

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-437](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

FEMA historically has relied on both permanent and temporary disaster-related employees to respond to presidentially declared disasters. FEMA's total workforce increased by about 144 percent—7,558 to 18,449 employees—from fiscal year 2005 to September 2014. In 2012, FEMA deployed two new components to its disaster response workforce—the DHS Surge Capacity Force and the FEMA Corps. However, an after-action report from Hurricane Sandy indicated that FEMA exhausted its staff resources during its response and that FEMA faced additional challenges related to its disaster response workforce.

GAO was asked to examine FEMA's efforts to manage its current and future workforce needs. This report addresses (1) FEMA's actions to address long-standing workforce challenges, and (2) the challenges that have affected FEMA's new disaster workforce components. GAO reviewed after-action reports, strategic plans, and program documentation for FEMA Corps and the Surge Capacity Force. GAO also interviewed agency officials and conducted 23 nongeneralizable focus groups with members of FEMA's workforce who provided important insights.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that FEMA develop a plan to increase Surge Capacity Force volunteer recruitment and collect additional cost and performance information for its two new workforce components. DHS concurred with the recommendations and identified related actions the department is taking to address them.

View [GAO-15-437](#). For more information, contact Christopher Currie at (404) 679-1875 or curriec@gao.gov.

July 2015

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Additional Planning and Data Collection Could Help Improve Workforce Management Efforts

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is taking steps to address various long-standing workforce management challenges identified by GAO. Since 2007, GAO has found that FEMA faced challenges in completing and integrating its strategic workforce planning efforts. As a result, GAO recommended that FEMA develop a plan that identifies workforce gaps and includes performance metrics for monitoring progress. GAO has also identified other workforce challenges at FEMA, including low employee morale. FEMA has not yet resolved these challenges and fully addressed GAO's workforce-related recommendations but, according to agency officials, plans to do so through several efforts:

- a new incident workforce planning model—pending final approval—that will determine the optimal mix of workforce components to include in FEMA's disaster workforce,
- a new Human Capital Strategic Plan to be finalized in September 2015—that will help ensure it has the optimal workforce to carry out its mission, and
- an executive-level steering committee to help ensure that these workforce planning efforts are completed and integrated.

FEMA's ability to address long-standing challenges hinges on its ability to effectively coordinate with agency stakeholders and integrate its workforce-related new efforts into a strategic human capital management approach. Given that the agency's efforts are ongoing, it is too soon to determine whether these challenges will be addressed.

DHS Surge Capacity Force: Employees of DHS components who volunteer to deploy to provide support to FEMA in the event of a disaster.

FEMA Corps: Temporary national service participants of the National Civilian Community Corps who complete FEMA service projects to complement its disaster-related efforts.

FEMA faces challenges in implementing and managing its two new workforce components: the Surge Capacity Force and the FEMA Corps. For example, as of January 2015, the Surge Capacity Force was at 26 percent of its staffing target of 15,400 personnel, and FEMA does not have a plan for how it will increase the number of volunteers to meet its goals. Developing such a plan would help ensure that the Surge Capacity Force has a sufficient number of personnel available to support FEMA's efforts. Further, GAO found that FEMA does not collect full cost information, including the costs of FEMA Corps background investigations and the salaries and benefits of Surge Capacity Force volunteers who are paid by DHS components while they are deployed. Collecting this information would help provide a more accurate accounting of the cost of conducting both programs. Further, FEMA does not assess all aspects of program performance because it does not have performance measures that correspond to all program goals. The agency also does not collect reliable performance data, or have an automated system for comparing performance against FEMA Corps project goals. Doing so would better enable FEMA to assess whether it is meeting its program goals.