is ideally carried out immediately after an event, or before the end of the shift, recognising that operational demands may mean this is not always possible.

A formal debrief for a critical incident or large operation requires more planning, coordination, and preparation than an informal debrief. Investigations associated with significant events may influence the timing of when a debrief is conducted.

Major events and operations over extended periods, or involving many staff, may require a tiered approach, e.g., reflections, observations and feedback from operational staff inform district debriefs, which in turn inform national debriefs. The senior officer in control of the event is responsible for communicating the plan in relation to the formal debrief process, including coordinating tiered debriefs and collating reports.

Critical incident debriefs

It's useful for as many people as possible who were involved in the incident to participate in the critical incident debrief.

Good practice is that involved staff should only participate after they have received legal or Police Association advice, and completed formal interviews; this may impact on the timing of the debrief. Where [anonymity is appropriate](#), involved staff should be represented by a [CILO](#).

Critical incident liaison officers (CILOs), wellness advisors and the [O/C](#) of the investigation should be consulted to ensure members' personal requirements are balanced with the organisation's need to conduct a debrief in a timely fashion.

Who

"Though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes" - Virginia Woolf

All Police employees have a role to play in documenting successes and identified issues, so everyone can learn from their experience.

Because each of us has different perspectives, it's essential that debriefs capture the views of as many of the people involved, as far as practicable. Where people are unable to attend the debrief in person, or virtually, they should be invited to provide written input. Where [anonymity is appropriate](#), involved staff should be represented by a [CILO](#).

Where an event has involved Police working with partner agencies, consider obtaining partner agency input.

A debrief is an opportunity to freely discuss event planning, decision-making, the immediate response, and subsequent investigation. Professional conduct staff, [IPCA](#) representatives and legal representatives should not be present. Service group representatives (e.g., Association or Guild) may attend at the request of debrief participants, unless there is an exceptional reason why these representatives should not be included.

The senior officer in control of an event is responsible for ensuring a debrief is conducted, identified lessons documented, and shared with the Lessons Management team.

How

This policy aims to establish a positive environment in which people feel confident to identify and share information that will improve Police performance, acknowledging that all humans are fallible.

This underpins effective debriefing and balances the need for accountability, with the ability to collect enough information to identify and address the root causes of mistakes and system failures.

Effective debriefing relies on people's willingness to share and discuss their experiences, both positive and negative, with others. The discussion needs to be respectful, constructive, and participative. People must feel safe to speak up without fear of ridicule, reprisal, or blame.

Honest reflections and observations about performance shortfalls do not imply failure of the operation; they are purely opportunities to improve organisational performance.

We will:

- use debriefs to promote reflection and learning
- ensure discussion and feedback is open, transparent, free and frank, understanding the purpose of debriefs is learn from experience to improve future outcomes
- identify good practice and celebrate success.

Debrief facilitation

Debriefs may be as simple as supervisors leading a conversation within their team.

Formal debriefs should be facilitated by a person independent of the event.

Given the likelihood of external scrutiny, the person facilitating a critical incident debrief preferably should also be independent of the district where the event occurred. This will eliminate any perception of conflicts of interest.

The Lessons Management team can help identify a suitably skilled and experienced facilitator.

[Appendix One](#) provides guidelines for conducting a debrief.

Reporting

All debrief reports should be submitted to the Lessons Management team for entry into the Lessons Management database.

Debrief reports are the beginning of the lessons management process. It is critical that reporting is factual and transparent so that an appropriate course of action to address identified learnings can be developed and implemented (refer appendices for [reporting templates and examples](#)).

Careful use of language is essential to convey meaning accurately, ensure clarity, and avoid misunderstanding.

Submissions to Lessons Management will be finalised in consultation with the report submitter.

The senior officer who controlled the event or operation is responsible for approving the formal debrief report.

A lesson is only learned once a demonstrated change (in culture / mindset / behaviour / practice) is embedded in the organisation.

Employees can make submissions to Lessons Management without having been involved in an informal or formal debrief.

Whenever other people can learn from your experience or observations, this should be documented and submitted to the Lessons Management team.

The Debrief / Lessons Identified [web form](#) may be used to capture reflections and observations. The webform is available on both mobility devices and via the desktop. After submitting the completed form, the sender automatically receives a copy via email.

Alternatively, send an email to [Lessons Management](#).

Glossary

Event - any police-involved incident or operation, including critical incidents and major operations.

Senior officer in control - depending on the event, this may be the senior person in an I-car, a section supervisor, a workgroup leader, O/C investigation, area or district commander, or in the case of a national operation, the national controller.

Appendix One - Debrief Guidelines

This guide details the different types of debriefs, how to run debriefs, how to document them appropriately, and what to do with this information.

