



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

LESSONS MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

Document control

Release history

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Glossary of Terms

After Action Review	Similar to a debrief, an AAR involves describing what was intended, what actually happened, what mistakes were made and how participation might improve in the future
Analysis	The process of systematically applying statistical techniques and/or logic to interpret, compare, categorise and summarise data collected
Continuous Improvement	A management strategy involving organisational-wide processes of continuous incremental innovation and adaption to major change
Evaluation	A time-bound exercise that attempts to assess, systematically and objectively, the relevance, performance, and success, or the lack thereof, of ongoing and completed activities
Framework	An organisational structure that identifies the key areas, such as culture, governance, engagement, capability and planning, which are required for an organisation to implement an effective process
Insight	A deduction drawn from the multiple observations collected which are similar in nature and need to be further considered
Issue	A matter drawn from the observations collected, that perhaps during an evaluation, which needs to be further considered. Issues will generally be negative, such as problems that have occurred
Lesson	Knowledge or understanding gained by experience, both positive or negative
Lesson Identified	A conclusion based on the analysis of one or more insights, and a viable course of action that can sustain an action or address an area of improvement
Lesson Learned	Occurs only when a solution has been implemented, verified that the change has been positive and sustained.
Lessons Management	A component of knowledge management that seeks to introduce better practice and improvement opportunities for an organisation's systems and processes. It broadly involves, collecting and analysing information and data to develop, implement and share changes intended to improve efficiency and/or effectiveness
No Blame Culture	A set of attitudes such as those within a particular business or organisation that are characterised by a willingness to take risks or to accept responsibility for mistakes without fear or criticism or prosecution
Observation	A fact or occurrence that has been seen, heard, noticed or experienced that are either positive or an opportunity for improvement
Validation	Ensures that the original observation has been checked or proving the accuracy of the observation

1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to detail how NSW RFS uses the Lessons Management Framework (LMF) to establish, maintain and continuously improve services to the community of NSW.

It explains the LMF and the role of the Operational Improvement team. It will further explain the interaction of members and organisational elements required, and shows how all members of NSW RFS are involved and responsible for operational improvement.

A Lessons Management Framework will enable the NSW RFS to analyse observations gleaned from operational experiences, events, research or innovations, to identify lessons for the organisation. Identified lessons will be able to be embedded into relevant parts of the organisation, and evaluation of their implementation will provide a measure of the NSW RFS's ability to adapt and better meet the needs of the community.

The NSW RFS Strategic Direction 2019-2024 outlines four strategic pillars. A Lessons Management Framework (LMF) fulfils the needs of Research, Innovation, and Technology. It fits under the need to "leverage research and member perspective for better ways of working," and "ensure a user-led approach to ensure fit-for-purpose business systems and processes."

A Lessons Management Framework will assist the NSW RFS to achieve its strategic outcomes of "Robust operational readiness and continuous improvement in operational performance," and "continuous improvement from applied research, science, and business intelligence."

2 Legislation and Policy Framework

2.1 Legislative Framework

NSW RFS has responsibilities to the NSW community under the following legislation:

- Rural Fires Act 1997
- State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
- Government Sector Employment Act 2013

2.2 Policy Framework

NSW RFS (and external) policies which the Lessons Management Framework will interact with include:

- OMP 8.06.01.05 – Fire ground SOPs (SOP #35, Operational Debriefing)
- IMP 4.07 - Incident Controllers' Reports
- P7.1.10 - Organisational Risk Management
- Bush Fire Coordinating Committee Policy 2/2006 - Management of Bush Fire Operations

3 Operational Improvement Team

The Operational Improvement Team is part of the Operational Performance Section, within Response & Coordination, Operations Directorate.

Operational Improvement will establish the LMF, and implement its methods of collecting, analysing, and reporting on data from all members of the NSW RFS. The Operational Improvement Team will also consult with various parts of the organisation as needed to provide business intelligence, focussing on information about Lessons Identified in operations, as well as themes and trends in feedback collected, to help inform the development of projects, policies, and systems.

4 Principles

The principles underpinning the Lessons Management Framework are:

- To facilitate Continuous Improvement at all management and volunteer levels of Operations in the NSW RFS towards achieving the goal of a Protected Community.
- Lessons Management will be a simple, accessible system, integrated into business as usual processes and compatible with existing Knowledge Management systems.
- Lessons and learning products produced will be visible and available to all members of the NSW RFS.
- Lessons Management will share common principles and data coding with those used by other emergency services and kindred agencies.
- Lessons Management is a partner to concluding investigations into safety issues.
- Lessons Management will contribute to implementing best practice, innovation, and sustainable cultural change across NSW RFS Operations.
- Lessons Management contributes to the forming of a learning organisation.

