United States Government Accountability Office

Report to Congressional Requesters

July 2015

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Additional Planning and Data Collection Could Help Improve Workforce Management Efforts

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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.

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.

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Abbreviations:

CORE	Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employee
CNCS	Corporation for National and Community Service
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FLETC	Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers
FQS	FEMA Qualification System
HCSP	*Human Capital Strategic Plan*
NCCC	AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps
OCCHCO	Office of the Chief Component Human Capital Officer
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
PFT	Permanent Full-Time
Post-Katrina Act	Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006

GAO

U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

July 9, 2015

Congressional Requesters

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has historically relied on both permanent and disaster-related temporary employees to respond to presidentially declared disasters. In 2012, FEMA first deployed two new components—made up of individuals who are not FEMA employees—as part of its disaster response workforce: the DHS Surge Capacity Force, with more than 4,000 DHS volunteers, and the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC)-FEMA Corps (hereafter FEMA Corps), with about 1,000 members per year.[1] FEMA's combined workforce increased by about 144 percent (from 7,558 to 18,449 employees) from fiscal year 2005 through 2014.[2] During Hurricane Sandy, FEMA deployed its permanent and temporary employees, as well as these new disaster workforce components. However, FEMA's after-action report on its response to Hurricane Sandy identified continuing challenges affecting how the agency manages its workforce, noting that the deployment of FEMA's disaster workforce nearly exhausted the number of available personnel.[3] In recent years, we have identified human capital management challenges at FEMA and made a number of recommendations to strengthen the agency's efforts. FEMA has taken or is planning various actions to address a number of these issues, as we discuss throughout this report.

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[1]The Surge Capacity Force and the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps-FEMA Corps are non-FEMA employees who are funded by the Disaster Relief Fund. While federal agencies pay the salary and benefits for Surge Capacity Force volunteers, FEMA uses the Disaster Relief Fund to pay for travel, per diem, lodging, and overtime when volunteers are deployed. In addition, FEMA Corps members receive a stipend and educational benefits after they complete their term. The Disaster Relief Fund is appropriated no-year funding, which allows FEMA to direct, coordinate, manage, and fund eligible response and recovery efforts associated with domestic major disaster and emergencies that overwhelm state resources, pursuant to the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Pub L. No. 100-707, 102 Stat. 4689 (1988).

[2]The combined workforce includes the disaster response workforce as well as permanent full-time employees who manage FEMA's "steady-state" day-to-day operations.

[3]FEMA, *Hurricane Sandy FEMA After-Action Report, July 1, 2013*.

We have also reported that FEMA obligated $12.7 billion from the Disaster Relief Fund for its administrative costs for major disasters declared from fiscal years 2004 through 2013.[4] These administrative costs accounted for 13 percent of the total $95.2 billion FEMA obligated from the fund for major disasters declared during this time frame. FEMA's average administrative cost percentages for major disasters during this time doubled the average during the 10 fiscal years 1989 to 1998 and the average number of FEMA staff deployed to a disaster has increased significantly, from fewer than 500 in fiscal year 1989 to over 1,500 in fiscal year 2009.[5] Given that salaries and benefits make up a large proportion of FEMA's administrative costs of responding to and recovering from disasters and the growing size of FEMA's disaster workforce, you asked us to review FEMA's efforts to manage its workforce and plan for future workforce needs. Our objectives were to determine the extent to which (1) FEMA has taken steps to address long-standing challenges in managing its workforce and (2) these challenges affected FEMA's deployment and management of its new disaster workforce components—the Surge Capacity Force and the FEMA Corps.

To assess FEMA's progress in addressing long-standing challenges in managing its workforce, we reviewed our prior work on FEMA and agency documentation such as FEMA's after-action reports on its response to Hurricane Sandy and the *FEMA Strategic Plan 2014-2018*.[6] We interviewed agency officials from the Office of the Chief Component Human Capital Officer (OCCHCO), the Incident Workforce Management

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[4]GAO, *Federal Emergency Management Agency: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Oversight of Administrative Costs for Major Disasters*, GAO-15-65 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 17, 2014). The Disaster Relief Fund supports three programs administered by FEMA: Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, and Hazard Mitigation. The Individual Assistance program covers certain expenses or needs of disaster victims that cannot be met through insurance or low-interest Small Business Administration loans. The Public Assistance program provides for debris removal; emergency protective measures; and the repair of disaster-damaged, publicly owned facilities and certain private nonprofit organizations. Hazard Mitigation provides funds to states to assist communities in implementing long-term measures to reduce the risk of future damages to facilities. The Disaster Relief Fund is also used to fund Mission Assignment, which FEMA uses to task and reimburse other federal entities that provide direct assistance during emergency and major disaster declarations.

[5]We used the fiscal year 1989-to-1998 period for comparison with the most recent 10-year period (at the time of our report) because it is the earliest 10-year period of obligations data maintained by FEMA.

[6]FEMA, *FEMA Strategic Plan 2014-2018*.

Division, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, and the Office of Policy and Program Analysis to discuss FEMA's progress in addressing our open recommendations and implementing initiatives related to the challenges we identified. We conducted focus groups at 3 of FEMA's 10 regions with full-time FEMA employees—Permanent Full-Time (PFT) employees and Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees (CORE)—to obtain regional perspectives on the agency's workforce planning and management efforts, FEMA Qualification System (FQS) implementation, and employee morale issues.[7] We selected the three regions based on factors including geographic dispersion and regions that typically respond to different types of disasters. While we cannot generalize the information we obtained from these focus groups, it provides important insights.

To address the extent to which these challenges affected FEMA's deployment and management of its new disaster workforce components, we reviewed program management documentation, such as the *FEMA Corps Implementation Plan,* the *FEMA Corps Business Case*, and the *Surge Capacity Force Concept of Operations*. We interviewed officials with FEMA, NCCC,[8] DHS headquarters, and DHS components responsible for implementing and supporting the Surge Capacity Force and FEMA Corps programs.[9] We visited two FEMA regions and conducted teleconferences with FEMA officials at an additional FEMA region to interview FEMA officials responsible for requesting and managing FEMA Corps teams in the field. We conducted focus groups with all eight DHS component Surge Capacity Force program coordinators and all four of FEMA's liaisons to the five NCCC regional campuses to obtain their perspectives on recruitment and retention

[7]From July 2014 through November 2014, we visited FEMA regional offices in Atlanta, Georgia, and Denton, Texas, and conducted teleconferences with FEMA officials in New York, New York.

[8]NCCC is part of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a federal agency that manages programs such as AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and FEMA Corps.

[9]DHS's eight components participating in the Surge Capacity Force include the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 17 DHS headquarters offices, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Secret Service, and the Transportation Security Administration.

challenges of the programs.[10] Further, we conducted focus groups of FEMA Corps team leaders and members at three FEMA regions to obtain their perspectives on FEMA Corps retention challenges. We analyzed these focus group discussions to identify common themes and patterns. While the information obtained from our focus groups with FEMA Corps team leaders and members in the three regions cannot be generalized, it provided us with valuable examples of experiences in the program. We applied standards from *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*,[11] program management best practices, program guidance, Office of Management and Budget guidance on cost-benefit analyses and surveys,[12] and best practices identified in our prior work on collaboration, program cost estimating and assessment, and strategic workforce planning,[13] to examine staffing, cost, and performance issues of its new disaster workforce components.[14] See appendix I for a more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from June 2014 to June 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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[10]NCCC has five campuses, located in Denver, Colorado; Sacramento, California; Baltimore, Maryland; Vicksburg, Mississippi; and Vinton, Iowa.

[11]GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1 (Washington, D.C: Nov. 1, 1999).

[12]Office of Management and Budget, *Guidelines and Discount Rates for Benefit-Cost Analysis of Federal Programs*, OMB Circular A-94 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 29, 1992). Office of Management and Budget, *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys* (Washington, D.C.: September 2006).

[13]GAO, *Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide: Best Practices for Developing and Managing Capital Program Costs*, GAO-09-3SP (Washington, D.C.: March 2009).

[14]To examine staffing issues, we compared information about FEMA Corps retention and Surge Capacity Force recruitment challenges from program management documentation, staffing data, interviews with program officials, and focus group participants against our leading practices on collaboration and strategic workforce planning. To examine cost issues, we compared information about FEMA Corps management and background investigation costs and Surge Capacity Force costs to DHS components from program management documentation, cost data, and interviews with program officials, against Office of Management and Budget guidance on cost-benefit analyses and our best practices on program cost estimating and assessment. To examine performance issues, we compared information about FEMA Corps and Surge Capacity Force performance measures and data from program management documentation, survey data, and interviews with program officials, against *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, program management best practices, program guidance, and Office of Management and Budget guidance on surveys.

Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions on our audit objectives.

Background

In 2001, we first identified strategic human capital management in the federal government as a high-risk area because of the significant challenges federal government agencies faced including acquiring and developing staff whose size, skills, and deployment met agency needs.[15] In our February 2013 update, we reported that effective strategic workforce planning is essential for ensuring that agencies have the talent, skill, and experience mix they need to cost-effectively execute their mission and program goals.[16]

In our past reviews of these issues at FEMA, we have reported that FEMA should strengthen the strategic management of its workforce, including improvements in gathering workforce data, identifying staffing gaps, and developing plans with goals and measures to fill those gaps. For example, in 2007,[17] we reported that FEMA lacked a strategic workforce plan and recommended that, in responding to strategic workforce planning requirements in the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (Post-Katrina Act), FEMA apply the key principles of strategic workforce planning, such as assessing the number of employees and critical skills that FEMA needs.[18] Although FEMA subsequently issued a strategic workforce plan for 2008-2012, that plan did not include performance metrics or identify possible workforce gaps, overlaps, or inconsistencies, as discussed later in this report.[19] In 2011,

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[15]GAO, *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-01-263 (Washington, D.C.: January 2001).

[16]GAO, *High Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-13-283 (Washington, D.C.: February 2013).

[17]GAO, *Budget Issues: FEMA Needs Adequate Data, Plans, and Systems to Effectively Manage Resources for Day-to-Day Operations*, GAO-07-139 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 19, 2007).

[18]The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-295, 120 Stat. 1394, was enacted as Title VI of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2007, Pub. L. No. 109-295, 120 Stat. 1355 (2006).

[19]FEMA, *Strategic Human Capital Plan, Fiscal Years 2008-2012*.

we again reported the need for and recommended that FEMA develop a workforce plan.[20] Most recently, in 2012, we recommended that FEMA establish goals, performance measures, and systematic processes for collecting and analyzing workforce data.[21] FEMA has not yet fully addressed many of our past human capital–related recommendations, as we discuss later in the report.

Overview of FEMA's Workforce

FEMA's workforce consists of a combination of employees hired under Title 5,[22] and the Stafford Act,[23] as well as individuals from two workforce components who are not FEMA employees but are deployed to augment FEMA's workforce for disaster response: the DHS Surge Capacity Force and the FEMA Corps.

- **Title 5 employees:** These permanent and temporary employees make up FEMA's day-to-day workforce and are responsible for administering the agency's ongoing program activities in headquarters and regional offices. During disasters, these employees can be deployed as needed.

- **Stafford Act employees:** These employees must provide support to disaster-related activities and augment FEMA's disaster workforce at facilities, regional offices, and headquarters. Stafford Act employees include Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees and reservists (formerly disaster assistance employees). COREs are temporary employees with 2- to 4-year appointments and can be

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[20]GAO, *FEMA: Action Needed to Improve Administration of the National Flood Insurance Program*, GAO-11-297 (Washington, D.C.: June 9, 2011).

[21]GAO, *Federal Emergency Management Agency: Workforce Planning and Training Could Be Enhanced by Incorporating Strategic Management Principles*, GAO-12-487 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 26, 2012).

[22]Generally, Title 5 refers to the section of the United States Code that establishes the law for managing human resources in the federal government.

