Frequently Asked Questions: HSEEP and NCIG

This fact sheet clarifies the similarities, differences and connections between FEMA's Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) and National Continuous Improvement Guidance (NCIG).

Table 1: Frequently Asked Questions and Responses

Question	Response
What is the difference between the NCIG and the HSEEP doctrine?	- The NCIG is an approach for organizations to confirm capabilities, processes and functions are sufficient, accurate and effective by conducting consistent and rigorous continuous improvement activities for real-world incidents. - HSEEP doctrine is a set of guiding principles for exercise program management, design, development, conduct, evaluation and improvement planning.
Is the Evaluation Phase in continuous improvement the same as exercise evaluation?	No. - The Evaluation Phase in continuous improvement measures the effectiveness of previously identified and completed recommended actions from continuous improvement Action Plans and exercise Improvement Plans. - Exercise evaluation identifies strengths and areas for improvement based on exercise objectives.
What is the difference between an Action Plan from continuous improvement and an Improvement Plan from HSEEP?	The main difference is the source of the information. - An Action Plan results from after-action review of a real-world incident and focuses on recommended actions, including activities that sustain strengths or formalize potential best practices. - An Improvement Plan results from exercise outcomes and has a more focused scope that includes a consolidated list of corrective actions, responsible parties and a timeline for completion.
We already use improvement planning in our exercises. Isn't that the same as continuous improvement?	Improvement planning is related to, but not the same as, continuous improvement. They share a common goal of enhancing an organization's capabilities and response, but they differ in scope, timing, and focus: - Improvement planning in exercises is a specific and tactical activity within the exercise process to address corrective actions identified during the exercise. - Continuous improvement is a holistic and ongoing organizational strategy to systematically improve all aspects of an organization's operations, capabilities, and processes over time.