5 The Lessons Management Framework (LMF)

5.1 Overview

The LMF enables a learning cycle where analysing and identifying lessons occurs without barriers. The result is modifying behaviours and procedures in a measurable way. Having a formal LMF creates a continuous improvement loop within the organisation.

An LMF aims to mitigate risk and to increase operational effectiveness. The focus of a Lessons Management process is on the behaviours and actions of people working in an uncertain operating environment. Its function is to identify and capture observations or problems, analyse the issue, make an evaluation, and recommend a solution to the appropriate part of the organisation.

The key elements of an effective LMF are the same as the principles laid out by the Australian and New Zealand Standards (ASNZ ISO 31000:2009) for a Risk Management system, namely to:

- ensure that accurate information and observations are collected
- create value through improved performance
- improve the decision making process at individual and team levels
- be tailored to the specific needs of the agency

- account for the human and cultural needs of the organisation
- be transparent and inclusive
- be dynamic and iterative
- be responsive to change and
- facilitate continuous improvement

As with Risk Management, the success of the LMF relies on effective communication and consultation. The value of a Lessons Management process is only realised when the information generated by the process is available to the people who need it, when they need it. Effective information sharing generates organisational knowledge and leads to an enduring improvement in organisational performance, so the process of capturing, developing, sharing, and effectively using both individual and organisational knowledge to improve performance is central to the LMF.

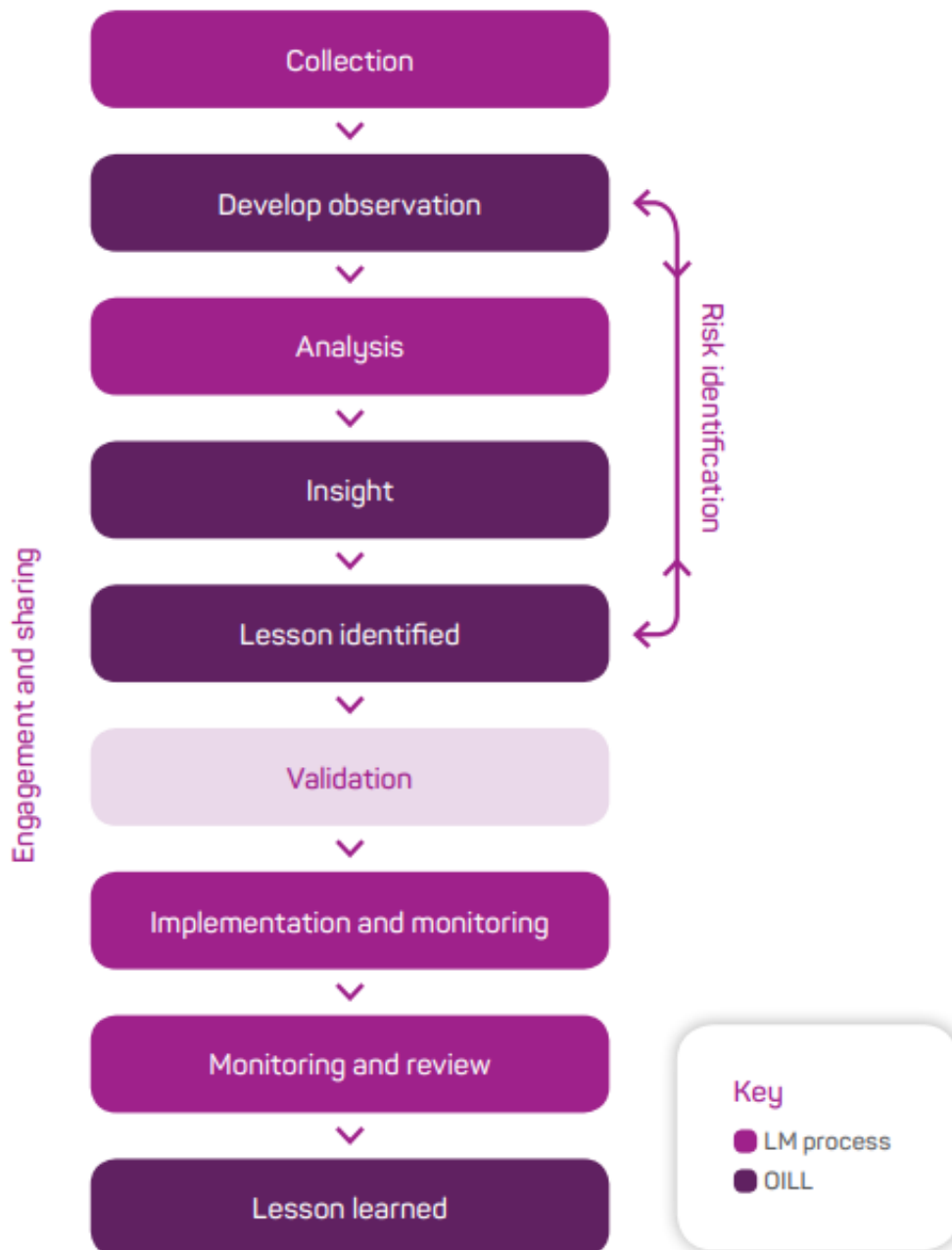
The organisational challenge is to create an environment in which all members feel comfortable and motivated to share their knowledge in a productive way. This enables the organisation to learn from experiences, be innovative, improve decision making, create solutions, perform tasks safely and recover quickly from adversities.