[23]See 42 U.S.C. § 5149(b)(1). The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as amended, known as the Stafford Act, established the basic process for states to request a presidential disaster declaration. The act also generally defines the federal government's role during the response and recovery after a disaster and establishes the programs and process through which the federal government provides disaster assistance to state and local governments, tribes, and certain nonprofit organizations and individuals. 42 U.S.C. § 5170. FEMA is tasked with coordinating the response under the Stafford Act.

deployed to fulfill any role specifically related to the incident for which they are hired and qualified during disaster assistance response and recovery efforts. Reservists work on an intermittent basis and are deployed as needed to fulfill incident management roles within their cadre function.[24]

- **Surge Capacity Force:** The purpose of the Surge Capacity Force is to augment FEMA's disaster workforce in a catastrophic disaster. The Surge Capacity Force consists of volunteers who are employees of DHS components, such as the Transportation Security Administration and U.S. Secret Service. DHS issued the *Surge Capacity Force Concept of Operations* in 2010 and first deployed Surge Capacity Force volunteers to assist in response and recovery efforts during Hurricane Sandy which made landfall in October 2012— approximately 1,100 Surge Capacity Force volunteers from seven DHS components deployed to New York in November and December 2012 to provide aid to survivors, information about disaster assistance, and logistics support.[25] Currently only DHS employees can volunteer to join the Surge Capacity Force, although the Post-Katrina Act authorizes FEMA to include employees of other federal agencies.[26] FEMA manages and coordinates the Surge Capacity Force program. The other DHS components provide management support for the Surge Capacity Force program.

- **FEMA Corps:** FEMA Corps is a national service program managed by AmeriCorps NCCC whose members work under the supervision of FEMA staff. FEMA staffs are responsible for developing projects for FEMA Corps members and providing technical supervision at project

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[24]Reservists' activities can include interviewing disaster survivors; conducting and verifying damage assessments; providing administrative, financial, and logistical support; and performing a wide variety of other tasks as identified by staffing needs and operational requirements. A cadre is a group of FEMA full-time equivalent and intermittent employees (reservist) organized by operational or programmatic functions and FEMA Qualification System (FQS) positions that perform disaster-related activities during FEMA disaster operations.

[25]The Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) coordinator who is responsible for the agency's Surge Capacity Force efforts stated that FLETC personnel did not actively participate in the Surge Capacity Force's response and recovery efforts until after Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

[26]6 U.S.C. § 711(b).

sites.[27] Specifically, FEMA Corps members are young adults—ages 18 to 24—who are recruited to serve in the FEMA Corps program as members of the AmeriCorps NCCC Program. They serve for 10 months under a service agreement providing national community service for FEMA disaster management operations.[28] The goals of the program are to (1) strengthen the nation's disaster response capability, (2) achieve significant cost savings to the taxpayer, (3) create pathways to work for young people, (4) promote an ethic of national service, and (5) modernize government operations to improve performance. FEMA, in conjunction with the NCCC, established the FEMA Corps in 2012, and its first major deployment to assist in disaster response and recovery efforts was during Hurricane Sandy in October 2012. Figure 1 shows an image of a FEMA Corps member participating in recent FEMA disaster recovery efforts.

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[27]AmeriCorps NCCC is part of the Corporation for National and Community Service and is a full-time, team-based residential program for men and women ages 18-24. Members serve for a 10-month commitment in teams of 8 to 12 members and are assigned to projects throughout the nation.

[28]According to NCCC officials, FEMA Corps members are officially National Service Participants under 42 U.S.C. § 12620(a).

Figure 1: FEMA Corps Member Assisting in FEMA's Disaster Recovery Efforts in Moore, Oklahoma, in May 2013

Source: Corporation for National and Community Service. | GAO-15-437

During fiscal years 2008 through 2014, the number of individuals that could be deployed as part of FEMA's disaster response workforce increased from 16,928 personnel in 2008 to 18,449 personnel in 2014—reflecting the incorporation of the two new non-FEMA components, the Surge Capacity Force and the FEMA Corps. Analysis of its mission and personnel, changes in policies, technology advances, and workforce data are some of the factors FEMA officials use to determine the agency's composition and staffing levels and the number of individuals needed for the new components of its disaster response workforce. Figure 2 shows FEMA's combined workforce composition and staffing levels for fiscal years 2008 through 2014.[29]

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[29]FEMA's workforce composition includes PFTs, COREs, reservists, FEMA Corps members, and Surge Capacity Force volunteers.

Figure 2: Overview of FEMA's Disaster Response Workforce, Fiscal Years 2008 through 2014

Staffing level (in thousands)
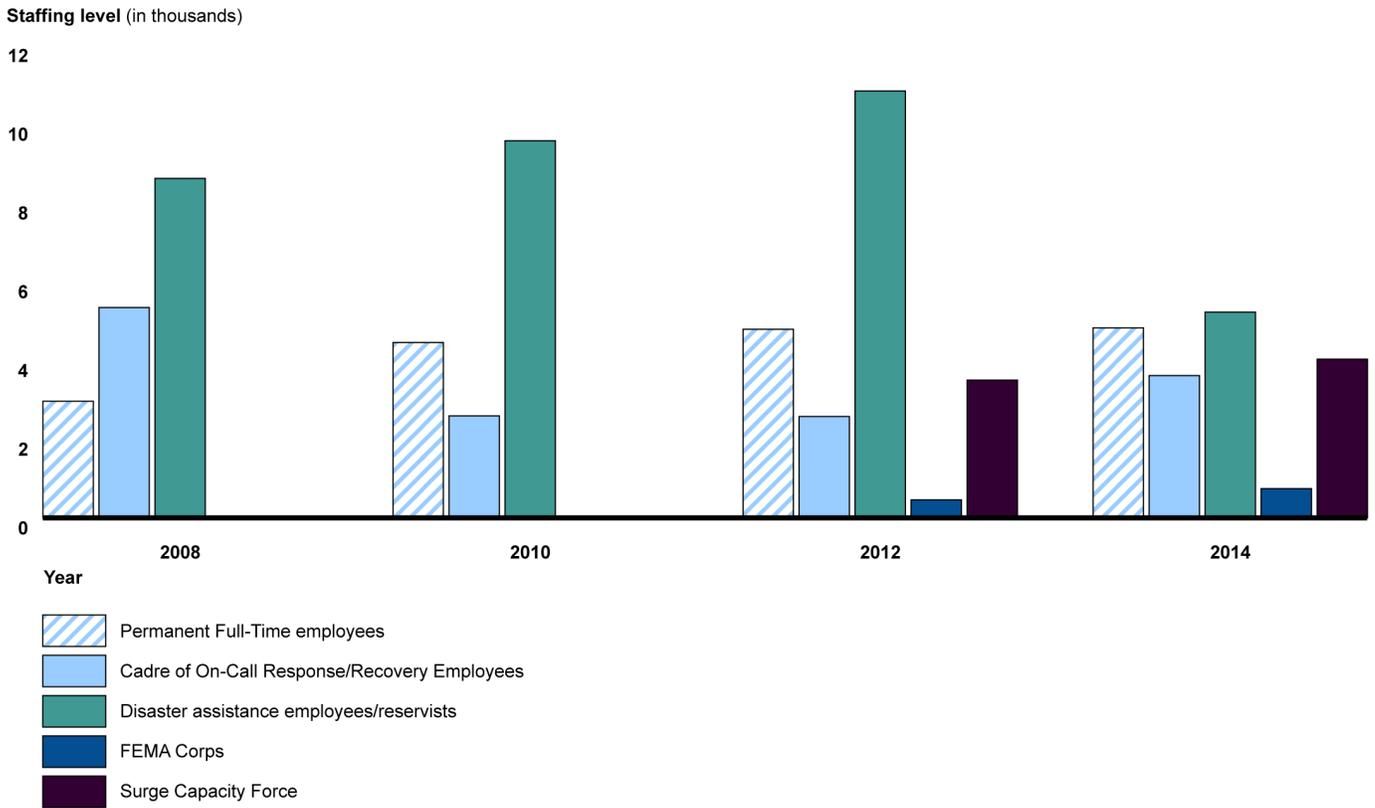
Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data. | GAO-15-437

Several program offices within FEMA play a role in the agency's workforce planning. At FEMA headquarters, OCCHCO (within the Mission Support Bureau) is responsible for providing leadership and direction to all stakeholders, including FEMA headquarters and regional offices, on human capital programs, products, and services.[30] OCCHCO is also responsible for implementing policies and programs to recruit, hire, train, and retain FEMA's workforce including guidance and oversight related to

[30]Approximately 70 percent of FEMA's permanent workforce is located at its headquarters, and the remaining 30 percent are assigned to FEMA's 10 regional offices located in Atlanta, Georgia; Boston, Massachusetts; Denton, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Chicago, Illinois; Kansas City, Missouri; New York, New York; Oakland, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Seattle, Washington.

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morale issues. Within the Office of Response and Recovery, the Incident Workforce Management Division is responsible for the deployment of personnel, the management of the surge capacity forces, disaster response cadre management, and the implementation of FQS. See appendix II for FEMA's organizational chart, as of January 2015.

FEMA Is Taking Steps to Address Long-standing Human Capital Management Challenges, but Success Hinges on the Effective Completion and Integration of These Efforts

In recent years, we and others have identified long-standing human capital management challenges at FEMA and made a number of recommendations to strengthen the agency's efforts. FEMA has taken or is planning various actions to address a number of these issues, as outlined below. However, since many of these efforts are ongoing and not yet completed, it is not clear whether they will be effective or the extent to which they will address our prior recommendations and the challenges that we and others have identified.

FEMA's Workforce Planning Efforts

Workforce planning has been a long-standing challenge for FEMA, as we have previously reported. In 2007, we reported that FEMA lacked a strategic workforce plan and recommended that FEMA, in responding to strategic workforce planning requirements in the Post-Katrina Act, apply the key principles of strategic workforce planning, such as assessing the number of employees and critical skills that FEMA needs. We also recommended that FEMA define what resources are needed to achieve its disaster relief mission, and collect sufficient data in a way that enables managers to monitor progress and support resource priorities, among other things.[31] In 2008, FEMA implemented our recommendations by issuing a *Strategic Human Capital Plan Fiscal Years 2008-2012*.[32] However, that plan did not include performance metrics or identify possible workforce gaps, which are leading practices for strategic

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[31]GAO-07-139.

[32]*FEMA Strategic Human Capital Plan, Fiscal Years 2008-2012*.

workforce planning that we have identified.[33] An OCCHCO official said that staff turnover and other emerging management issues prevented FEMA from subsequently identifying workforce gaps, and developing staffing goals and related metrics. In 2011, we again recommended that FEMA develop a comprehensive workforce plan that meets Post-Katrina Act requirements to identify agency staffing needs and skills requirements.[34] In 2012, FEMA said the agency had acquired a contractor to conduct a baseline assessment of its workforce to inform the agency's future workforce planning efforts, including the development of a strategic workforce plan for fiscal years 2012 to 2016. However, FEMA did not develop a plan and our recommendation remains unaddressed.

In 2012, we also recommended that FEMA identify long-term quantifiable mission-critical goals, establish a time frame for completing the development of quantifiable performance measures, establish lines of authority for agency-wide workforce planning efforts, and develop systematic processes to collect and analyze workforce data.[35] FEMA officials said that the new strategic workforce plan they were developing to cover fiscal years 2012 to 2016 would help address these recommendations. However, FEMA did not issue a new strategic workforce plan. In 2015, FEMA officials identified two ongoing efforts that they believe will address these previously identified challenges and our recommendations—the development of a new incident workforce

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[33]GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, GAO-04-39 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003). The National Academy of Public Administration similarly reported in 2009 that FEMA had not developed a workforce plan that includes a workforce gap analysis, staffing levels for each category of employee, or specific goals and objectives for recruiting and retaining employees including strategies to develop, train, and rapidly deploy a DHS surge capacity force. The National Academy of Public Administration recommended that FEMA develop a valid 5-year strategic workforce plan to address these shortcomings. See National Academy of Public Administration, *FEMA's Integration of Preparedness and Development of Robust Regional Offices* (Washington, D.C.: October 2009).

[34]GAO-11-297.

[35]GAO-12-487.

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planning model and a new strategic workforce plan.[36] These efforts are described in more detail below.

New incident workforce planning model—In September 2014, FEMA entered into a contract to develop a new incident workforce planning model to determine the optimal mix of workforce components to include in FEMA's disaster workforce.[37] FEMA's Response Directorate officials said a new incident workforce planning model was needed to address changes since the existing workforce model was developed. These changes include current disaster workforce data such as deployment rates of reservists and FEMA's new disaster workforce components as well as changes in policies, technological advances, and progress in FQS, and the impact of national mitigation efforts. FEMA's Office of Response and Recovery officials said that the new incident workforce planning model will provide a comprehensive analysis of the workforce FEMA needs to conduct its response, recovery, and mitigation missions including, for example, the required number of reservists, Surge Capacity Force volunteers, COREs, and FEMA Corps members. They said they intend to review and reevaluate the incident workforce model approximately every 3 years to ensure that the workforce is capable of carrying out FEMA's mission. According to FEMA officials, results of the analyses from the new model were imminent; however, the results were not available at the time we concluded our review in June 2015.