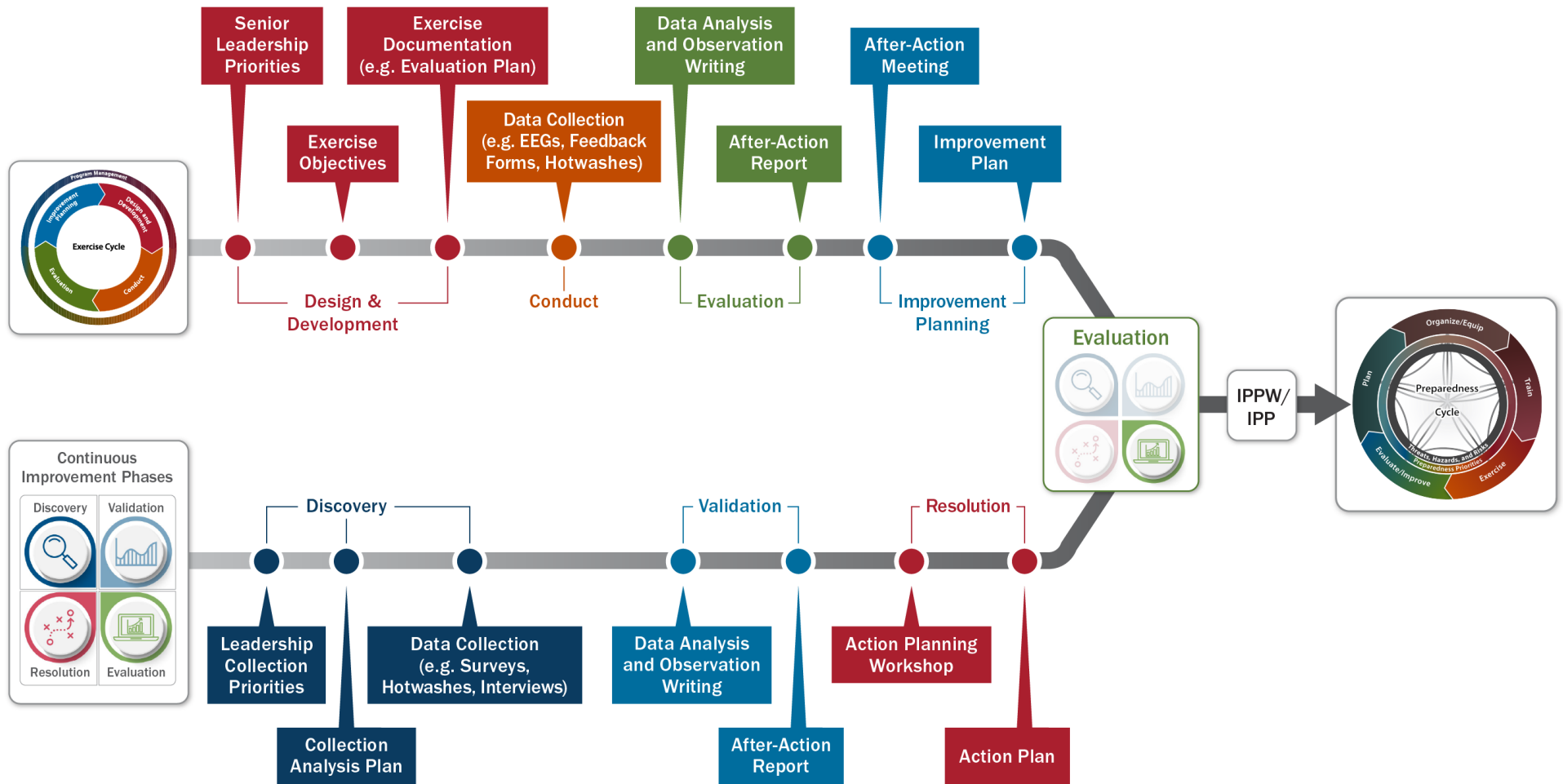| Question	Response
How can we use continuous improvement activities and exercises together?	Both serve different but interconnected purposes—they complement each other. Findings from HSEEP exercises and assessments of real-world incidents both feed into the continuous improvement process. Two examples include: ▪ Exercise Outcomes and Improvement Plans: Exercise outcomes (strengths and areas for improvement) can feed into an organization's continuous improvement process. For example, if an exercise reveals weaknesses in communication protocols, the organization can develop and track corrective actions using the same tool or process to track recommended actions from real-world incident assessments. ▪ Real-World Incident Assessments and Action Plans: After real-world incidents, continuous improvement assessments analyze outcomes and identify recommended actions to sustain or formalize best practices and address areas for improvement, especially mission-critical issues. Exercises evaluate how successfully completed actions address root causes or underlying issues.
What is the difference between After-Action Meetings and Action Planning Workshops?	After-Action Meetings (AAMs) and Action Planning Workshops (APWs) serve the same general purpose. The key difference is that an AAM is part of an exercise's review process, and an APW is part of a real-world incident's review process.
Do we have to track corrective actions and recommended actions separately?	No; in fact, many emergency management programs use the same tool or process to track corrective actions (from exercises) and recommended actions (from real-world incidents). A single process reduces duplication of effort, such as overlapping or conflicting actions. However, since Action Plans (real-world incidents) and Improvement Plans (exercises) may include differences in terminology and approach, a single tracking tool should be able to differentiate the types and sources of the information.
Can I use HSEEP templates for continuous improvement activities?	The best practice is to use templates designed for the specific situation. Both HSEEP and the Continuous Improvement Technical Assistance Program (CITAP) provide templates for continuous improvement activities. However, CITAP's templates are tailored for real-world incidents. HSEEP templates are tailored for exercises, and the significant differences between real-world incidents and exercises may require additional customization of HSEEP templates.
Some phases and terminology are the same for both NCIG and HSEEP but seem to be used differently. What are the differences and similarities in the continuous improvement phases and the HSEEP cycle?	HSEEP and NCIG apply similar concepts to different situations: HSEEP for exercises and NCIG for real-world incidents. As such, there are some distinct differences between the two. Figure 1 and Figure 2 provide visual and text-based comparisons of the similarities and differences between HSEEP and NCIG: ▪ Figure 1 is a side-by-side map of the products that HSEEP's exercise and NCIG's real-world after-action processes generate through their phases. ▪ Figure 2 is a text-based comparison of the terminology each cycle uses for these processes. The HSEEP and CITAP websites have downloadable versions of these figures.