5.2 The Lessons Management Process

The process by which the LMF will manage knowledge and lessons is consistent with that defined by the Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience (2019), and found in its [Lessons Management Handbook](#). This is the process most commonly used for Lessons Management by Australian emergency services agencies, the broader emergency management community, industry, and the military.

This process will depend on all members understanding and supporting it. Marketing and educational processes will be undertaken to gain buy-in from all levels of the NSW RFS.

Lessons management



(AIDR, 2019)

5.2.1 Collection

Collection of Observations is the first step in the Lessons Management Process. Collection will take many forms, and may be active, or passive. Examples of collections processes that will be undertaken by Operational Improvement include:

- Enabling the submission of observations by NSW RFS members and others, through an online portal directly to the Operational Improvement Team.
- Review and analysis of reports and investigations (such as S44 IC reports and accident investigations).
- Receiving findings of After-Action Reviews (AARs) conducted at all levels of the organisation; in some cases the Operational Improvement Team may conduct or observe these AARs.
- Interviews of personnel involved in operations.
- Direct observation of activities such as exercises, actual incidents, and related activities.

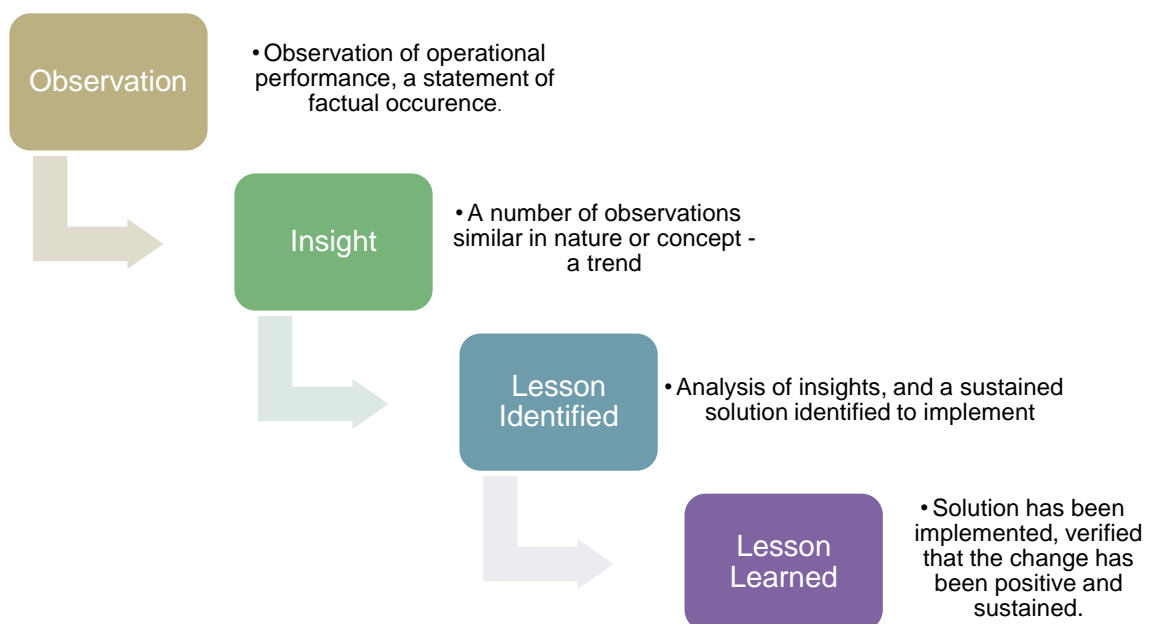
Collection planning will usually involve stakeholders to ensure transparency and trust, but it may be required to be undertaken at short notice without preparation. As such it is important that all NSW RFS members understand what the collection of observations looks like and its purpose, and support the Lessons Management Framework.