Types of debrief

There are two types of debriefs - informal and formal debriefs:

- **Informal (hot) debrief** e.g., discussion with I-car partner after attendance at an event, or a post-event discussion with team or supervisor.
- **Formal debrief** e.g., critical incidents, nationally significant events, major multi-agency events, major operations.

The nature of the event or activity being reviewed will determine which type of debrief is most appropriate, noting that the different types of debrief are not mutually exclusive.

Everyone involved in any event should reflect on their own performance. This will inform their contribution to an informal (hot) debrief, which in turn will inform any subsequent formal debrief.

Informal (hot) debriefs

An informal debrief is an opportunity for everyone involved to discuss an event, reinforce good practice, and identify learning and wellness support opportunities e.g., discussion with I-car partner after attendance at an event, a post event discussion with team or supervisor.

Informal debriefs:

- are held as soon as practicable after the event
- allow rapid capture of good practice, issues, and opportunities for improvement
- allow discussion of a range of perspectives to facilitate shared understanding
- are an opportunity to provide immediate feedback to staff, where ideas and solutions can be implemented quickly
- may include several informal debriefs held simultaneously following an event i.e., each team or workgroup may hold their own debrief to identify learnings relevant to their actions.
- collects observations that may inform higher level debriefs.

Debrief reports are the beginning of the lessons management process, which may include health and safety reviews and coordinated learning reviews. For this to be effective, debrief reports must clearly detail the identified learnings.

Debriefs may be recorded and submitted to the Lessons Management team via the Debrief / Lessons Identified webform. The [web form](#) is available in Checkpoint on mobility devices and via the desktop.

Debrief reports may also be submitted as an attachment to the web form.

After submitting the completed form, the sender automatically receives a copy via email.

Alternatively, email [Lessons Management](#).

Note: A debrief is not an investigation and should not be used as an investigative tool; however, the debrief may inform subsequent reviews, including health and safety and coordinated learning reviews.

Formal debriefs

A formal debrief is an opportunity to review organisational performance, recognise good practice, ensure learning opportunities are identified to maximise safety and mitigate risk, and appropriate steps have been taken to ensure staff wellness.

Generally held at a district or national level, a formal debrief needs to consider feedback from those directly involved in the event, as

well as input from senior leaders. This requires more planning, coordination, and preparation than an informal debrief.

Formal debriefs should be facilitated by a person independent of the event.

Given the likelihood of external scrutiny, the person facilitating a critical incident debrief preferably should also be independent of the district where the event occurred. This will eliminate any perception of conflicts of interest.

The Lessons Management team can help identify a suitably skilled and experienced facilitator.

Formal debriefs:

- are held as soon as practicable after the event (ideally within four weeks), acknowledging that formal processes (e.g., interviews etc.) may need to take place first. Remember, any delay is likely to have a negative impact on memory recall and lesson identification
- may encompass interim debriefs in the case of extended events
- should obtain input from as many of the people involved as practicable (operational debriefs at a workgroup and district level ought to inform national debriefs)
- should focus on organisational matters, rather than individual performance.

Debrief reports are the beginning of the lessons management process, which may include health and safety reviews and coordinated learning reviews. For this to be effective, debrief reports must clearly detail the identified learnings.

Debriefs may be recorded and submitted to the Lessons Management team via the Debrief / Lessons Identified webform. The [web form](#) is available in Checkpoint on mobility devices and via the desktop.

Debrief reports may also be submitted as an attachment to the web form.

After submitting the completed form, the sender automatically receives a copy via email.

Alternatively, email [Lessons Management](#).

Note: A debrief is not an investigation and should not be used as an investigative tool; however, the debrief may inform subsequent reviews, including health and safety and coordinated learning reviews.

Critical incidents

A critical incident is defined as:

'An incident involving death or life-threatening injury to a person during any police activity or to a person in police custody or under the care of police. It also includes:

- any incident where a police employee discharges a firearm intentionally at a person, whether or not death or serious injury results*
- any accidental discharge that results in death or injury.'*

Important lessons can be learnt from these types of incidents and debriefing captures the circumstances that led to the outcome.

Debriefing of critical incidents must not occur until after involved staff have received legal or Police Association advice, and have completed formal interviews. Where anonymity is appropriate, involved staff should be represented by a [CILO](#).

Critical incident liaison officers (CILOs), wellness advisors and the [O/C](#) of the investigation, should be consulted to ensure members' personal requirements are balanced with the organisation's need to conduct a debrief in a timely fashion. Any potential conflict should be escalated to the debrief initiator for consideration.

Given the likelihood of external scrutiny, the person facilitating a critical incident debrief preferably should be independent of the event, and also independent of the district where the event occurred. This will eliminate any perception of conflicts of interest.

The Lessons Management team can help identify a suitably skilled and experienced facilitator.

Major events and operations

Debriefs of major events and operations may be complex, and involve multiple stakeholders, workgroups, and issues.