Figure 1: Side-by-Side Map of the HSEEP and NCIG Products

Continuous Improvement Process (CIP)
Incident After-Action Review Process
https://www.fema.gov/about/offices/preparedness/continuous-improvement

Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) Cycle
https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/exercises/hseep

Leadership Collection Priorities:
Based on direction from leadership, incident needs, existing plans, and previous real-world incidents or exercise After Action Reports. Priority development continues throughout real-world incidents during the Discovery Phase.

Senior Leadership Priorities:
Established by senior leaders and informed by risk and capability assessments, findings, and corrective actions from previous events and external requirements like regulations and grant guidance.

Design and Development

Products: Planning meetings and exercise documentation

Incident or Exercise

Discovery Phase
Product: Collection Analysis Plan: A plan that organizes and sets up a clear approach for data collection efforts. It typically includes a brief description of the incident, purpose, scope, collection priorities, methodology, roles and responsibilities, schedule, and potential constraints.

Data Collection
The same data collection methods can be used for exercises and real-world incidents and will vary based on need.

Conduct
Product(s): Exercise Evaluation Guides, Evaluation Plan, Controller/Evaluator Handbook, Facilitator/Evaluator Handbook: Developed during the exercise design and development as a part of pre-exercise evaluation planning. Used to guide evaluators and participants in providing observations

Validation Phase
Product: After Action Report: Based on the Collection Analysis Plan and other planning documents

Observations Include:
• Strengths
• Potential Best Practices
• Areas for Improvement
• Mission Critical

Data Analysis
The same data analysis techniques can be used for exercises and real-world incidents and will vary based on need.

Observations
The end products for real-world incidents will vary from those created for an exercise but serve a similar purpose.

Evaluation
Product: After Action Report: Based on exercise objectives and the evaluation criteria designed for the exercise

Observations include:
• Strengths
• Areas for Improvement

Resolution Phase
Product: Recommended Actions: An action that needs to be taken to maintain a strength, institutionalize a best practice, or address an area for improvement or mission critical issue. Initially developed as an element of an observation, recommended actions are finalized during an APW and transferred into an Action Plan for tracking and completion.

Product: Action Planning Workshop: Brings together multiple stakeholders to facilitate the development, adoption, and implementation of recommended actions. The workshop should include those entities responsible for taking action(s).

Product: Action Plan: Identifies recommended actions, assigns them to responsible entities, and sets up timelines for their completion.

Finalize, Track, and Implement
Improvement Plan and Action Plan items can be combined into one tracking document that is updated after each exercise, real-world incident, or other activity that creates recommended or corrective actions.

Improvement Planning
Product: Corrective Actions: An item outlined in an IP that is intended to resolve areas for improvement.

Product: After Action Meeting: Serves as a forum to review the revised AAR and the draft IP. Participants should seek to reach final consensus on strengths, areas for improvement, draft corrective actions, concrete deadlines, and owners/ assignees for implementation of corrective actions.

Product: Improvement Plan: Includes a consolidated list of corrective actions, responsible parties, and a timeline for completion.

Evaluation Phase

Measure Effectiveness: Once a discrete recommended or corrective action is marked complete, the effectiveness of that action should be measured or validated. This can be done in several ways.