5.2.2 The OILL Methodology

OILL is the method within the Lessons Management Process, through which knowledge and feedback are managed within the LMF.

OILL stands for:

- **O**bservations
- **I**nsights
- **L**essons Identified
- **L**essons Learned



5.2.3 Observations

Observations are the building block of the Lessons Management Process. They are facts or occurrences that a member regards as worth noting, as an example of good practice or an opportunity for improvement.

Observations need to be concise factual statements which can be understood in isolation from other information. They should be short, written in plain English, identify the circumstances of the observation, identify the roles (not names) of people involved, and provide details of what happened and the impacts which it had. A solution may be suggested if desired.

A guide to writing good observations can be found [here](#).

5.2.4 Analysis

Once collected, Observations are given unique identifiers and are analysed. This may involve multiple separate processes:

- Validation. This may involve contacting the author of an Observation for further information or context; seeking the opinion of subject matter experts and other personnel present at the event; or comparing it to other Observations gathered from similar locations, incidents, times, or groups.
- Check if an Observation is also subject to an investigation (such as after an accident or injury). However, the Lessons Management Process should not cease if this is the case; findings may need to be de-identified but both processes have the same goal and should work in tandem.
- Coding. This involves classifying each Observation against both National Themes as agreed at the former Australian Emergency Management Institute, as well as State themes as determined by the Capability Development Sub Committee reporting to the NSW State Emergency Management Committee. By using common Themes as agreed with other agencies, Observations can easily be shared between organisations.
- Undertaking trend analysis to find similarities between Observations.

When multiple Observations demonstrate a trend, they may form an Insight.

5.2.5 Insights

Observations are then coded against State and National themes. Coding is a systematic way to group and identify themes from observations. More information on coding can be found [here](#).

When multiple Observations have been coded and data analysis indicates a trend in one or more classifications, they may be used to form Insights.

Not all Observations may contribute to forming an Insight. They may be isolated examples, not validated, or not contain sufficient information to contribute to an Insight. However, observations are kept for regular trend analysis over time; an observation that seems isolated today may gain validity if further similar Observations are collected next year.

A single Observation may become an Insight and be promulgated as a stand-alone piece of information if it points to a clear, validated, significant safety issue. Insights may also be shared with the original submitters of Observations to demonstrate that the organisation is progressing the issue which they have raised.

Insights are validated again, in the same way as Observations are. Further, each insight will be subjected to a Root Cause Analysis using a variety of methods (eg, a fishbone diagram built in consultation with witnesses and/or subject matter experts). This may cause the Insight to be adjusted or contextualised.

Once Insights have been analysed, when a trend between them is apparent, for example the same issue arising from a range of different causes, or similar causes leading to different insights, there may be the formation of a Lesson Identified.

When an Insight is identified, the Operational Improvement Team will formally report them to the Operational Lessons Reference Group consisting of:

- Director Response & Coordination;
- Directors Area Operations;
- An Area Commander;
- A District staff member (manager or 2IC); and,
- A senior volunteer with broad operational management experience.

The Lessons Reference Group may refer the Insight back to the local area for action, decline, or identify that action is already occurring within the organisation.

If the group determines that the Insight is meaningful and valuable for the organisation, the group will:

- engage with a Manager/Director within the business unit/s that may have ownership or need to contribute significantly to the Lesson; or,
- refer to relevant groups or committees within the organisation for review and/or management.

If agreed to, the Lessons Reference Group will recommend its implementation to the Executive Director Operations.

The Executive Director Operations may decline moving forward with the Insight or authorise its implementation within the Operations Directorate.

The Executive Director Operations may refer it to the Executive Group for review and/or allocation to another Directorate or area of the organisation for implementation.