New strategic workforce plan—In September 2014, FEMA's OCCHCO entered into a contract to obtain human resource management support and help it develop the agency's strategic workforce plan, which will identify the agency's requirements in terms of size, type, and quality of the workforce to achieve mission priorities.[38] According to FEMA's

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[36]FEMA officials stated the agency's strategic workforce plan will be an overarching document that combines findings from both the workforce plan and incident workforce model to identify and address gaps, overlaps, or inconsistencies in the agency's workforce.

[37]According to FEMA officials, the incident workforce planning model also provides a comprehensive view of staffing requirements based on historical trends of workload by incident type and will be used to determine staffing needs for incidents.

[38]FEMA's OCCHCO officials stated that the *Human Capital Strategic Plan* (HCSP) will be an overarching document that combines findings from both the workforce plan and the incident force structure model to identify and address gaps, overlaps, or inconsistencies. The HCSP will consist of four subplans—the Diversity and Inclusion Plan, the Leadership Succession Plan, the Workforce Plan, and the Recruitment Plan.

OCCHCO officials, its forthcoming *Human Capital Strategic Plan* (HCSP) will address all of the unaddressed workforce-related recommendations from our 2011 and 2012 reports. FEMA's OCCHCO officials said they planned to issue the plan in September 2015. In the past, we have found that organizations in both the public and private sectors use strategic workforce planning to help ensure they have the capacity to meet both current and future mission requirements. Preparing a strategic workforce plan encourages agency managers and stakeholders to systematically consider what is to be done, what skills will be needed, and how to gauge progress and results.[39] Until FEMA completes its new incident workforce planning model and its strategic workforce plan, we cannot assess their effectiveness or determine whether they will help to address the long-standing workforce challenges we and others have identified.

FEMA Employee Credentialing System

Employee credentialing has also been a long-standing challenge for FEMA, as we and others have previously reported. Employee credentialing involves assigning members of FEMA's workforce with qualification levels and areas of expertise which they can use to assist state and local stakeholders during a disaster. In response to Post-Katrina Act requirements, FEMA launched an agency-wide credentialing effort in June 2008 that officials renamed FQS in 2010. The Incident Workforce Management Division assumed responsibility for the system in June 2011, and FEMA implemented FQS in 2012.[40] Officials said they use the system to assign and track the various qualifications and expertise of members of FEMA's workforce.

In the five focus groups we conducted from July 2014 through November 2014, participants cited concerns about FEMA's implementation and management of FQS.[41] Participants said that FEMA officials ignored FQS qualifications and titles when assigning tasks during Hurricane Sandy, issues that were also identified in FEMA's after-action report on its response to the storm. They said that as a result, some of the managers

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[39]GAO-04-39.

[40]According to FEMA officials, prior to 2012, credentials were managed differently across FEMA's regional offices and cadres and there was no information system to support the credentialing system.

[41]Our focus groups included 29 Permanent Full-Time employees and 41 COREs from three FEMA regional offices.

and participants were deployed without the skills or expertise needed to effectively function in their assigned duties and contribute to disaster response and recovery efforts. Additionally, some participants stated that during Hurricane Sandy, staff did not know their FQS titles or had the wrong FQS title and that they observed that other employees were overqualified or underqualified, based on their training and experience, for the cadre position and qualification level to which they were assigned.[42] FEMA officials noted that, at the time these issues occurred, FQS had been implemented on an agency-wide basis for less than a month and that difficulties in using the newly designed system in the operational environment after Hurricane Sandy were understandable. Nonetheless, employees in our focus groups said these issues have also negatively affected employees' morale, another long-standing challenge for FEMA, as discussed below.

The DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) has also identified various problems in FEMA's efforts to implement a credentialing system before, during, and after the response to Hurricane Sandy. For example, before Hurricane Sandy, the OIG identified problems in developing an information technology system for implementing FQS in 2012.[43] In assessing the agency's response to Hurricane Sandy, the OIG reported on issues related to misclassified personnel and difficulties in finding

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[42]Under the FQS, individuals are assigned a qualification title of entry-level "trainee" or the more experienced title of "qualified" based on training and experience levels. During implementation of FQS, some reservists were assigned to the trainee qualification level because of training or cadre-specific experience requirements that, in some cases, have been difficult to achieve, according to FEMA's Incident Workforce Management Division officials.

[43]Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, *FEMA's Progress in Implementing Employee Credentials*. OIG-12-89 (Washington, D.C.: June 2012). The OIG recommended that FEMA establish a plan for implementing FQS, a comprehensive information technology system to track FQS credentialing, training, and deployment information, and a detailed plan and budget for the training needed to implement FQS. FEMA concurred with these recommendations, and the OIG has since closed all of them based on actions taken by FEMA, including implementation of a new deployment tracking system as of December 2014. Since this information technology system was only recently implemented, it is too soon to assess its effectiveness.

qualified personnel.[44] The DHS OIG has also identified issues with FEMA implementations of FQS in subsequent disasters, noting that FEMA's reliance on FQS to obtain enough appropriately skilled staff continued to be an ongoing and systemic problem.[45] As a result, the DHS OIG told us it has an ongoing review of FEMA's implementation of FQS and plans to issue a report later this year.

FEMA's strategic plan for 2014-2018 establishes a performance goal to increase the operational readiness and deployability rating of the agency's workforce to 80 percent or greater by the end of 2018.[46] To achieve this goal, FEMA will need to, among other things, effectively implement its FQS program, to appropriately size, train, and organize its disaster workforce to conduct effective and efficient operations. FEMA's Incident Workforce Management Division officials said they had established a working group in December 2014 to address issues affecting the effectiveness of the FQS to complement other efforts they had initiated to improve FQS implementation. For example, they established a FEMA Incident Workforce Academy to streamline and standardize training to better ensure that all workforce members received the appropriate training prior to deployment. Resolving the long-standing issues with FEMA credentialing efforts will better position FEMA to implement its national credentialing system. However, because FEMA's efforts related to improving FQS are ongoing, it is too soon to determine whether they will address challenges experienced.

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[44]Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, *FEMA's Initial Response in New Jersey to Hurricane Sandy*, OIG-13-117 (Washington, D.C., September 2013).This report did not contain specific recommendations on FQS. FEMA's action report on Hurricane Sandy also found that 30 percent of deployed personnel did not have an FQS title and were assigned to positions they were not necessarily qualified to fill. FEMA noted that this was especially problematic for Permanent Full-Time staff, 46 percent of whom were deployed without preassigned FQS titles.

[45]Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, *FEMA's Initial Response to Hurricane Isaac in Louisiana Was Effective and Efficient*, OIG-13-84 (Washington, D.C., April 2013); *FEMA's Initial Response to the Oklahoma Severe Storms and Tornadoes,* OIG-14-50-D (Washington, D.C., March 2014). These reports are part of the DHS OIG's broader ongoing investigation into FEMA's implementation of its FQS credentialing program, and do not contain specific recommendations on FQS.

[46]FEMA*, FEMA Strategic Plan 2014-2018*.

FEMA's Employee Morale

Since DHS began operations, in 2003, employee morale has been a long-standing workforce management issue for the department as well as for FEMA. In September 2012, we reported that DHS employees had lower than average morale compared with that of the rest of the federal government, but morale varied across DHS components.[47] FEMA has had consistently lower than average employee morale scores on the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) annual federal employee survey since the agency was transferred to DHS in 2003.[48] In addition, the Partnership for Public Service reported in 2014 that FEMA's ranking on the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* had declined since 2010,[49] and FEMA ranked 281 out of 315 agency subcomponents in *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* in fiscal year 2014.[50]

Participants in our focus groups cited a number of concerns contributing to continuing morale issues including FQS credentialing issues and changes to FEMA's management of the reservist workforce. Specifically, in each of our five focus groups, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the agency's implementation of FQS and its long-term negative impact on employee morale. Regarding changes to FEMA's management of the reservist workforce, focus group participants in each of the three regions stated that there were negative impacts on morale when FEMA moved management and oversight responsibilities for the reservist

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[47]GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Taking Further Action to Better Determine Causes of Morale Problems Would Assist in Targeting Action Plans*, GAO-12-940 (Washington, D.C., Sept. 28, 2012). We reported that DHS and selected agencies had taken steps to understand morale problems, such as holding focus groups, implementing an exit survey, and routinely analyzing Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results.

[48]OPM's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey measures employees' perceptions of whether, and to what extent, conditions characterizing successful organizations are present in their agencies. Survey results provide valuable insight into the challenges agency leaders face in ensuring the federal government has an effective civilian workforce and how well they are responding.

[49]Partnership for Public Service's *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* is designed to help a broad audience of government leaders, employees, and job seekers. The rankings include the views of more than 392,700 civil servants on a wide range of workplace topics. In 2014, more than 389 federal organizations were ranked according to overall employee satisfaction and commitment, as well as on 10 additional workplace issues such as strategic management, teamwork, leadership, and work-life balance.

[50]According to the Partnership for Public Service, the *Best Places to Work* ranking is based on employee responses to the following three questions: (1) I recommend my organization as a good place to work. (2) Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job? (3) Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization?

program from FEMA's 10 regional offices to FEMA headquarters in 2012 because the change eliminated long-standing positive relationships between the reservists and regional staff. FEMA officials said that they made the change in management of the reservist workforce because the prior, decentralized system managed by the regions was dysfunctional, inconsistent, inefficient, and lacked standardization and strategic oversight.

FEMA's OCCHCO officials said they have taken a number of steps to address low employee morale. Among other things, they said they provide program officials with a planning tool (the Employee Viewpoint Survey Team Action Planning worksheet) to assist the agency's managers and supervisors in improving employee morale and increasing satisfaction within their work units.[51] They also said that they established a working group in December 2014 to identify solutions for improving employee morale.[52] Officials said they planned to issue a report sometime in 2015. Given that the working groups, as well as the other initiatives officials described, are ongoing, it is too early to assess whether they will be effective in addressing FEMA's long-standing morale problems.

Success Hinges on the Effective Completion and Integration of Various Human Capital Management Efforts

Given the ongoing nature of FEMA's efforts to address workforce management challenges highlighted above, FEMA's progress in resolving these challenges hinges on the extent to which officials are able to effectively coordinate and integrate various human capital efforts into a strategic human capital management approach. We have previously reported our concerns regarding the lack of coordination and collaboration among FEMA offices and organizations. For example, we reported in June 2011 that FEMA has much work ahead of it to ensure effective collaboration between program and support offices.[53] In April

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[51]The objectives of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Team Action Planning worksheet are to (1) share the results from the most recent Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey with an agency's employees, (2) discuss what the results mean to an agency's employees in today's environment, and (3) brainstorm and commit to actions that are within your control that your team can take to improve the work environment and your overall effectiveness.

[52]In addition to the working group, FEMA's OCCHCO officials stated that the agency established an employee engagement council—to report to the Human Capital Governance Board—which has increased the agency's focus and efforts on employee morale.

[53]GAO-11-297.

2012, we reported that FEMA's efforts related to workforce planning have been independently conducted by various offices across the agency, concluding that having integrated workforce planning and training could help FEMA ensure that it has the properly sized and skilled workforce to effectively carry out its mission.[54]

FEMA's OCCHCO officials told us that the multiple stakeholders responsible for these various human capital efforts have coordinated through an agency executive steering committee to ensure they will be integrated into their broader strategic workforce plan. However, the effectiveness of these coordination efforts remains to be seen. For example, the statement of work for the contractor whom FEMA acquired to support its human capital planning efforts does not specify that FEMA's ongoing workforce-related initiatives and activities are expected to be integrated into the proposed strategic workforce plan, nor does it indicate how OCCHCO plans to analyze future staffing needs for FEMA's day-to-day, or steady-state operations. Such an analysis would help FEMA's agency-wide workforce planning but will not be included in the Incident Workforce Management Division's new incident workforce planning model. In an August 2012 report commissioned by OCCHCO, the Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute found that the existing force planning model considered the FEMA workforce from a response-only perspective and did not consider the workforce requirements to fill any steady-state activities.[55] The report stated that such consideration could provide valuable insights into FEMA's workforce strategy. According to FEMA officials, they plan to address the issue of steady-state operations for future workforce planning through its executive steering committee to integrate it into the ongoing human capital planning efforts. Given that FEMA's efforts are ongoing, it is too early to assess their effectiveness in addressing long-standing workforce-related challenges over the long term.

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[54]GAO-12-487.

[55]Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute, *Informing FEMA's Future Workforce Strategy: FEMA Strategic Workforce Initiative Phase II Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 24, 2012).