1. As part of steady state data collection activities
2. Assessing in similar conditions during a real-world incident
3. Assessing through exercises
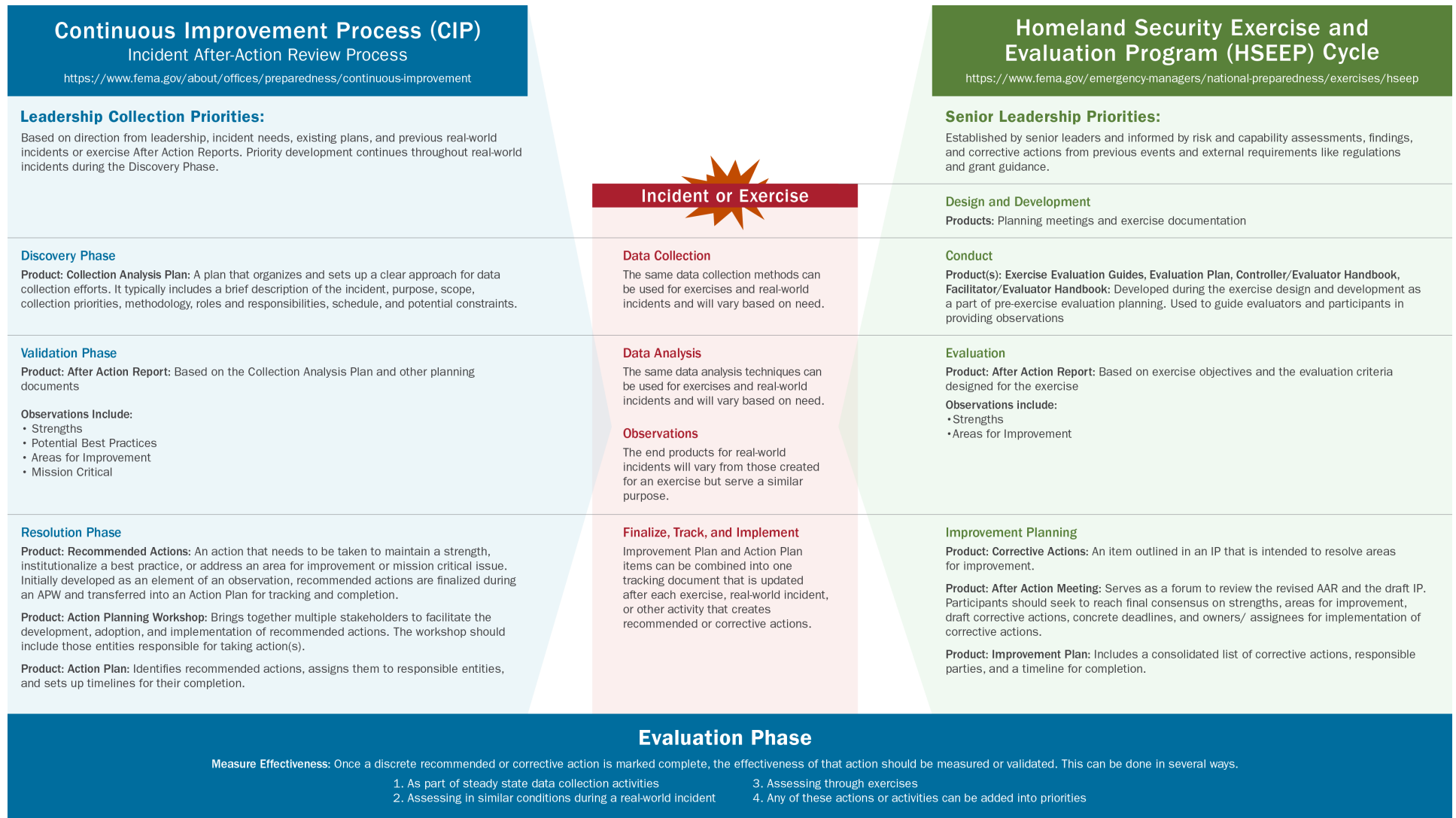4. Any of these actions or activities can be added into priorities

Figure 2: Side-by-Side Comparison of HSEEP and NCIG Terminology