Continuous Improvement Considerations for Emergency Management Leaders

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Leaders play a key role when establishing or building continuous improvement initiatives in any emergency management organization. This document provides guidance on how senior leaders in your organization can build and run continuous improvement initiatives to promote an ongoing culture of learning.

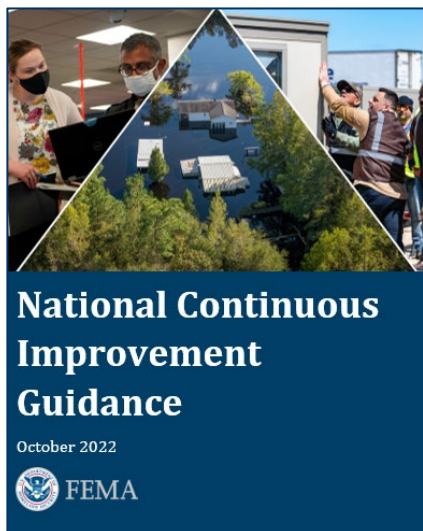## What is Continuous Improvement?

Continuous improvement involves establishing an **ongoing culture of learning** in which an organization periodically examines its capabilities, processes, and functions to ensure they are sufficient, applicable, and effective to handle the threats, hazards, and risks their jurisdictions or communities may face.

Figure 1: Some Benefits of Continuous Improvement

All organizations can engage in continuous improvement, and leaders play a critical role in championing a culture of change. You can lead by example in your willingness to evaluate existing processes and implement actions to improve.

You can build a culture of continuous improvement in your organization where change is deliberate and improvement is championed.

Figure 2: National Continuous Improvement Guidance

What is the National Continuous Improvement Guidance?

Continuous Improvement: Considerations for Emergency Management Leaders is a companion document to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Continuous Improvement Guidance, which provides whole community partners with an approach to conduct continuous improvement within their emergency management organizations. You can find the National Continuous Improvement Guidance at: https://preptoolkit.fema.gov/web/cip-citap/ncig.

Building Continuous Improvement Initiatives

Your organization can benefit from integrating any level of continuous improvement activities into its operations. While some organizations may establish a comprehensive continuous improvement program, others may choose to begin by engaging in select continuous improvement activities, such as completing after-action reviews to identify strengths and areas for improvement during or after an incident or developing simple tools to track recommended actions.

By supporting continuous improvement activities, you can help your organization identify and act on opportunities for improvement that can help you better serve people in your jurisdiction or organization. Additionally, you can use the information gained from continuous improvement efforts to build relationships with key stakeholders and help them achieve their goals for organizational change and improvement.

Leaders' Responsibilities in Building Continuous Improvement Initiatives

You may consider taking on the following responsibilities when building your organization's ability to conduct continuous improvement:

- **Establish the purpose, goals, and objectives** of your organization's continuous improvement activities.

- **Promote continuous improvement initiatives** across the jurisdiction or organization to build a culture of continuous improvement.

- **Identify funding and resources** for continuous improvement activities (e.g., staff, equipment, tools, facilities).

- **Recruit high-quality staff** with skills needed to conduct continuous improvement (e.g., data analysis and collection, stakeholder engagement, process improvement).

- **Establish key partners** within the organization who may participate in continuous improvement initiatives (e.g., surveys or focus groups).

- **Engage with key stakeholders** so they understand your continuous improvement activities and how they can benefit from them.

Funding Sources

If your organization does not have sufficient funding to establish or expand its continuous improvement initiatives, you may consider seeking external funding for these activities and the resulting recommended actions. Depending on the type of organization and the activities you are attempting to fund, your organization may be eligible to apply for FEMA grants. For more information on FEMA's grant programs, please visit FEMA.gov/grants.

Developing and Using Continuous Improvement Products

Continuous improvement products can be useful resources for you and your organization. To ensure products are align with organizational and leadership priorities and are actionable, you can be involved in providing strategic level inputs as part of the process. Once products are complete, senior leaders can use them to inform decision-making before, during, and after incidents.

After-Action Report   Decision Support Product   Trend Analysis

Figure 3: Example Continuous Improvement Products

Leaders' Responsibilities During Product Development

You may consider taking on the following responsibilities when developing continuous improvement products:

- Work with staff to determine the **scope of products and identify priorities** for data collection from incidents, keeping in mind how products can help your decision-making.

- **Provide lessons learned** from your perspective as a senior leader during an incident.

- **Support stakeholder engagement**, especially when a product requires input and buy-in from multiple organizations involved in an incident.

- **Conduct general oversight of product development** and review and approve final versions of significant products, such as an after-action report (AAR).

- **Help staff prioritize their work** if they are developing multiple products and have other competing priorities, such as incident response and recovery duties.

Examples: Using Products to Support Decision-making

The following examples show how continuous improvement products can support your decision-making before, during, and after incidents:

Before: A trend analysis using after-action review data from historical incidents helps you decide to make staff training a strategic priority for your organization.

During: A product summarizing key findings on sheltering from previous incidents supports your decision to send additional resources to urban shelters.

After: An observation from a recent incident AAR helps you decide to implement an expensive but beneficial best practice for debris removal at future incidents.

Affecting Change Through Continuous Improvement

Resolving issues and improving operational capabilities is an important aspect of continuous improvement. Once an organization identifies a problem to resolve or strength to institutionalize, it must identify specific actions that will ensure it happens. Your involvement in developing these actions may be necessary to help shape accurate and practical actions and ensure they are prioritized, resourced, and implemented effectively. If your organization does not have sufficient resources, staff, and/or funding, to address all the actions identified, you may need to guide the process of prioritizing recommended actions.

Leaders' Responsibilities in Affecting Change within Your Organization

You may consider taking on the following responsibilities when developing and resolving actions:

- **Provide feedback on actions** to ensure they are reasonable, implementable, and effective.

- **Facilitate engagement with stakeholders** to ensure they are part of the process to develop actions and willing to own and implement applicable, identified actions.

- **Attend decision-making meetings** focused on prioritizing identified actions.

- **Support staff** that track the status of actions, working with them to ensure stakeholders responsible for implementing actions are accountable to complete them and actions do not have negative unintended consequences.

- **Secure funding and resources,** as needed, to support implementing an action or developing a system to track actions.

Other Continuous Improvement Resources

This document is part of FEMA's Continuous Improvement Technical Assistance Program (CITAP), which offers a comprehensive technical assistance package to the whole community through tools, templates, training, and customized engagements in continuous improvement.

Please visit CITAP's PrepToolkit page to find more information and resources: https://preptoolkit.fema.gov/web/cip-citap.

If you have any questions about the content in this guide, please reach out to the CITAP team: FEMA-CITAP@fema.dhs.gov.