FEMA Faces Staffing Challenges with New Disaster Workforces and Does Not Collect All Information Necessary to Evaluate Program Costs and Performance

Retention and Recruitment Challenges Limit FEMA's Ability to Meet Staffing Goals in Its New Disaster Workforce Programs

FEMA Corps Retention

FEMA Corps program attrition has varied from 23 to 28 percent in each recruitment class, or "cohort."[56] As shown in figure 3, although the FEMA Corps program did not meet its target of less than 25 percent attrition in each of the first four FEMA cohorts of FEMA Corps members, the program met its target for the most recent cohort. According to FEMA officials, the responsibility for retaining FEMA Corps members is shared jointly by FEMA and NCCC. FEMA is primarily responsible for determining the suitability of FEMA Corps members to gain access to FEMA's facilities and networks. Keeping FEMA Corps members in the program is important because of the costs associated with recruiting, training, and equipping them for deployment, as well as the need for FEMA Corps members to support FEMA's response, recovery, and preparedness missions.

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[56]FEMA Corps cohorts are recruitment classes of about 500 members that are processed through NCCC regional campuses. Generally there are two recruitment classes each year.

Figure 3: Staffing for FEMA Corps Cohorts 1-5 from September 2012 through March 2015
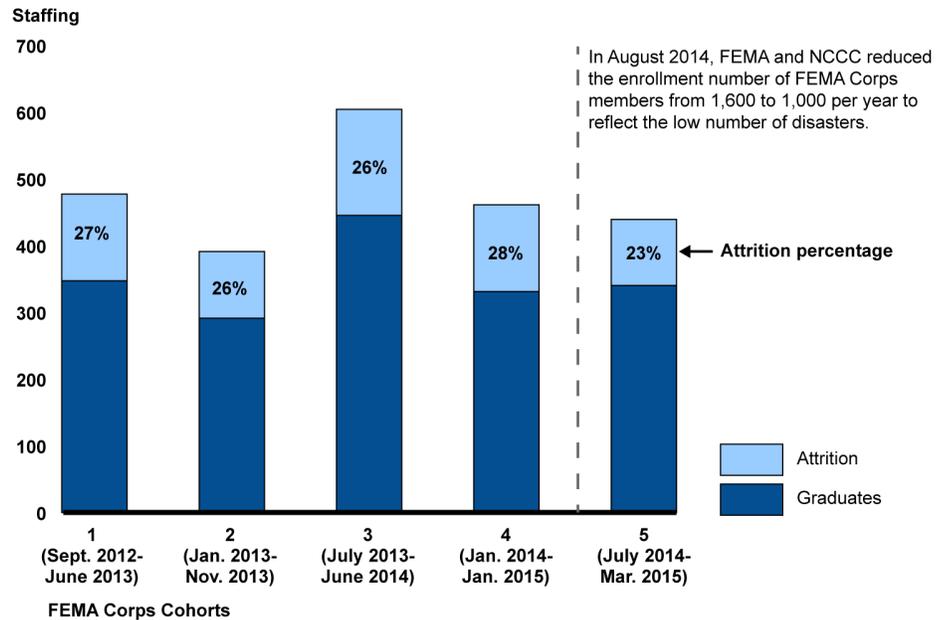
Source: GAO analysis of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) data. | GAO-15-437

FEMA Corps Members Views of the FEMA Corps Program

According to annual surveys by NCCC of FEMA Corps members in cohorts 1-3 from September 2012 through June 2014, the majority of respondents had positive views of the FEMA Corps program. However, according to NCCC's retention data from September 2012 through October 2014, the primary reason cited by FEMA Corps members who leave the program before graduation is dissatisfaction with the program. According to NCCC officials, dissatisfaction with the program may also be reflected in the low percentage of FEMA Corps members applying for a second year of service in the program.[57] Additionally, among the graduating members of FEMA Corps cohort 3 from July 2013 through June 2014 who responded to the survey, a substantial number of members felt that the program did not live up to their expectations

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[57]According to NCCC officials, 38 of 2,710 FEMA Corps members, or less than 2 percent, reenrolled in the program, which is short of NCCC's goal of 5 percent. However, these officials explained that this may be due to other factors besides dissatisfaction with the program, such as other career opportunities.

regarding the type of service activities they would be involved in and said the work seemed meaningless or was unfulfilling.[58] For example, some said they would have preferred to provide direct service to disaster areas instead of doing behind-the-scenes administrative and support work in office settings.

During our FEMA Corps focus groups, participants also reported feeling underutilized or having little or no meaningful work during some of their service projects.[59]

FEMA and NCCC officials said the survey results and our focus group discussions reflected challenges during the initial implementation of the program and the relatively limited number of disasters that occurred in 2013 and 2014. In August 2014, FEMA and NCCC reduced the enrollment number of FEMA Corps members from 1,600 to 1,000 per year to reflect the low number of disasters and resulting challenges with providing enough substantive work for FEMA Corps members. FEMA officials cited this change as an example of the steps they have taken with NCCC to adjust the program to address FEMA Corps members' satisfaction with the program. They also said they are taking steps to set accurate expectations in advertising, target recruitment efforts, as well as piloting different types of teams to provide members with additional service project opportunities.[60]

FEMA Corps Background Investigations

According to FEMA and NCCC officials, failing background investigations is another reason that FEMA Corps members leave before the end of the program. Members failing background investigations also contributed to the program not meeting its retention target. As shown in figure 4, the

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[58]NCCC officials could not clarify the number of survey respondents who felt this way.

[59]All of these participants were members of FEMA Corps cohorts 4 or 5.

[60]According to FEMA Corps program guidance, NCCC is primarily responsible for advertising the FEMA Corps program as well as recruiting and selecting FEMA Corps members.
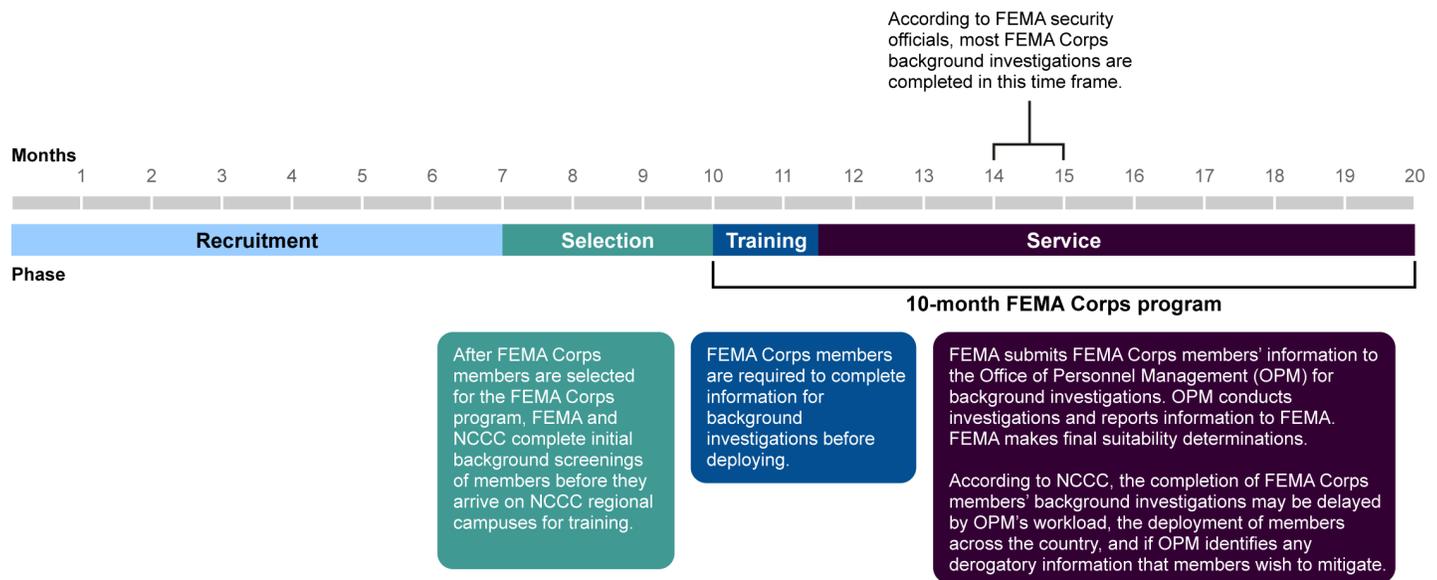
FEMA Corps security vetting process has three parts.[61] First, applicants who have been selected to join the FEMA Corps undergo initial background screening by both FEMA and NCCC before they arrive on campus.[62] Members who pass these screenings receive FEMA badges and equipment. Second, before deploying to the field, FEMA Corps members are required to complete all necessary information for an OPM "public trust" background investigation.[63] Third, while FEMA Corps members are deployed to the field, OPM conducts the background investigation of members.

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[61]In 2012, FEMA and CNCS agreed on security vetting procedures that applied to FEMA Corps members that did not include background investigations. FEMA obtained a waiver from DHS that approved the protocol, but in August 2013, the DHS Office of the Chief Security Officer revoked the waiver and required implementation of the current FEMA Corps security vetting process, which requires background investigations. According to FEMA officials, FEMA Corps cohort 3 was the first cohort to become subject to the background investigation requirement.

[62]Office of Personnel Management, Optional Form 306 (Declaration for Federal Employment), OMB number 3206-0182, Revised October 2011. This form is used to determine suitability for federal employment.

[63]Office of Personnel Management, Standard Form 85P (Questionnaire for Public Trust Positions), OMB number 3206-0191, Revised September 1995. The form is completed through the Office of Personnel Management Electronic Questionnaire for Investigation Processing system.

GAO-15-437 FEMA's Workforce Management

Figure 4: Timeline of FEMA Corps Security Vetting Process

According to FEMA security officials, most FEMA Corps background investigations are completed in this time frame.

Months																			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20

Phase: Recruitment | Selection | Training | Service

10-month FEMA Corps program

After FEMA Corps members are selected for the FEMA Corps program, FEMA and NCCC complete initial background screenings of members before they arrive on NCCC regional campuses for training.

FEMA Corps members are required to complete information for background investigations before deploying.

FEMA submits FEMA Corps members' information to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for background investigations. OPM conducts investigations and reports information to FEMA. FEMA makes final suitability determinations.

According to NCCC, the completion of FEMA Corps members' background investigations may be delayed by OPM's workload, the deployment of members across the country, and if OPM identifies any derogatory information that members wish to mitigate.

Source: GAO analysis based on Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Corps program guidance and interviews with FEMA and National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) officials. | GAO-15-437

According to FEMA officials, FEMA allows members whose background investigations are still pending to have access to FEMA's facilities and information networks as well as, depending on their project, survivors' sensitive personal information, such as Social Security numbers. According to FEMA security officials, such security risks are mitigated because all members have undergone preliminary background screening by both FEMA and NCCC. FEMA officials also stated that any members who are found during background investigations to present serious risks are immediately removed from FEMA until the member mitigates the adverse information, if he or she is able to do so.

According to NCCC officials, if FEMA Corps members fail the background investigation and are terminated from the program, members may not receive some or all of the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, which is a

key incentive for completing the program.[64] However, these officials stated that these members may be able to transfer to the traditional AmeriCorps NCCC program, if positions are available. During FEMA Corps focus groups, participants commented on the disruption to teams when members are terminated from the program.

During a focus group with all four of FEMA's liaisons to the five NCCC regional campuses, liaisons stated that the cost and duration of the security process pose a significant threat to the program's ability to retain FEMA Corps members.

FEMA officials stated it would be desirable to require members to submit this information earlier, such as during the selection phase, which would allow FEMA to begin processing background investigations up to 4 months earlier than the officials currently do.[65] These officials stated that such changes to the security vetting process would be possible if they were implemented in a phased pilot approach and the program accepted or mitigated potential risks, such as higher costs for background investigations for applicants who are not selected and member recruitment challenges. FEMA and NCCC officials said they have had discussions about modifying the security vetting process to minimize the disruptions resulting from failed background checks and FEMA is considering piloting changes to have team leaders complete background investigations earlier in the process. According to NCCC officials, by making it possible for incoming FEMA Corps members to complete the information needed for the background investigation before members arrive on campus, OPM could arrange for investigators to conduct background investigation interviews of members while they are on campus rather than after they have been deployed.

> *We develop bonds and having [a team member terminated] 24 hours before we deployed to [a service project location] was a shock. We were all angry at FEMA Corps for quite some time.*
>
> Source: FEMA Corps team focus group participant. | GAO-15-437

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[64]FEMA Corps members are eligible for the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of $5,730 to repay qualified student loans or pay current educational expenses for up to 7 years after their last day of service if they complete the FEMA Corps program and serve a minimum of 1,700 hours. According to NCCC officials, 39 participants received a partial education award after being dismissed from the program. However, these officials were unable to tell us the number of members who received partial awards after failing background investigations.