Major events and operations over extended periods, or involving many staff, may require a tiered approach to debriefing; reflections, observations and feedback from operational staff should inform district debriefs, which in turn inform national debriefs.

In a national or large operation, it is impossible to have everyone participate in one debrief. The only way to achieve a common understanding of what happened throughout the event, is by conducting smaller debriefs at district / area / workgroup levels.

The senior officer in control of an operation or response is responsible for initiating the debrief process, and collating reports from lower level debriefs, and ensuring these are available to participants of the next tier of debrief to inform the discussion. For example, district debrief reports should be available to inform national debriefs. Those involved in a major event or operation should seek guidance from the senior officer in control of the event prior to commencing any debrief activity, to ensure deconfliction.

Debrief reports and/or identified themes from both district and national debriefs should be available to inform the discussion at an executive debrief.

If multiple agencies are involved, lessons identified from Police formal debriefs may inform a multi-agency debrief.

Multi-agency / Stakeholder debriefs

In addition to the bullet points above, multi-agency debriefs:

- are facilitated by the lead organisation/agency
- are held as soon as practicable after the event (ideally within six weeks), acknowledging that formal processes (e.g., interviews etc.) may need to take place first
- should focus on the effectiveness of inter-agency / stakeholder communication, engagement, and coordination.

Guidance for conducting a debrief

The senior officer in control of an event is responsible for ensuring a debrief is held.

A debrief should not judge success or failure of individuals or assign blame. Instead, decisions and actions should be considered against law, policy, and established procedures.

Following a chronology (in time sequence) of the event helps provide a structure that naturally follows the progression of a response to an event.

The points below detail considerations and suggestions for people coordinating and/or facilitating a debrief.

Facilitators

Ideally, debrief facilitators will:

- be independent (of the event). A workgroup needing an independent facilitator may request advice from the Lessons Management team to help identify a suitable person to assist
- understand the concept of just culture
- have experience in facilitating debriefs commensurate with the level of debrief being conducted
- be effective, inclusive communicators.

Preparation and planning

Because each of us has a different perspective, it's essential the debrief includes the views of as many people as practicable.

- Identify the people involved in the event.
- Consider who ought to participate in the debrief. Remember to include representatives from the [ECC](#) and Safer People.
- If the event involved a tactical response or use of tactical options, consider including a Frontline Safety Training (FST) supervisor.
- Consider facilitating virtual attendance (e.g., video conferencing) for those unable to attend in person, noting that in-person participation is most effective.

- Seek written submissions from people unable to attend.
- Formal debriefs should be informed by debriefs at an operational / district level; obtain these reports in advance.
- In collaboration with the workgroup and/or district, schedule a date and time that suits most participants.
- Identify and book a suitable venue.
- Set up a virtual meeting.
- Get [WFM](#) to re-roster as required.
- Email participants advising them of the scheduled debrief.
- Provide joining instructions, a [summary of just culture](#) and the debrief process.
- Consider requesting that people do not wear uniform, this may remove a potential barrier to free and frank discussions.
- Include the video conference link so people can attend virtually if required.
- Request an RSVP.
- Send a text or email reminder several days before the scheduled debrief to remind participants.
- Identify a suitably skilled person to take notes and / or record the discussion.

On the day

Preparation

- Arrive early.
- Set up the venue (inclusive seating, refreshments).
- Check technical equipment i.e., virtual meeting links, laptop connections, microphones.

Beginning

- Welcome all participants and acknowledge apologies.
- Provide a health and safety / facilities briefing.
- Consider opening with a karakia.
- Complete introductions - request name, role in the event.
- Outline what just culture is, the debrief process, and ground rules, including confidentiality.
- Outline that the purpose of the debrief is to learn from everyone's experiences and observations, and reach an objective understanding.

Discussion

- Invite participants to share their experiences and observations in a chronological order.
- Discuss the event sequentially, encouraging everyone to share their views. Be aware of reluctant or hesitant participants, and ensure they are invited to express their views.
- Key aspects of a debrief to discuss include (but are not limited to), available intelligence, planning, [TENR](#), briefing, command and control, communication, post-event actions, staff wellness, core values.
- Paraphrase and summarise regularly to ensure mutual understanding.
- The facilitator must be prepared to constructively challenge observations to encourage objective reflection by participants, and ensure key learnings and risks are identified.
- Invite agreement and/or correction before moving onto the next logical stage in the event.

Conclusion

- Invite any additional comments.
- Ask whether there is anything that is relevant and hasn't been covered.
- Outline next steps:
 - debrief notes will be finalised and circulated to participants for review and correction.
 - feedback will be incorporated to the final debrief report.
 - the final report will be provided to participants, as well as the debrief instigator
- Thank people for their attendance and contribution.
- Consider closing with a karakia.

Debrief reporting

The structure of a debrief report will depend on the size and complexity of the event being debriefed.