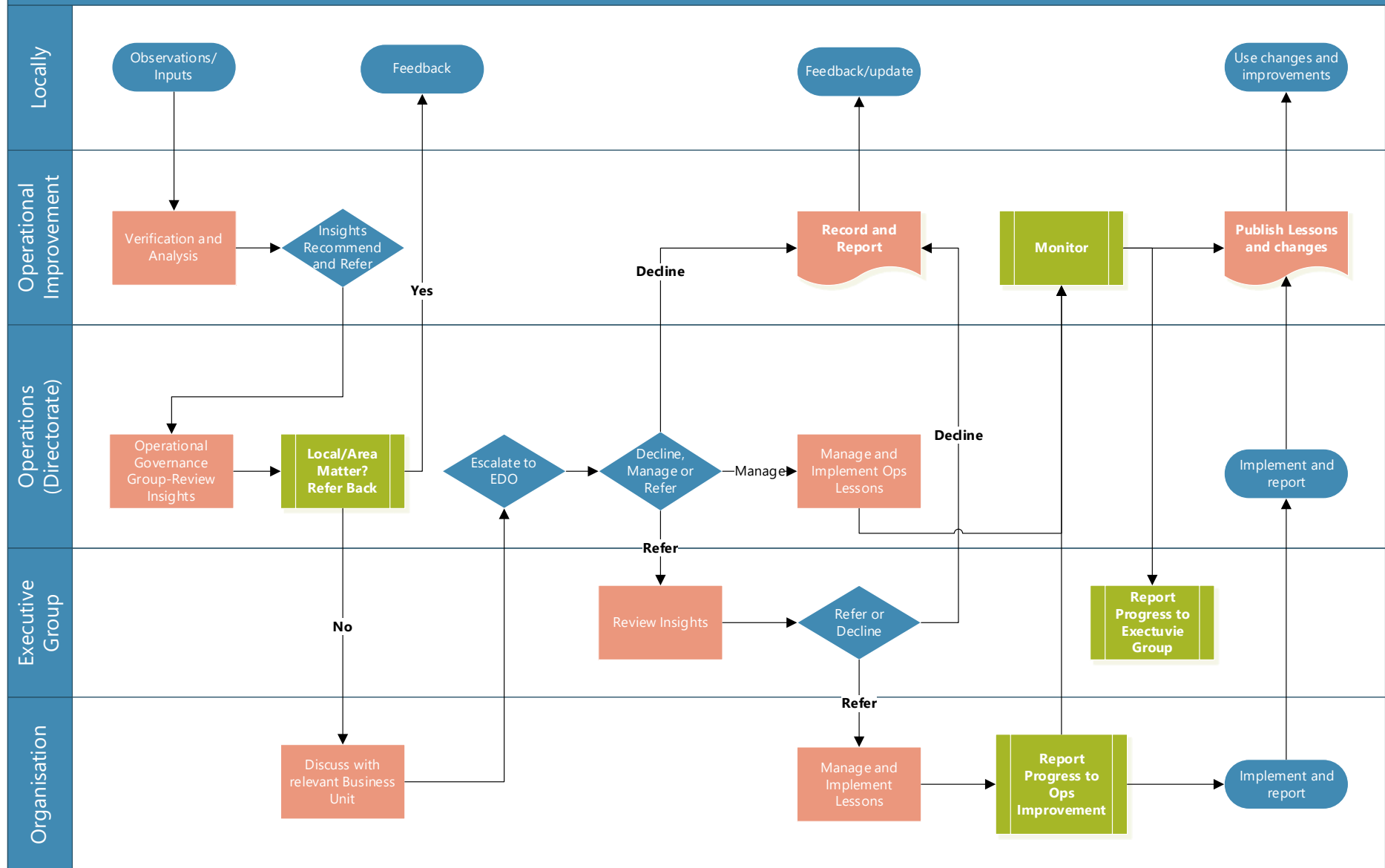
Once an Insight has Executive Director endorsement, it may be used to contribute to a Lesson Identified.

5.2.6 Lessons Identified

A Lesson Identified is an action or change that results from the insights following its analysis. Lessons may be a reinforcement of good practice (“keep doing this, it’s working well”) or a correction of poor practices or safety breaches (“change how we do that, it’ll make us better.”)

The Operational Improvement Team will assist any section or directorate in implementation to ensure consistency of products and messaging, as well as for situational awareness of implementation status. The Operations Improvement Team maintains a register of Observations, Insights, and Lessons Identified, whether the Insights are implemented or declined.

Operational Improvement- Lessons Management Flowchart



5.2.7 Implementation and Monitoring

The Operational Improvement Team will develop and provide a range of products and services to assist with the sharing of Insights and Lessons across NSW RFS and kindred agencies.