[65]FEMA Corps program guidance states that the FEMA Corps Branch Chief and NCCC National Director are to send the initial packet of forms, which includes the forms for NCCC's background investigations, as early as practicable, to all members.
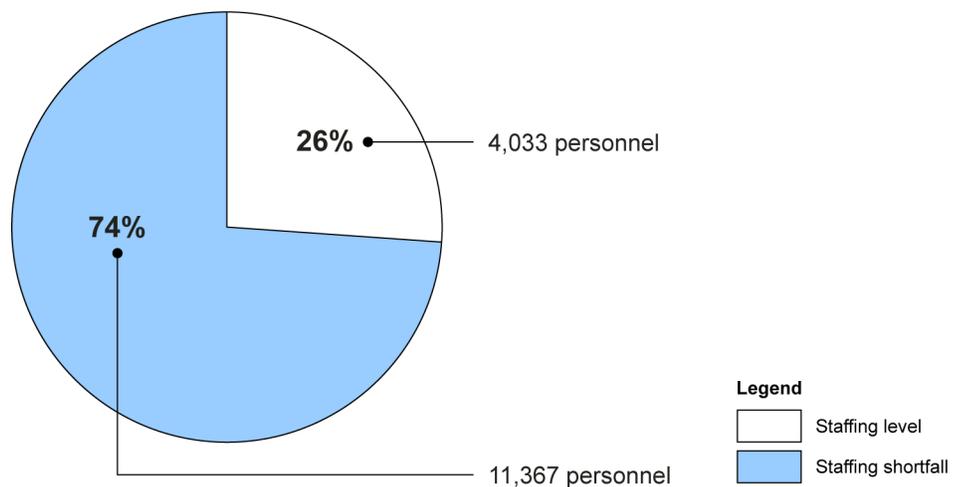
Surge Capacity Force Recruitment

FEMA has not met its goals for recruiting volunteers for the Surge Capacity Force. FEMA has a goal of staffing the Surge Capacity Force with 15,400 volunteers.[66] As shown in figure 5, according to FEMA officials, in January 2015, the Surge Capacity Force had 4,033 volunteers, and, as of March 2015, one of the eight participating DHS components met the enrollment target of 7 percent of the eligible workforce.

Figure 5: Surge Capacity Force Staffing as of January 2015

Surge Capacity Force

Staffing goal: 15,400

26% • 4,033 personnel

74%

11,367 personnel

Legend
☐ Staffing level
■ Staffing shortfall

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data. | GAO-15-437

During focus groups with all eight DHS component program coordinators, participants identified challenges related to FEMA's management of the program. The groups agreed in general that DHS components will not be able to meet recruitment goals without additional resources, guidance, marketing, and senior DHS and FEMA leadership engagement to help recruit and manage additional Surge Capacity Force volunteers. All the coordinators reported that their position was a collateral duty.

> *I did not volunteer for the position; it was assigned to me. . . . . It is a collateral duty for me and I will always be pulled away for other priorities. . . . . We need an emergency management professional in the agency to handle these duties.*
>
> Source: Surge Capacity Force focus group participant. | GAO-15-437

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[66]According to FEMA's Incident Workforce Management Division officials, the staffing goal of 15,400 is based on the 2010 workforce model and may change based on the ongoing update to the model.

According to the *Surge Capacity Force Concept of Operations*, a baseline level of staffing for the Surge Capacity Force to respond to program requirements is 15,400 personnel.[67] However, FEMA officials said they do not have a strategy or plan for how they plan to increase the number of volunteers because they believe this is the responsibility of the other DHS components. However, an August 2012 Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute report, commissioned by FEMA to support the agency's workforce planning efforts, reported that "many federal agencies have their own protocols that must be followed in the event of a national-level disaster, and other agency staff may not be available for deployment. Careful advanced planning with partner agencies may ensure that staff is available for the surge capacity."[68] In addition, the report said, "it would be helpful to identify where surge employees will come from and what their level of availability will be. . . . . Understanding the availability rate of surge employees could ensure that FEMA has a sufficient surge force when needed."[69] While FEMA officials said that they could fill the volunteer shortfall by having DHS components designate their employees to be part of the Surge Capacity Force, they said this would not take place until needed during a disaster. As a result, employees specifically designated for a disaster may not be ready to deploy within 48 hours of no-notice activation, as required by program guidance, because they may not have been trained on their agency's travel procedures or possess a valid government travel credit card. Because FEMA can increase the number of potentially available Surge Capacity Force volunteers before a disaster strikes, FEMA's reliance on the designation option increases the risk that FEMA may not have a sufficient Surge Capacity Force when needed during a disaster.

Our work on leading strategic workforce planning practices calls for agency leaders to develop workforce plans, implement recruitment and retention strategies, and measure their effects. These leading practices on collaboration state that agencies should identify and address needs by leveraging resources, agree on roles and responsibilities, establish

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[67]Department of Homeland Security, *Surge Capacity Force Concept of Operations* (Washington, D.C.: April 2010).

[68]Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute, *Informing FEMA's Future Workforce Strategy: FEMA Strategic Workforce Initiative Phase II Final Report* (Arlington, V.A.: Aug. 24, 2012).

[69]Ibid.

mutually reinforcing or joint strategies, and reinforce agency accountability for collaborative efforts through agency plans and reports.

Given that the deployment of FEMA's disaster workforce to Hurricane Sandy nearly exhausted the number of available personnel, the lack of a recruitment plan or strategy for how to increase Surge Capacity Force staffing to reach targets may limit the capacity of FEMA's disaster workforces to support response efforts in the event of a disaster. Because the Surge Capacity Force has a key role in augmenting FEMA's workforce in catastrophic disasters, having such a plan or strategy to strengthen recruitment efforts would help ensure that FEMA has the information it needs to identify the availability of Surge Capacity Force volunteers needed to fully support its efforts.

FEMA Does Not Collect Complete Cost Information on New Disaster Workforce Programs

FEMA Corps Management and Background Investigation Costs

FEMA does not collect or consider data on all of the costs associated with implementing the FEMA Corps program, although the low per capita cost of employing FEMA Corps members was a primary justification for establishing the program. FEMA has estimated that it will cost about $100 million to implement the FEMA Corps program over 5 years, from 2012 through 2017, and the final cost depends on factors such as member enrollment, attrition, and housing costs, among others. While this cost estimate accounts for NCCC's costs of recruiting, selecting, and deploying FEMA Corps members, FEMA officials said they do not collect or account for data on all of FEMA's costs of implementing the program or its costs for conducting background investigations of program participants.

First, FEMA does not collect data on the salaries and expenses of the staff in FEMA's 10 regions who are responsible for developing requests for FEMA Corps teams, providing on-the-job training to the teams, and supervising teams on a day-to-day basis. According to the FEMA Corps Branch Chief in February 2015, on average, about 10 FEMA Corps teams per month were operating in each of FEMA's 10 regions in 2014. FEMA Corps project sponsors in 1 FEMA region we visited reported that each of its teams working out of the regional office has one or more regional office staff supervisors.

In addition, although FEMA collects data on the costs of background investigations for FEMA Corps members, it does not collect data on the costs of staff to process them, and does not include either of these costs in the per capita cost of employing FEMA Corps members. These costs may be substantial as, according to FEMA officials, the program has had between 756 and 1,045 new FEMA Corps members each year, and a background investigation must be conducted on the new members. According to FEMA officials, depending on the projects to which members are assigned, the cost of these background investigations can range from about $1,000 per member for the moderate-risk background investigation to more than $3,600 per member for the full background investigation. These costs could increase the per capita cost of members by up to 10 percent. According to FEMA officials, from October 2013 through April 2015, FEMA conducted background investigations for 1,507 FEMA Corps members at a cost of about $2.2 million. According to FEMA officials, it has reduced the number of FEMA Corps members subject to the full background investigation for fiscal year 2015 after researching job functions to which members were generally assigned. However, as the program provides additional opportunities for members to engage in projects, such as information technology projects, which require the more expensive full background investigation, the cost of these background investigations is likely to increase in the future.

According to Office of Management and Budget guidance, in order to promote efficient resource allocation through well-informed decision making, agencies should identify comprehensive estimates of the expected benefits and costs in analyses used to support decisions to expand programs.[70] These analyses should also consider alternative means of achieving program objectives by examining different program scales and different methods of provision.[71] In addition, the best practices we have identified on program cost estimating and assessment state that reliable cost information is required to know whether government programs are achieving their goals and what the costs are.[72]

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[70]Office of Management and Budget, *Guidelines and Discount Rates for Benefit-Cost Analysis of Federal Programs*, OMB Circular A-94 (Washington, D.C.: October 29, 1992).

[71]Ibid.

[72]GAO, *Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide: Best Practices for Developing and Managing Capital Program Costs*, GAO-09-3SP (Washington, D.C.: March 2009).

FEMA officials said they consider their own management costs and the background investigation costs for FEMA Corps members to be part of their regular operating costs and therefore do not have a system in place to estimate or capture these costs for any management analysis. They said it was not feasible to determine the exact proportion of costs for staff and other expenses that are attributable to the FEMA Corps program because of the wide range and variance in staff and other resources used to support the program in FEMA headquarters and regional offices. However, by estimating the number of staff used to manage FEMA Corps teams in the field and the proportion of their time spent on FEMA Corps oversight and management, FEMA could use assumptions regarding the proportion of costs for staff and other expenses and validate them with relevant stakeholders. Further, the full costs of background investigations are directly attributable to the FEMA Corps program. Complete cost information on the FEMA Corps program would inform FEMA's decision making on allocation of its disaster workforce resources and help program officials determine the extent to which the program is achieving the significant cost savings that was a primary goal and justification for establishing the program.

Surge Capacity Force Costs to DHS

When estimating total costs of managing and implementing the Surge Capacity Force, FEMA does not collect or consider data on all of the costs associated with implementing the Surge Capacity Force. While FEMA collects information on its own costs of managing the program, officials said they do not collect data on the costs incurred by DHS components in managing the program and deploying staff during disasters or annual deployment mobilization exercises. For example, when reporting its costs for managing the Surge Capacity Force program in 2014—about $1.2 million—FEMA included salaries of FEMA Surge Capacity Force program management staff and program support staff, as well as printing costs and reimbursable expenses to DHS components for travel, lodging, per diem, and any overtime during an annual mobilization exercise. In addition, according to FEMA human capital officials, when collecting information on the costs of managing and deploying the Surge Capacity Force during Hurricane Sandy response and recovery efforts, the costs collected included reimbursable expenses incurred by these employees for travel, per diem, lodging, and any overtime expenses. According to FEMA's Incident Workforce Management Division officials, the total reimbursement cost for Surge Capacity Force volunteers during Hurricane Sandy was about $14.2 million.

However, FEMA does not collect or consider data on other costs to DHS components, related to the Surge Capacity Force, that are not reimbursed

by FEMA. These costs include the salaries and benefits of volunteers when deployed for disasters or annual mobilization exercises, the costs of coordinators in each DHS component to recruit and manage volunteers, or any overtime paid to other employees to backfill positions vacant when volunteers are deployed for disasters or exercises. For example, seven DHS components deployed employees for up to 45 days during Hurricane Sandy response and recovery efforts. These components paid the salaries and benefits of these employees during their deployment. According to FEMA officials, the costs to DHS components of deploying employees to disasters as part of the Surge Capacity Force vary. For example, the salary associated with deploying a highly-graded technical or professional employee could be twice as much as deploying an employee working in another sector within DHS.

During focus groups, Surge Capacity Force program coordinators at DHS components said that staffing costs are a consideration when DHS components determine which categories of their employees are eligible to volunteer for the Surge Capacity Force and when supervisors in DHS components approve their direct reports to volunteer and deploy as part of the Surge Capacity Force. However, FEMA's Office of the Chief Financial Officer officials stated they do not consider the costs to DHS components in supporting the program because FEMA is not responsible for reimbursing DHS components for these costs. We requested information from the DHS Office of the Chief Financial Officer to determine whether DHS collected any information on the department-wide costs associated with implementing the program and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer official referred us back to FEMA as the department's lead agency for managing the program. The costs to DHS components when deploying their employees for Surge Capacity Force may not be a direct cost to FEMA, but they are costs attributable to the government's overall management and implementation of the Surge Capacity Force as a program. For example, the costs of deploying volunteer DHS employees include the opportunity cost of time that deployed employees could otherwise spend carrying out their routine duties.

