



Highlights of [GAO-07-1259T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal executive boards (FEB) bring together federal agency and community leaders in major metropolitan areas outside Washington, D.C., to discuss issues of common interest, including pandemic influenza. This testimony addresses the FEBs' emergency support roles and responsibilities, their potential role in pandemic influenza preparedness, and some of the key challenges they face in providing emergency support services.

The issues discussed in the testimony are based on the GAO report, *The Federal Workforce: Additional Steps Needed to Take Advantage of Federal Executive Boards' Ability to Contribute to Emergency Operations* ([GAO-07-515](#), May 2007). GAO selected 14 of the 28 FEBs for review because they coordinate the greatest number of federal employees or had recent emergency management experience. In this report, GAO recommended that the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to formally define the FEBs' role in emergency planning and response. In completing the FEB strategic plan, OPM should also establish accountability for the boards' emergency support activities and develop a proposal to address the uncertainty of funding sources for the boards. While not commenting specifically on the recommendations, OPM said it is building a business case through which to address the resources FEBs need to continue operations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-07-1259T](#). For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6806 or steinhardt@gao.gov.

INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Federal Executive Boards' Ability to Contribute to Pandemic Preparedness

What GAO Found

Located in 28 cities with a large federal presence, the FEBs are interagency coordinating groups designed to strengthen federal management practices and improve intergovernmental relations. The FEBs bring together the federal agency leaders in their service areas and have a long history of establishing and maintaining communications links, coordinating intergovernmental activities, identifying common ground, and building cooperative relationships. The boards also partner with community organizations and participate as a unified federal force in local civic affairs.

OPM, which provides direction to the FEBs, and the boards have designated emergency preparedness, security, and safety as an FEB core function and are continuing to work on a strategic plan that will include a common set of performance standards for their emergency support activities. Although not all FEB representatives agreed that the boards should play an expanded role in emergency service support, many of the FEB representatives cited a positive and beneficial working relationship with FEMA. As one of their emergency support activities, the FEBs and FEMA, often working with the General Services Administration, host emergency planning exercises and training for federal agencies in the field.

The FEBs' emergency support role with its regional focus may make the boards a valuable asset in pandemic preparedness and response. The distributed nature of a pandemic and the burden of disease across the nation dictate that the response will be largely addressed by each community it affects. As a natural outgrowth of their general civic activities and through activities such as hosting emergency preparedness training, some of the boards have established relationships with, for example, federal, state, and local governments; emergency management officials; first responders; and health officials in their communities. Some of the FEBs are already building capacity for pandemic influenza response within their member agencies and community organizations by hosting pandemic influenza training and exercises. The communications function of the FEBs is also a key part of their emergency support activities and could be an important asset for pandemic preparedness and response.

The FEBs, however, face key challenges in providing emergency support, and these interrelated issues limit the capacity of the FEBs to provide a consistent and sustained contribution to emergency preparedness and response. First, their role is not defined in national emergency plans, which may contribute to federal agency officials being unfamiliar with their capabilities. In addition, with no congressional appropriations, the FEBs depend on host agencies and other member agencies for their resources. This has resulted in inconsistent funding for the FEBs nationwide and creates uncertainty for the boards in planning and committing to provide emergency support services.