These products and services may include:

- “Rapid Lessons,” being short one or two-page briefing notes for all (or specific) members of the NSW RFS to inform them of the Lesson, how it was identified, and what they can do to implement and share the suggested solution. These may be stand-alone products published on the One RFS website, included with Operational Briefs, inserted into the Pocket Book app, etc.
- Journal articles providing a more in-depth discussion of a Lesson, its basis and experiences, and outlining actions for members to take to implement it.
- Presentations at NSW RFS and external forums, conferences, and meetings, at State, Area, and Local levels.
- Provision of evidence to other Sections, to contribute to projects, doctrine, training materials, concepts of exercises, etc.
- Development of short informational videos or other presentations to inform members of Lessons, via social media and related channels.
- Piloting of adjusted processes, actions, or systems that may form part of a Lesson.
- An accessible repository of the above products for access and use by members on an ongoing basis.

Operational Improvement will be required to initiate marketing activities across the organisation to ensure that members understand these products (and the broader Lessons Management Process). Furthermore, the team will undertake active promotion of these products and the LMF.

5.2.8 Reviewing and Reporting

The LMF requires ongoing reviewing of Lessons that have been identified and implemented. This will ideally be built into business as usual processes such as quarterly reporting.

A Lesson Identified will be reported as being a **Lesson Learned** when it is determined that the Observations on which it was based are no longer occurring. This may be seen through a range of factors including:

- Reduced safety breaches
- Observations reporting more efficient operations
- Amendment to and compliance with doctrine, systems, and processes.
- Observations related to improved culture and behaviour.

It must be noted that a considerable period of time may elapse between the gathering of Observations and the reporting of a Lesson Learned. In particular, issues surrounding workforce culture or behaviours may take some years of monitoring before changes are apparent. As such, monitoring of Lesson implementation cannot be subject to a strict and consistent time-based KPI by which its success will be determined. An expected timeframe may be set by Management as a reasonable yardstick of success, but it should take into account the context of the Insight and the people it relates to.

The Operational Improvement Team will provide monthly reports to the Director, Response & Coordination, regarding:

- Collection activities undertaken and planned

- Observations collected
- Insights formed
- Lessons Identified
- Products and services provided to NSW RFS members and kindred agencies.
- Status of Lessons implementation.

Business Units responsible for implementing changes in line with Lessons will report to Operational Improvement bi-monthly on progress. Operational Improvement will monitor progress of all changes in line with Lessons.

Operational Improvement will present new and current Lesson progress to the Executive Directors group bi-monthly.

6 Governance

This section outlines the roles and functions of various personnel in regards to the Lessons Management Framework.

6.1 Organisational Leadership

- Creates a culture where members feel safe and empowered to share Observations
- Champions the Lessons Management Framework and encourages its use
- Accepts the need to authorise and implement Lessons when they are submitted, as appropriate
- Supports identified implementation actions and provides resources to enable them.
- Authorises the sharing of information across the membership, including operational, accident, and activity reports.

6.2 Operations

- Create a culture where members feel safe and empowered to share Observations
- Directors, Area Commanders, and Managers champion the Lessons Management Framework and encourage its use.
- Ensure that volunteer members are informed of the Lessons Management Framework
- Include the LMF and Operational Improvement Team in debriefing processes at all levels
- Provides the required resources and authorisation for the Operational Improvement Team to implement the LMF
- Provides personnel to the Lessons Reference Group.

6.3 Lessons Reference Group

- Support and promote the Lessons Management Framework
- Analyse Insights relevant to the Operations Directorate as referred by Operational Improvement.
- Recommend validation activities or analysis by subject matter experts.
- Provides resources to undertake those activities as required.
- Recommend the creation and distribution of products and services to either the Executive Director Operations for authorisation,

6.4 Operational Improvement

- Supports leadership of the Directorate and Service to be a learning organisation.
- Maintains the LMF and markets its use to the organisation
- Is a point of contact for all members regarding Lessons, Observations, Debriefs etc.
- Collects and analyses Observations through multiple methods, develops Insights, and refers them to the Lessons Reference Group
- Produces products and provides services as authorised by the Lessons Reference Group.
- Reports as directed to Director Response & Coordination, RFSA Consultative Committees, etc.
- Represents the NSW RFS at relevant events and groups across the organisation and industry
- Provides consultative services to the NSW RFS and other agencies regarding debriefings, lessons management