As discussed previously, according to Office of Management and Budget guidance, agencies should identify comprehensive estimates of the expected benefits and costs in analyses used to support decisions to

expand programs.[73] In addition, the best practices we have identified on program cost estimating and assessment state that reliable cost information is required to know whether government programs are achieving their goals and what the costs are.[74]

The FEMA Corps and the Surge Capacity Force have the potential to help FEMA achieve its mission at a lower cost, but tracking and reporting the full costs of deploying and managing these disaster workforce components would help FEMA better assess actual cost savings resulting from the programs and determine the most cost-effective size and mix of FEMA's disaster workforce and its deployment to disasters. Complete cost information on the Surge Capacity Force would also help FEMA determine whether the total number and the mix of Surge Capacity Force volunteers who participated in the program and deployed during Hurricane Sandy response and recovery efforts was cost-effective. Additionally, more comprehensive and accurate cost information on both workforce components could help inform ongoing discussions regarding FEMA's efforts—in the case of the Surge Capacity Force—to expand the program outside of DHS to other federal agencies, and FEMA's decision—in the case of FEMA Corps—whether to renew or modify the interagency agreement it has with NCCC to administer the FEMA Corps program, which expires in February 2017.

FEMA Does Not Measure or Collect Full Performance Data Needed to Assess the Effectiveness of New Disaster Workforce Programs

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[73]Office of Management and Budget, *Guidelines and Discount Rates for Benefit-Cost Analysis of Federal Programs*, OMB Circular A-94 (Washington, D.C.: October 29, 1992).

[74]GAO-09-3SP.

FEMA Does Not Have Complete Measures or Reliable Performance Data	FEMA does not have complete measures to assess its progress in meeting program goals—for example, the goal of having FEMA Corps graduates gain employment in emergency management careers, such as with FEMA. FEMA also does not have a measure to assess the FEMA Corps program's primary goal of enhancing FEMA's disaster response efforts, or the Surge Capacity Force's goal of deploying a sufficient number of qualified personnel to disasters. For example, FEMA officials said they do not report on the number of FEMA Corps teams that are assigned to service projects specific to a declared disaster compared with the number of teams assigned to non-disaster-specific service projects. For the Surge Capacity Force, FEMA does not report the numbers of volunteers needed and available during a disaster to highlight any potential gaps in the ability of the Surge Capacity Force to meet its program goals.

FEMA does not have complete measures to assess its progress in meeting program goals—for example, the goal of having FEMA Corps graduates gain employment in emergency management careers, such as with FEMA. FEMA also does not have a measure to assess the FEMA Corps program's primary goal of enhancing FEMA's disaster response efforts, or the Surge Capacity Force's goal of deploying a sufficient number of qualified personnel to disasters. For example, FEMA officials said they do not report on the number of FEMA Corps teams that are assigned to service projects specific to a declared disaster compared with the number of teams assigned to non-disaster-specific service projects. For the Surge Capacity Force, FEMA does not report the numbers of volunteers needed and available during a disaster to highlight any potential gaps in the ability of the Surge Capacity Force to meet its program goals.

Additionally, FEMA does not collect complete and reliable data necessary for FEMA to assess FEMA Corps and Surge Capacity Force program performance. For example, although the FEMA Corps program has a retention goal of 75 percent, NCCC officials, who are responsible for tracking these data, were unable to determine the number of FEMA Corps members who left the program because of failed background investigations because these data are not systematically collected. Further, FEMA and NCCC officials provided us different numbers of members who left because of failed background investigations, and were unable to account for differences between the sets of data. As described earlier, to measure whether members experienced personal growth and development during their terms of service, NCCC conducts member exit surveys, but these surveys do not include responses from FEMA Corps members who did not graduate from the program (about 23 to 28 percent of 2,710 total program participants). In addition, the 2013 NCCC survey of FEMA Corps project sponsors to assess whether FEMA Corps teams helped meet their needs had a response rate of 34 percent, which is far below the 80 percent standard response rate for surveys as outlined by the Office of Management and Budget.[75] FEMA's performance data on the Surge Capacity Force program also were not complete or reliable. FEMA officials said they did not collect data on the number of volunteers deployed for Hurricane Sandy response and recovery efforts who left their

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[75]Office of Management and Budget, *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys* (Washington, D.C.: September 2006).

deployments early. While FEMA conducted a postdeployment survey of Surge Capacity Force volunteers who deployed for Hurricane Sandy response and recovery efforts for the program's after-action report, the resulting data are not generalizable because the survey had a response rate of 13 percent. According to FEMA officials, for those staff who did respond, FEMA did not collect data on the reasons why 23 percent of these survey respondents indicated they would not deploy with the Surge Capacity Force for a future event.[76]

According to the Project Management Institute's *The Standard for Program Management*, agencies should develop meaningful measures to monitor program performance and to track the accomplishment of the program's goals and objectives.[77] Additionally, *The Standard for Program Management* states that in monitoring programs, agencies should collect, measure, and disseminate performance information and analyze program trends, so that program managers can determine the program's state and trends, and point to areas in need of adjustment.[78] Regarding the Surge Capacity Force postdeployment surveys, according to Office of Management and Budget guidance, agencies must design surveys to achieve the highest practical rates of response, and nonresponse bias analyses must be conducted when response rates or other factors suggest there is a potential for bias to occur.[79]

FEMA officials said they had not yet established comprehensive performance measures or collected reliable performance data for the FEMA Corps and Surge Capacity Force programs because they are new programs that are still being developed. However, the FEMA Corps program was announced in March 2012, more than 3 years ago, and DHS established the Surge Capacity Force program in April 2010, more

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[76]According to FEMA officials, the majority of survey respondents responded positively about their deployment and 77 percent of respondents indicated they would serve again if called upon.

[77]Project Management Institute, Inc., *The Standard for Program Management ®*, Third Edition (Newton Square, PA: 2013).

[78]Ibid.

[79]Office of Management and Budget, *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys* (Washington, D.C.: September 2006).

GAO-15-437 FEMA's Workforce Management

than 5 years ago.[80] In addition, although FEMA and NCCC identified some FEMA Corps program performance measures in August 2014, during our review, as of February 2015, the FEMA Corps Branch Chief is considering potential new measures for FEMA.[81] Developing performance measures that reflect all program goals would help FEMA assess the overall effectiveness of the FEMA Corps and Surge Capacity Force programs and hold program officials accountable for meeting all program goals and ensuring the appropriate use of its resources. With regard to collecting complete and reliable performance data, FEMA's managers of the FEMA Corps and Surge Capacity Force programs agreed that such data collection is essential for proper program management and stated that they may take steps to gather such information in the future, but did not have specific plans to do so. Without collecting complete and reliable data to help assess the performance of the FEMA Corps and Surge Capacity Force programs, FEMA lacks assurance that its workforce components are meeting desired objectives and goals.

Performance Assessment of FEMA Corps Teams

FEMA does not have a system in place to assess FEMA Corps teams' performance in contributing to FEMA's disaster response, recovery, and preparedness missions. FEMA staff request FEMA Corps teams by submitting service project requests to NCCC identifying the tasks and goals associated with the disaster deployment or project. Service projects may include Stafford Act–related disaster response or recovery activities, as well as preparedness activities and include activities such as registering survivors in the field on tablet computers, answering phones at national call centers, and performing data entry and general administrative duties. Once a team's project is completed, FEMA Corps team leaders complete project completion reports that describe the tasks and accomplishments.

However, FEMA does not have a system in place to compare the service project requests and the corresponding project completion reports to assess whether the goals of the requests were met. We reviewed service

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[80]In March 2012, the White House announced the partnership between FEMA and the Corporation for National and Community Service to establish the FEMA Corps program. DHS issued the initial *Surge Capacity Force Concept of Operations* in April 2010.

[81]Examples of FEMA Corps program performance measures include the average time between deployment of a team and team arrival at disaster site, average length of a project, member retention rates, number of teams deployed to presidentially declared disasters, and the number of members who complete the program.

project requests and project completion reports from 2012 through 2014 that FEMA and NCCC provided and determined that they were completed with varying amounts of detail and project identification information, such as project or disaster declaration codes, which made it unfeasible to match corresponding requests and completion reports for comparison. FEMA and NCCC officials agreed that the limitations in the way the data were documented and collected made comparison of the records very difficult. During our review, FEMA and NCCC issued program guidance in August 2014 that called for both agencies to collaborate on the development of a standard system to share information. In April 2015, FEMA and NCCC officials said they were manually matching corresponding records and they intended to complete this effort in May 2015. In addition, as a longer-term project, FEMA and NCCC officials said they were developing an automated system that would enable NCCC and FEMA to more easily evaluate project completion reports against the objectives in the service project requests. Officials said they intended to complete this automated system in 2016. However, when we requested the project plans for these efforts, NCCC and FEMA officials could not provide any documentation, such as meeting minutes, agendas, budgets, or documentation of expected time frames, related to either their reconciliation efforts or the development of the automated information technology system.

FEMA Corps program guidance establishes that the success of the program will be measured by the completion of meaningful and measurable service projects during FEMA deployments. Additionally, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* suggests that information should be recorded and communicated to management and others within the entity who need it, and in a form and within a time frame that enables them to carry out their internal control and other responsibilities.[82] Such internal control responsibilities include routine evaluations of program and employee performance through FEMA Corps service projects. Further, according to best practices for project management, the development of a project management plan—which defines how the project is executed, monitored, and controlled—is a key element of project management.[83] Best practices also call for the

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[82]GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.

[83]Project Management Institute, Inc., *The Standard for Program Management* © (2006).

development of milestone dates, among other factors, in carrying out a project successfully.

Given the importance of evaluating FEMA Corps teams' performance in meeting the needs of service project requests, developing a plan, with milestones, to create an automated information technology system or process to efficiently compare project completion reports against their initial service project requests would better position FEMA Corps managers to carry out such performance evaluations. Being able to conduct these performance evaluations would also better enable FEMA to identify any necessary changes to the program to maximize the utility of FEMA Corps teams and the FEMA Corps program as a component of its disaster workforce.

Conclusions

Since 2007, we have highlighted the need for FEMA to develop a strategic workforce plan that encompasses goals, performance metrics, and other key aspects of workforce management. According to FEMA's OCCHCO officials, the agency has various efforts ongoing to address long-standing workforce management challenges and open recommendations, including its incident workforce planning model and its HCSP. However, the success of these efforts will hinge on FEMA's ability to successfully coordinate them and to integrate various other workforce-related efforts involving FEMA's employee credentialing system and employee morale into a broader strategy on workforce management. Regarding FEMA's newest disaster workforce components—developing a plan or strategy to improve recruitment efforts for the Surge Capacity Force could help FEMA identify the availability of resources that could help it reach its staffing goals for the program and respond effectively to disasters. Further, collecting and accounting for total costs associated with managing both the FEMA Corps and the Surge Capacity Force programs will better position DHS to compare the benefits of the programs against the level of resources invested in these programs. FEMA also does not have the performance measures, data, and system to adequately assess the programs' progress and ensure they are meeting stated program goals. Establishing performance measures for all stated program goals and collecting complete and reliable data—such as the number of members who leave the program because of failed background investigations, and working with NCCC to develop a plan, with milestones, to create an automated system by which FEMA Corps managers can assess FEMA Corps project completion reports against the initial service project requests—are actions that will better position FEMA managers to evaluate the program.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To better enable DHS to meet its Surge Capacity Force staffing goals and improve its capacity for disaster response, we recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct the FEMA Administrator to develop a plan or strategy for improving recruitment efforts.

To better position DHS to evaluate the effective use of its resources and to ensure that DHS is aware of the total costs of administering and managing the FEMA Corps, we recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct the FEMA Administrator to collect and account for all costs associated with this new workforce, including the costs of background checks and staff time spent managing FEMA Corps teams.

To better position DHS to evaluate the effective use of its resources and to ensure that DHS is aware of the total costs of administering and managing the Surge Capacity Force, we recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct the FEMA Administrator to collect and account for all costs associated with this new workforce, including the costs of employee salaries and benefits of Surge Capacity Force volunteers when deployed.

To better enable FEMA to track and evaluate the performance of the FEMA Corps program, we recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct the FEMA Administrator to

- establish performance measures for all program goals, such as the rates of employment among program graduates in the emergency management field, and the rates of deployment of FEMA Corps members during disaster response;

- collect complete and reliable program performance data, such as tracking the number of FEMA Corps members who leave the program early for failing background investigations, and obtaining survey responses from as many participants of the FEMA Corps as possible, including those who have left the program or not graduated; and

- develop, in conjunction with NCCC, a plan, with milestones, to create an automated system or process by which managers can assess project completion reports against service project requests.

