

## Why GAO Did This Study

Since fiscal year 2007 FEMA has obligated \$33 billion in disaster assistance payments. FEMA relies heavily upon its cadre of DAEs, a reserve workforce who interact with disaster survivors. GAO was asked to review the management and training of DAEs. Specifically, this report addresses the extent to which (1) FEMA has policies and procedures in place to govern the DAE program; (2) FEMA's human capital controls over the DAE workforce are consistent with internal control standards; and (3) FEMA's DAE training incorporates key attributes of effective training and development programs. In addition, GAO describes FEMA's initiative to transform the DAE program announced in April 2012. GAO reviewed management documents such as program-specific and human capital-related guidance, interviewed FEMA officials, and conducted 16 focus group sessions with DAEs in four selected joint field offices chosen to provide geographic dispersion, among other factors. The results of the focus groups are not generalizable, but provide valuable insight into DAE experiences.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that FEMA establish a mechanism to monitor both its regions' implementation of DAE policies and DAEs' implementation of disaster policies; criteria for hiring and compensating DAEs; and a plan to train DAEs within a set time frame. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

## DISASTER ASSISTANCE WORKFORCE

### FEMA Could Enhance Human Capital Management and Training

## What GAO Found

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has taken steps to enhance its management of the Disaster Assistance Employee (DAE) program, such as through the establishment of a credentialing program, the FEMA Qualification System (FQS); however, management controls and training could be strengthened. For example, FEMA does not monitor how the regions implement DAE policies and how DAEs implement disaster policies across regions to ensure consistency. FEMA's Administrator noted that due to differences in how regions operate, it is problematic to deploy someone based in one region to another during a disaster. Establishing a mechanism to monitor both the regional implementation of DAE policies and procedures and DAE's implementation of disaster policies could help provide FEMA with reasonable assurance that disaster assistance is conducted in accordance with policy and implemented consistently.

FEMA's human capital controls could be strengthened. FEMA's regional DAE managers are responsible for hiring DAEs, but FEMA has not established hiring criteria and has limited salary criteria. By establishing standardized criteria for making hiring and salary decisions, FEMA would be better positioned to hire people with requisite skills and better ensure consistency across regions. Likewise, FEMA's performance appraisal system for DAEs is not consistent with internal control standards. FEMA does not have criteria for supervisors to assign DAEs satisfactory or unsatisfactory ratings. Thirteen of 16 regional DAE managers GAO interviewed stated that the appraisal process could be improved, such as implementing a rating scale instead of a pass/fail rating. FEMA officials noted that performance management is a critical component in DAE supervision and must be improved in fiscal year 2012. Establishing a more rigorous performance management system that includes criteria for given performance elements as well as guidance could help FEMA ensure that DAEs' performance appraisals more accurately reflect performance and provide needed information to managers.

FEMA's DAE training is not consistent with key attributes of effective training and development programs, such as a plan for training staff. FEMA does not have a plan to ensure DAEs receive necessary training such as FQS requirements. Further, 13 of 16 regional DAE managers GAO spoke to said that they would like more opportunities for DAEs to receive training. A plan to ensure that all DAEs have opportunities for training and completing FQS requirements with related milestones would provide FEMA with a roadmap and ensure accountability for qualifying DAEs under FQS. In addition, FEMA does not track how much of the Disaster Relief Fund is spent on training for DAEs. Developing a systematic process to track training costs could provide FEMA with information to help it determine whether it is allocating its resources effectively.

In an April 2012 memo, FEMA announced plans to transform the DAE program beginning in June 2012; however, this effort is still in the early stages and as a result, it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of FEMA's planned actions.