

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-560T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Federal Spending Oversight and Emergency Management, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Following the federal response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Post-Katrina Act was enacted in 2006, requiring FEMA to establish a national preparedness system and assess the nation's overall preparedness. To implement the system, FEMA issued the National Response Framework, which identifies 14 emergency support functions that serve as the federal government's primary coordinating structure for providing response capabilities. From fiscal years 2002 through 2015, DHS awarded over \$40 billion for preparedness grant programs to enhance the capabilities of state and local governments to respond to emergencies and disasters.

This statement addresses (1) FEMA's progress in strengthening federal preparedness efforts and (2) FEMA's efforts to manage preparedness grants. This statement is based on prior reports GAO issued from March 2011 through February 2016 and selected updates on efforts to improve coordination in March 2016. To conduct prior work and updates, GAO analyzed relevant FEMA data and documentation and interviewed relevant officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO has made several recommendations in its prior reports designed to address the challenges discussed in this statement. FEMA has taken actions to address some but not all of these recommendations.

View [GAO-16-560T](#). For more information, contact Chris P. Currie at (404) 679-1875 or [currie@gao.gov](mailto:currie@gao.gov).

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# FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

## Progress and Continuing Challenges in National Preparedness Efforts

### What GAO Found

GAO's recent work highlights both the progress and challenges in the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) efforts to strengthen federal preparedness.

- In December 2014, GAO reported that the federal departments responsible for coordinating emergency support functions (ESF) in preparation for national disaster response carry out their responsibilities in various ways, but efforts to assess ESF preparedness could be enhanced. GAO recommended that FEMA coordinate and collaborate with other federal departments and agencies to issue guidance to ESF coordinators on minimum standards for demonstrating ESF preparedness. FEMA concurred, and in June 2015, consistent with our recommendation, issued such guidance.
- GAO found in December 2014 that federal departments that participate in national-level exercises monitor the status of their corrective actions but do not report this information to DHS or FEMA, nor does DHS or FEMA comprehensively collect this information. GAO recommended that FEMA coordinate and collaborate with interagency partners to collect information and regularly report to the Secretary on the status of its planned actions. FEMA concurred, and in October 2015 reported taking steps to address this recommendation; however, work remains.

GAO's work on FEMA's preparedness grant management highlights challenges in coordination and challenges in establishing a framework to assess capabilities.

- In February 2016, GAO found that coordination challenges between FEMA headquarters and regional staff in managing preparedness grants continue to create inefficiencies. GAO recommended that FEMA develop a plan with timeframes, goals, metrics and milestones on how it will resolve longstanding challenges with its grants management model, which divides responsibilities between regional and headquarters staff. FEMA did not concur with this recommendation. However, we continue to believe that FEMA would benefit from a more strategic approach to resolve longstanding challenges associated with the existing hybrid model.
- In February 2012, GAO identified coordination challenges among four FEMA grant programs that share similar goals and fund similar projects, which contribute to the risk of duplication among the programs. GAO recommended that FEMA take steps, as it develops its new Non-Disaster Grant Management System, to collect project information with sufficient detail to identify potential duplication among the grant programs. In March 2016, FEMA reported taking steps to address the recommendation but has been delayed in implementing the new grant management system.
- In March 2011, GAO reported the need for FEMA to establish a framework for assessing capabilities to prioritize grant funding. As of March 2016, FEMA does not have clear and quantifiable performance measures that provide such a framework and we concluded that until FEMA develops such requirements and measures it is unclear what capability gaps currently exist and what level of federal resources will be needed to close such gaps.