

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-637T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Emergency Management, Intergovernmental Relations, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

From fiscal years 2002 through 2012, Congress appropriated about \$41 billion to a variety of DHS preparedness grant programs to enhance the capabilities of state and local governments to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks and other disasters. DHS allocated more than \$22.3 billion through four of the largest preparedness programs—the Urban Areas Security Initiative, the State Homeland Security Program, the Port Security Grant Program, and the Transit Security Grant Program.

In February 2012, GAO identified factors that contribute to the risk of FEMA potentially funding unnecessarily duplicative projects across the four grant programs. In March 2011, GAO reported that FEMA faced challenges in developing and implementing a national preparedness assessment, a fact that inhibits its abilities to effectively prioritize preparedness grant funding. This testimony updates GAO's prior work and describes FEMA's progress in (1) managing preparedness grants and (2) measuring national preparedness by assessing capabilities. This statement is based on prior products GAO issued from July 2005 to March 2013 and selected updates in June 2013. To conduct the updates, GAO analyzed agency documents, such as the *National Preparedness Reports*, and interviewed FEMA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to DHS and FEMA in prior reports. DHS and FEMA concurred with these recommendations and have actions under way to address them.

View [GAO-13-637T](#). For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-8777 or maurerd@gao.gov.

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NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

FEMA Has Made Progress, but Additional Steps Are Needed to Improve Grant Management and Assess Capabilities

What GAO Found

Officials in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—have identified actions they believe will enhance management of the four preparedness programs GAO analyzed; however, FEMA still faces challenges. In February 2012, GAO found that FEMA lacked a process to coordinate application reviews and made award decisions with differing levels of information. To better identify potential unnecessary duplication, GAO recommended that FEMA collect project-level information and enhance internal coordination and administration of the programs. DHS concurred and has taken steps to address GAO's recommendations. For example, the fiscal year 2013 and 2014 President's budgets proposed the establishment of the National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP), a consolidation of 16 FEMA grant programs into a single program. Members of Congress raised questions about the NPGP and did not approve the proposal for fiscal year 2013. FEMA incorporated stakeholder views, as directed by Congress, and the fiscal year 2014 President's Budget again proposed the NPGP. If approved, and depending on its final form and execution, the NPGP could help mitigate the potential for unnecessary duplication and address GAO's recommendation to improve internal coordination. In March 2013, FEMA officials reported that the agency intends to start collecting and analyzing project-level data from grantees in fiscal year 2014; but has not yet finalized data requirements or fully implemented the data system to collect the information. Collecting appropriate data and implementing project-level enhancements as planned would address GAO's recommendation and better position FEMA to identify potentially unnecessary duplication.

FEMA has made progress addressing GAO's March 2011 recommendation that it develop a national preparedness assessment with clear, objective, and quantifiable capability requirements and performance measures, but continues to face challenges in developing a national preparedness system that could assist the agency in prioritizing preparedness grant funding. For example, FEMA required state and local governments receiving homeland security funding to complete Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessments (THIRA) and, as a part of this process, develop their own capability requirements by December 31, 2012. State officials are to use the capability requirements they identified to self-assess capabilities in their future *State Preparedness Reports*, which FEMA uses along with other sources to develop the annual *National Preparedness Reports*. However, FEMA faces challenges that may reduce the usefulness of these efforts. For example, because states develop their own capability requirements, and use individual judgment rather than a quantitative standard to assess preparedness capabilities, it may be difficult to identify differences and compare capability levels across states. Further, while FEMA officials stated that the THIRA process is intended to develop a set of national capability performance requirements and measures, such requirements and measures have not yet been developed. Until FEMA develops clear, objective, and quantifiable capability requirements and performance measures, it is unclear what capability gaps currently exist and what level of federal resources will be needed to close such gaps. GAO will continue to monitor FEMA's efforts to develop capability requirements and performance measures.