To better enable FEMA to track and evaluate the performance of the Surge Capacity Force program, we recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct the FEMA Administrator to:

- establish performance measures for all program goals, such as the rates of deployment of Surge Capacity Force members during disaster response; and

- collect complete and reliable program performance data, such as obtaining survey responses from as many participants of the Surge Capacity Force as possible.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DHS and FEMA for review and comment. DHS provided written comments, which are reproduced in appendix III. In its comments, DHS concurred with our recommendations and described actions planned to address them. FEMA also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

With regard to our first recommendation, for FEMA to develop a plan or strategy for improving recruitment efforts, DHS stated that by using staffing requirements developed during the Force Structure review, the Surge Capacity Force program will work with the DHS components to establish recruiting priorities and metrics for Tier 3 volunteers in order to improve recruitment efforts.[84] In coordination with the DHS components, DHS will also develop a communication strategy to ensure the dissemination of information to DHS employees outlining the benefits of volunteering in the Surge Capacity Force program. DHS estimated that all of these efforts would be completed on or before March 31, 2016. These actions, if fully implemented, should address the intent of the recommendation.

With regard to our second and third recommendations, for FEMA to collect and account for all costs associated with the new workforce components, DHS stated that the department will work with FEMA's Office of the Chief Security Officer and Surge Capacity Force program, respectively, to identify all costs associated with managing its two new disaster response workforce components—FEMA Corps and the Surge Capacity Force. For example, regarding FEMA Corps, DHS stated that it

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[84]The Surge Capacity Force is organized into the following four tiers: Tier 1 consists of disaster reservists with FEMA credentials; Tier 2 consists of permanent full-time federal employees with FEMA credentials; Tier 3 consists of non-FEMA credentialed, but National Incident Management System trained permanent full-or part-time federal employees; and Tier 4 consists of permanent full-or part-time federal employees.

will identify the costs related to processing security background checks. For the Surge Capacity Force program, DHS stated that the program will request and compile salary and benefit information of Surge Capacity Force volunteers from the various DHS components. DHS estimated that all of the efforts would be completed on or before April 30, 2016. These actions, if fully implemented, should address the intent of the recommendations.

With regard to our fourth recommendation, for FEMA to track and evaluate the performance of the FEMA Corps program, DHS stated that the FEMA Corps program will work with NCCC to develop mechanisms to better track and evaluate the performance of the program. For example, the FEMA Corps will work with NCCC to develop an exit survey for all FEMA Corps members, including those that leave the program early and will monitor results for continuous improvement. The estimated completion date for all of the efforts is December 31, 2016. These actions, if fully implemented, should address the intent of the recommendation.

With regard to our fifth recommendation to track and evaluate the performance of the Surge Capacity Force program, DHS stated that the program will develop an exit survey for all Surge Capacity Force volunteers and request the support of all DHS components in gathering responses and establish a performance target for availability of Surge Capacity Force volunteers to deploy if activated. DHS estimated that all of the efforts would be completed on or before July 31, 2016. These actions, if fully implemented, should address the intent of the recommendation.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Homeland Security and interested congressional committees. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at http://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (404) 679-1875 or curriec@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Chris P. Currie
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

List of Requesters

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
   and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Michael McCaul
Chairman
The Honorable Bennie Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Martha McSally
Chairman
The Honorable Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness,
   Response, and Communications
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Susan Brooks
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objectives of this report were to determine the extent to which (1) the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has taken steps to address long-standing challenges in managing its workforce, and (2) these challenges affected FEMA's deployment and management of its new disaster workforce components—the Surge Capacity Force and the FEMA Corps.

To address the first objective, we identified FEMA's long-standing challenges in managing its workforce by reviewing GAO's prior work on FEMA and FEMA's after-action reports on its response to Hurricane Sandy. To assess the extent to which FEMA has taken steps to address these challenges, we reviewed documentation that describes FEMA's workforce planning and management efforts, such as the *FEMA Strategic Plan 2014-2018*, the statement of work for the contract for FEMA's updated strategic workforce management plan (expected to be finalized in September 2015), and the statement of work for FEMA's contract for its new incident workforce planning model—expected imminently, pending final approval.[1] We interviewed officials from the Office of the Chief Component Human Capital Officer (OCCHCO), the Incident Workforce Management Office, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, and the Office of Policy and Program Analysis to discuss FEMA's progress in addressing GAO's open recommendations and implementing the initiatives identified in *FEMA's Strategic Human Capital Plan, 2008-2012*. We also discussed the extent to which these initiatives and GAO's leading practices in human capital planning will be included in the updated strategic workforce management plan and integrated into FEMA's workforce planning efforts. To assess FEMA's implementation of the FEMA Qualification System (FQS), we interviewed officials from FEMA's Incident Workforce Management Division. We also reviewed FEMA's *Hurricane Sandy After-Action Report* to identify the agency's progress and challenges faced with FQS during response and recovery efforts for Hurricane Sandy.[2] To help assess the extent to which FEMA is experiencing employee morale issues, we reviewed findings of the Partnership for Public Service, which ranked the best places to work in the federal government for fiscal years 2010 through 2014—the 5 most recent years for which data were available. We also interviewed

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[1]FEMA, *FEMA Strategic Plan 2014-2018*.

[2]FEMA, *Hurricane Sandy FEMA After-Action Report,* July 1, 2013.

OCCHCO officials to obtain information on the agency's progress and
challenges with addressing employee morale issues.

As shown in table 1, to obtain the views of FEMA's disaster workforce on
FEMA's challenges in managing its workforce, we conducted 23 focus
group sessions with a total of 136 participants from the Department of
Homeland Security (DHS), FEMA, and the AmeriCorps National Civilian
Community Corps (NCCC).

**Table 1: Number of GAO-Led Focus Groups and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Participants at the Selected
FEMA Regions**

	Total number of focus groups	Total number of participants	Locations of focus groups[a]
Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees			
Deployed to Hurricane Sandy	3	20	FEMA Regions II, IV, and VI
Not Deployed to Hurricane Sandy	3	21	FEMA Regions II, IV, and VI
Permanent Full-Time employees			
Deployed to Hurricane Sandy	3	17	FEMA Regions II, IV, and VI
Not deployed to Hurricane Sandy	2[b]	12	FEMA Regions IV and VI
FEMA Corps			
Liaisons	1	4	Washington, D.C.
Team leaders	2	6	FEMA Regions II and VI
Members	6	48	FEMA Regions II, IV, and VI
Surge Capacity Force			
DHS component coordinators	3[c]	8	Washington, D.C.[d]
Total	**23**	**136**	

Source: GAO. | GAO-15-437

[a]We conducted the site visit to Region II by teleconference in November 2014.

[b]The focus group session in Region II was not held because of an insufficient number of available
employees.

[c]One of the focus groups was a one-off teleconference call with a single DHS component coordinator
in November 2014.

[d]Two of the focus groups were conducted by teleconference.

To obtain regional perspectives on FEMA's disaster workforce on FEMA's
workforce planning and management efforts, we conducted focus groups
with Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees (CORE) and

Permanent Full-Time (PFT) employees at 3 of FEMA's 10 regions
(Regions II, IV, and VI).[3] We selected the 3 regions based on factors
including geographic dispersion and regions that typically respond to
different types of disasters. These sessions involved small-group
discussions designed to gain more in-depth information about issues
COREs and PFTs face. Discussions were guided by a moderator who
used a list of discussion topics to encourage participants to share their
thoughts and experiences as COREs or PFTs. Specifically, discussion
topics included experiences while being deployed to Hurricane Sandy or
other disasters, job differences during deployments and steady-state
conditions, likelihood of deployments, whether every employee is an
emergency manager, FQS implementation, force structure, training,
policies and procedures, communication, perspectives of other employee
groups, employee morale, and changes at FEMA; however, not all topics
were discussed in each group. Each focus group involved four to eight
COREs or PFTs. There were two types of focus groups based on whether
employees were deployed to Hurricane Sandy response efforts. The
participants were chosen from a random sample of the entire universe of
eligible participants at each region. We excluded supervisors from
selection to allow participants to speak freely. Selected individuals who
were not available for the focus groups were replaced with randomly
selected alternates, to the extent possible. We completed written
summaries of each focus group, and used qualitative analysis software to
categorize responses and identify common themes across the focus
groups, using appropriate checks to ensure accuracy. The results of
these focus groups are not generalizable. However, the views we
obtained from them provided us with valuable examples of CORE and
PFT experiences.

To address the second objective, we selected the FEMA Corps and
Surge Capacity Force programs for review because these new disaster
workforces were deployed for the first time during Hurricane Sandy, the
nation's most recent catastrophic disaster. We also selected these
workforces for review because they are jointly managed by agencies
outside of FEMA and they consist of non-FEMA employees who are
funded by the Disaster Relief Fund. To examine the retention and
recruitment challenges of these programs, we reviewed program

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[3]From July 2014 through November 2014, we visited FEMA regional offices in Atlanta,
Georgia, and Denton, Texas, and conducted teleconferences with FEMA officials in New
York, New York.

documentation, such as the *Surge Capacity Force Concept of
Operations*, and NCCC surveys of FEMA Corps member graduating
classes. We also interviewed officials with FEMA, NCCC, DHS
headquarters, and DHS components about program staffing challenges.[4]
We reviewed FEMA Corps program data on the number of FEMA Corps
members who left the program because of failed background
investigations from September 2012 through March 2015, but we
determined that these data were not sufficiently reliable for the purposes
of this report. We compared the information we gathered against our
leading practices on collaboration and strategic workforce planning. To
examine the extent to which these programs collect complete cost
information, we reviewed program documentation, such as the *FEMA
Corps Business Case*, and interviewed officials with FEMA, NCCC, DHS
headquarters, and DHS components responsible for implementing and
supporting the Surge Capacity Force and FEMA Corps programs. We
compared the information we gathered against Office of Management and
Budget guidance on cost-benefit analyses and our best practices on
program cost estimating and assessment.[5] To examine the performance
of these workforces, we reviewed program documentation, such as the
FEMA Corps Implementation Plan, and Surge Capacity Force
postdeployment surveys. We also interviewed officials with FEMA,
NCCC, DHS headquarters, and DHS components about performance
management for both programs. We intended to review FEMA Corps
service project requests and corresponding project completion reports
from September 2014 through November 2014, but as we discuss in the
report, the records could not be reliably compared. As a result, we could
not report on the number of service projects completed by FEMA Corps
teams or the extent to which the goals of service projects have been
accomplished by FEMA Corps teams. We visited two FEMA regions and
one FEMA region via teleconference to interview FEMA officials
responsible for requesting and managing FEMA Corps teams in the field

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[4]DHS's eight components participating in the Surge Capacity Force include the U.S.
Citizenship and Immigration Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border
Protection, 17 DHS headquarters offices, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers,
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Secret Service, and the Transportation
Security Administration.

[5]Office of Management and Budget, *Guidelines and Discount Rates for Benefit-Cost
Analysis of Federal Programs*, OMB Circular A-94 (Washington, D.C.: October 29, 1992).
GAO, *Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide: Best Practices for Developing and
Managing Capital Program Costs*, GAO-09-3SP (Washington, D.C.: March 2009).

and, as discussed later, to conduct focus groups of FEMA Corps team leaders and members. We compared the information we gathered against standards in *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*,[6] program management best practices, program guidance, and Office of Management and Budget guidance on surveys.[7]

To obtain perspectives on FEMA's management of its new disaster workforces—FEMA Corps and Surge Capacity Force—we conducted focus groups with all four of FEMA's liaisons to the five NCCC regional campuses and all eight DHS component Surge Capacity Force coordinators. These sessions involved small-group discussions designed to gain more in-depth information about recruitment and retention issues in the FEMA Corps and Surge Capacity Force programs. Discussions were guided by a moderator who used a list of discussion topics to encourage participants to share their thoughts and experiences. Specifically, discussion topics included implementation, management, deployment, recruitment, and retention issues; however, not all topics were discussed in each group. We completed written summaries of each focus group, and used qualitative analysis software to categorize responses and identify common themes across the focus groups, using appropriate checks to ensure accuracy. The results of these focus groups of all four FEMA's liaisons to the five NCCC regional campuses and all eight DHS component Surge Capacity Force coordinators represent the entire populations.