In general, if the report is structured similarly to the debrief session, it should provide a logical outline of the event response (refer [Appendix Three](#)).

When drafting a debrief report, it is also important to consider this as guidance for planners of the 'next' event.

Just culture and accountability

A just culture demands accountability - honesty, transparency, and the ability to reflect on individual and organisational performance - with the sole aim of learning.

While some topics of discussion may feel uncomfortable, we need to embrace the opportunity to acknowledge any shortfalls in performance and learn from them. This is about accountability, not blame. Honest reflections and observations do not imply overall failure of the event or operation; they are purely opportunities to improve organisational performance.

To maximise organisational learning, debrief reports must clearly articulate identified successes or failures. Avoid generalisations, and ensure reports contain sufficient detail to inform the lessons management process.

Unless critical to the issue raised, good practice is to ensure that comments are not attributed to individuals.

Discoverability and disclosure

Concern about possible disclosure of information may be a perceived barrier to open, transparent, free, and frank discussion.

As a public organisation, everything we do is discoverable, although not necessarily disclosable.

For this reason, it is *critical* that debrief reports describe issues accurately and without emotion, avoiding ambiguous language.

Always consider that what people **say**, might not be what they **mean**. It is up to the facilitator and the report writer to confirm with participants that their intended meaning is accurately reflected in the report.

Well-written debrief reports and a robust lessons management process demonstrates Police's commitment to organisational learning and continuous improvement.

Reporting process

1. Draft report completed.
2. Draft report sent to participants for review / amendment / correction.
3. Participant feedback incorporated.
4. Debrief facilitator reviews and signs off the report as an accurate record of the debrief.
5. The report is submitted to the debrief initiator and Lessons Management.
6. Once the report has been received and reviewed by the debrief initiator and Lessons Management, then it can be shared with partners / stakeholders with any necessary redactions (although preferably none).

Lessons management

Debrief reports are the beginning of a [lessons management process](#).

Debrief reports must be submitted to the Lessons Management team for inclusion in the lessons management database. This ensures that lessons identified are available for organisational learning and future reference.

The Lessons Management team will consult with relevant stakeholders to develop recommendations to address identified learnings.

If action is required at a district or area level, a [RIOD](#) task is to be entered, including the actions required, and an agreed timeframe for completion. This should also be notified to Lessons Management so the lesson entry can be updated.

If national workstreams are established, this should also be communicated to the Lessons Management team to enable the capture of organisational action in response to identified issues.

Appendix Two - Draft Agenda/Operational Debrief

Event / Operation Name:

Date / Time of event

Event Summary

- Date / time
- Location
- Event type
- Initial notification / information available
- Initial event control

Initial response

- Emergency Communication Centre advice / dispatch
- TENR considerations
- Planning and communication
- Initial attending staff/agencies
- Observations on arrival
- Initial actions / scene control / ongoing response

Event escalation / progression

- Ongoing TENR assessment in response to evolving situational context
- Subsequent attending staff / agencies
- Command structure
- Assessment / appreciation

Command & Control

- Managed transfer of command from the Emergency Communication Centre?
- Clarity of command and control?
- Clarity as to who was the lead agency?

Other

- Health & safety considerations
- Equipment
- Radio / phone comms
- Interagency communication
- Scene security / road closures
- Media
- Wellness support
- What corrective actions have already been taken

What worked well

What did not work well / could have been done better

What could have been done differently

Suggestions or recommendations that may address the identified learnings

Conclusion

Appendix Three - Template Debrief Report

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Event: | Type of event including any operation name |
| Place: | Location |
| Date: | Date and time of event |
| Debrief Led by: | Rank / name |
| Initiator: | Rank / name |
| Participants: | List of attendees |
| Relevant documents e.g.: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Briefing materials- Timeline of events |
| Debrief Report: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The debrief took place following (event) at (location).- Overview of event, initial notification / initial action / ongoing response.- Overview of discussions during debrief.- Key issues identified / explanation of possible causes or deficiencies that need review / suggested remedies.- Positive aspects.- Recommendations.- Factors impacting on the debrief process, e.g. key people unable to attend, or unavailability of information, noting any relevance to key findings and recommendations. |
| Signed: | |
| Date: | |

For larger scale events and debriefs, the report should commence with an **introduction**, which describes the circumstances of the event, including a brief chronology of what occurred.

Following this, an **executive summary** summarises the key points and key recommendations from the debrief report.

The body of the report will be a **full narrative**, which will outline various observations (positive and negative) and recommendations under each issue heading.

The report may include **supporting documentation**, attached to the debrief report. This can include maps, debrief presentation notes, reports generated during the event, media articles, photos, etc.

The report brings together the various **recommendations** into one document, and recommendations should be finalised in a schedule which, together with the executive summary, provides an easy-to-read overview of the event and recommendations.