In addition, to obtain perspectives of participants in the FEMA Corps program, we conducted focus groups with FEMA Corps team leaders and members at FEMA Regions II, IV, and VI. These sessions involved small-group discussions designed to gain more in-depth information about participant experiences in the FEMA Corps program. Discussions were guided by a moderator who used a list of discussion topics to encourage participants to share their thoughts and experiences. Specifically, discussion topics included implementation, management, deployment, recruitment, and retention issues; however, not all topics were discussed in each group. Both focus groups with FEMA Corps team leaders

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[6]GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1 (Washington, D.C: Nov. 1, 1999).
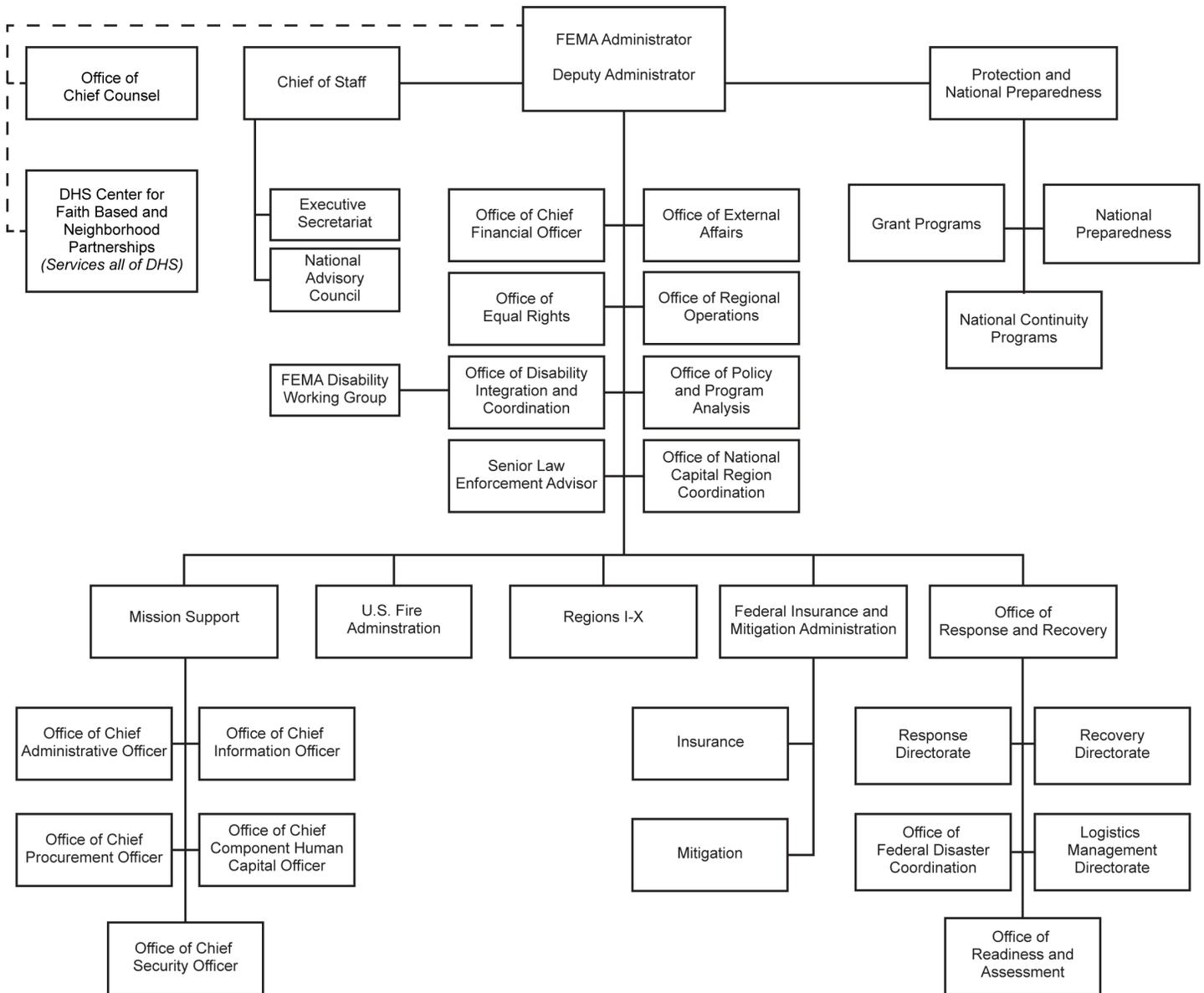
[7]Office of Management and Budget, *Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys* (Washington, D.C.: September 2006).

involved three team leaders each. Each focus group with FEMA Corps
members involved eight members from two or more teams in a region.
The participants were chosen from a random sample of the entire
universe of eligible participants at each region.[8] We completed written
summaries of each focus group, and used qualitative analysis software to
categorize responses and identify common themes across the focus
groups, using appropriate checks to ensure accuracy. The results of
these focus groups are not generalizable. However, the views we
obtained from them provided us with valuable examples of experiences of
participants in the FEMA Corps program.

We conducted this performance audit from June 2014 to June 2015 in
accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.
Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain
sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our
findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that
the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and
conclusions on our audit objectives.

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[8]We conducted focus groups with 48 of 63 FEMA Corps members, or 76 percent,
available at the time we conducted focus groups in each of the three FEMA regions. All of
these participants were members of FEMA Corps cohorts 4 or 5.

Appendix II: Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Organization Chart

FEMA Administrator / Deputy Administrator

Office of Chief Counsel

DHS Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships *(Services all of DHS)*

Chief of Staff
- Executive Secretariat
- National Advisory Council

FEMA Disability Working Group

Office of Chief Financial Officer

Office of Equal Rights

Office of Disability Integration and Coordination

Senior Law Enforcement Advisor

Office of External Affairs

Office of Regional Operations

Office of Policy and Program Analysis

Office of National Capital Region Coordination

Protection and National Preparedness
- Grant Programs
- National Preparedness
- National Continuity Programs

Mission Support
- Office of Chief Administrative Officer
- Office of Chief Information Officer
- Office of Chief Procurement Officer
- Office of Chief Component Human Capital Officer
- Office of Chief Security Officer

U.S. Fire Adminstration

Regions I-X

Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration
- Insurance
- Mitigation

Office of Response and Recovery
- Response Directorate
- Recovery Directorate
- Office of Federal Disaster Coordination
- Logistics Management Directorate
- Office of Readiness and Assessment

Source: FEMA. | GAO-15-437

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Homeland Security

June 26, 2015

Chris P. Currie
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Draft Report GAO-15-437, "FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
   AGENCY: Additional Planning and Data Collection Could Help Improve
   Workforce Management Efforts"

Dear Mr. Currie:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S.
Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government
Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing
this report.

DHS is pleased to note GAO's recognition that the Federal Emergency Management
Agency (FEMA) is taking steps to address workforce-management challenges. FEMA
continuously strives to improve our Nation's capabilities to respond to disasters. FEMA
is committed to supporting our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a Nation we
work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against,
respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards, including hurricanes, floods, and
tornadoes.

The draft report contained five recommendations with which the Department concurs.
Specifically, GAO recommended that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct the
FEMA Administrator to:

Recommendation 1: Develop a plan or strategy for improving recruitment efforts.

Response: Concur. Using staffing requirements for the Surge Capacity Force (SCF)
developed during the Force Structure review, the SCF Program will work with
Components across the Department to:

- Establish recruiting priorities and metrics for Tier 3 volunteers by October 31,
  2015.

- In coordination with the Components, outline a communications strategy to ensure widest dissemination of messaging to DHS employees that emphasizes the benefits of volunteer SCF membership for the employee, his or her host Agency, and the Department by March 31, 2016.

Estimated Completion Date (ECD): March 31, 2016.

Recommendation 2: Collect and account for all costs associated with this new workforce, including the costs of background checks and staff time spent managing FEMA Corps teams.

Response: Concur. In order to account for the costs of background checks, the FEMA Corps program will work with the FEMA Office of the Chief Security Officer to collect and account for the costs of background investigations for each member. Specifically, they will:

- Identify costs related to processing security background checks by September 30, 2015.

- Design a mechanism to capture security background check costs on a per member-cohort basis by October 31, 2015.

- Implement the mechanism on a per member-cohort basis by November 30, 2015.

With regard to staff time spent managing teams; the FEMA Corps program will survey project sponsors requesting an estimate of time spent providing technical direction to FEMA Corps. Once received, FEMA will aggregate and estimate the total cost incurred by fiscal year. Specifically, they will:

- Identify methodology to assess estimated staff costs associated with providing technical direction to a FEMA Corps team by November 30, 2015.

- Design a questionnaire to collect data required to assess estimated staff costs associated with providing technical direction to a FEMA Corps team by February 29, 2016.

- Implement the questionnaire on a per project basis by April 30, 2016.

ECD: April 30, 2016.

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Recommendation 3: Collect and account for all costs associated with this new workforce, including the costs of employee salaries and benefits of SCF volunteers when deployed.

Response: Concur. The SCF program will request and compile salary and benefit information of SCF volunteers from the various Components. Because FEMA does not reimburse Agencies for these costs, in accordance with approved practices for mission assignments applicable to all Federal Departments and Agencies that provide direct assistance under the Stafford Act as detailed in 44 CFR Section 206.8, these costs will not be captured for Surge volunteers when deployed. This effort will include:

- Designing a mechanism to capture Tier 3 volunteer salary and benefit costs with the Components by November 30, 2015.

- Completing collection efforts and compiling costs by March 31, 2016.

ECD: March 31, 2016.

Recommendation 4:

- Establish performance measures for all program goals, such as the rates of employment among program graduates in the emergency management field, and the rates of deployment of FEMA Corps members during disaster response.

- Collect complete and reliable program performance data, such as tracking the number of FEMA Corps members who leave the program early for failing background investigations, and obtaining survey responses from as many participants of the FEMA Corps as possible, including those who have left the program or not graduated; and

- Develop, in conjunction with the National Civilian Communication Corps (NCCC), a plan, with milestones, to create an automated system or process by which managers can assess project completion reports against service project requests.

Response: Concur.

- The FEMA Corps program will establish measures to assess key performance areas as outlined in the Program's 2012 announcement. These measures will include:
  - Identifying potential performance measures in conference with NCCC by January 31, 2016.

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      o Designing mechanisms and define timelines to capture performance data on
         a routine basis by April 30, 2016.
   o Implementing performance measures by July 31, 2016.

- The FEMA Corps program will work with NCCC partners to develop an exit
  survey for all members, including those that leave the program early and will
  monitor results for continuous improvement. These measures will include:
  - Analyzing current surveys for collecting member exit data, identifying
    feasibility and areas to improve by November 30, 2015.
  - Working with NCCC to design member exit questionnaire and define an
    appropriate survey mechanism by November 30, 2016.

- Implement surveys on a per member basis upon member exit by December 31,
  2016. The FEMA Corps program will collaborate with NCCC to develop a
  system by which project completion reports can be evaluated against service
  project requests. This system will include:
  - Assessing options for matching Service Project Requests (SPRs) and
    Project Completion Reports (PCRs) with NCCC by November 30, 2015.
  - Determining best course of action for matching SPRs and PCRs by
    February 29, 2016.
  - Implementing new mechanism for matching SPRs and PCRs by April 30,
    2016.

ECD: December 31, 2016.

Recommendation 5:

- Establish performance measures for all program goals, such the rates of
  deployment of SCF members during disaster response; and

- Collect complete and reliable program performance data, such as obtaining survey
  responses from as many participants of the SCF as possible.

Response: Concur. The SCF program will establish a performance target for availability
of SCF volunteers to deploy if activated and measure its performance against that goal
following activation. Specifically, they will:

- Identifying potential performance measures in conjunction with DHS components
  by January 31, 2016.

- Designing mechanisms and define timelines to capture performance data by
  April 30, 2016.

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- Implementing performance measures by July 31, 2016.

The SCF program will also develop an exit survey for all SCF volunteers and request the support of all Components in gathering responses, including:

- Working with DHS Components to design questionnaire and define an appropriate survey mechanism by January 31, 2016.

- Implementing survey process by March 31, 2016.

ECD: July 31, 2016.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Technical comments were previously provided under separate cover. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,
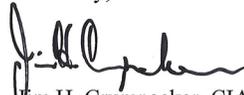
Jim H. Crumpacker, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

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Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact	Chris P. Currie, (404) 679-1875 or curriec@gao.gov
Staff Acknowledgments	In addition to the contact above, Christopher A. Keisling (Assistant Director); Frederick Lyles, Jr. (Analyst-in-Charge); Carla N. Argueta; Chuck Bausell; Billy Commons, III; Eric Hauswirth; Susan Hsu; Tracey King; Marc N. Meyer; Luis E. Rodriguez; Cynthia Saunders; and Michelle Su all made key contributions to this report.