

GAO

Report to 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

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THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

Additional Steps Needed to Take Advantage of Federal Executive Boards' Ability to Contribute to Emergency Operations





Highlights of [GAO-07-515](#), a report to 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

OPM, which provides direction to the FEBs, is now emphasizing that in the post-9/11 environment, the boards have a transformed emergency support role. The report discusses the boards' emergency preparedness roles and responsibilities and their potential role in preparing for and responding to pandemic influenza. GAO selected 14 of the 28 FEBs for review because they coordinate the greatest number of federal employees or had recent emergency management experience.

What GAO Recommends

Particularly given the threat of pandemic influenza, GAO recommends that the Director of OPM discuss with FEMA and other stakeholders the feasibility of integrating FEBs in national emergency plans. 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 and that institutionalized relationships with partners such as FEMA can help address funding issues. FEMA said that it welcomed the opportunity to work with OPM to formally define the FEB role in emergency planning and response.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-515.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6806 or steinhardt@gao.gov.

THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

Additional Steps Needed to Take Advantage of Federal Executive Boards' Ability to Contribute to Emergency Operations

What GAO Found

Located outside Washington, D.C., in 28 cities with a large federal presence, the federal executive boards (FEB) are interagency coordinating groups designed to strengthen federal management practices, improve intergovernmental relations, and participate as a unified federal force in local civic affairs. Created by a Presidential Directive in 1961, the boards are composed of the federal field office agency heads and military commanders in their cities. Although membership by agency heads on the boards is required, active participation is voluntary in practice. The boards generally have staff of one or two full-time personnel, including an executive director. The FEBs have no congressional charter and receive no congressional appropriation but rather rely on voluntary contributions from their member agencies. Although the boards are not intended to be first responders, the regulations that guide the FEBs state that emergency operations is one of their functions.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the FEBs have designated emergency preparedness, security, and employee safety as a core function of the boards and are continuing to work on a strategic plan that will include a common set of performance standards for their emergency support activities. All of the selected FEBs were performing emergency activities, such as organizing preparedness training, and FEB representatives and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials reported that these activities mutually advanced their missions.

The FEBs, however, face key challenges in carrying out their emergency support role. First, their role is not defined in national emergency plans. According to several FEMA officials, FEBs could carry out their emergency support role more effectively if it was included in national emergency management plans. The framework within which the FEBs operate with member agencies and OPM also poses challenges in holding the boards accountable for their emergency support function. In addition, the funding sources for the boards are uncertain, affecting their ability to plan for and commit to providing emergency support services.

Despite these challenges, the nature of pandemic influenza, which presents different concerns than localized natural disasters, makes the FEBs a particularly valuable asset in pandemic preparedness and response. Many of the selected boards had already hosted pandemic preparedness events, which included their member agencies and local community organizations. With the greatest burden of pandemic response resting on the local communities, the FEBs' outreach and their ability to coordinate across organizations suggest that they may be an important resource in preparing for and responding to a pandemic.

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Abbreviations

AMEM	Association of Minnesota Emergency Managers
APC	Advanced Pharmaceutical Cache
COOP	continuity of operations
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FEB	federal executive board
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
GETS	Government Emergency Telecommunications Service
GSA	General Services Administration
HCLMSA	Human Capital Leadership and Merit System Accountability
JFO	joint field office
JPDO	Joint Planning and Development Office
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
ONSC	Office of National Security Coordination
OPM	Office of Personnel Management

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Washington, DC 20548

May 4, 2007

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka
Chairman
The Honorable George V. Voinovich
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

In an April 2004 report on opportunities to improve federal continuity planning, we concluded that federal executive boards (FEB) are uniquely positioned to improve coordination of emergency preparedness efforts in areas outside of Washington, D.C.¹ Located in 28 cities with a large federal presence, the FEBs are interagency coordinating groups designed to strengthen federal management practices, improve intergovernmental relations, and participate as a unified federal force in local civic affairs. The membership of each board is made up of the highest ranking federal agency officials in the FEB service area. The regulations that guide FEB operations state that the boards shall be responsible for emergency operations, such as those under hazardous weather conditions; responding to blood donation needs; and communicating related leave policies.² Much of the FEB emergency operations responsibility in the past has been providing advisories regarding hazardous weather conditions to member agency leaders and providing a forum in which agency leaders could make informed decisions about office closings affecting their employees. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which provides direction to the boards, is now emphasizing that in the post-9/11 environment the FEBs have a transformed role that encompasses elements of emergency preparedness, employee security, and continuity of operations. Although the boards are not intended to be first responders, we recommended in the 2004 report that OPM should determine the desired role for the FEBs in improving coordination of emergency preparedness efforts and identify and address FEB capacity issues to meet that role.

¹GAO, *Human Capital: Opportunities to Improve Federal Continuity Planning Guidance*, GAO-04-384 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 20, 2004).

²5 C.F.R. § 960.107 (c) (6).

Determining the FEB role in emergency operations is particularly challenging given that the boards operate with no independent authority and with resources voluntarily provided by member agencies. The boards depend on a host agency, generally the agency with the greatest number of employees in the area, to provide staff of usually one or two full-time personnel, including an executive director. The FEBs also rely on their hosts and other member agencies for operating expenses. Important to emergency preparedness, one of the FEB functions includes building relationships with state and local organizations to promote federal involvement within their communities.

Emergency preparedness efforts involve dealing with the full range of emergencies, including natural and man-made disasters. Attention has focused on pandemic influenza, a real and significant threat facing the United States and the rest of the world. Influenza pandemics occur when a novel influenza virus emerges that can be effectively transmitted between humans who have little immunity to it. The last three pandemics in the 20th century occurred in 1918, 1957, and 1968, and killed approximately 40 million, 2 million, and 1 million people worldwide, respectively. Although the timing of the next pandemic is unpredictable, there is widespread agreement that an influenza pandemic will occur at some point. A pandemic is not a singular event, but is likely to come in waves, each lasting months, and pass through communities of all sizes across the nation and the world simultaneously. A pandemic could threaten society and the economy by removing essential personnel, including federal government employees, from the workplace for weeks or months.

To obtain a better understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and capacities of selected FEBs for emergency operations, particularly in the event of pandemic influenza, you asked us to (1) identify the actions FEBs have taken to fulfill their emergency preparedness and response roles and responsibilities, (2) describe the key challenges facing the FEBs in fulfilling these roles and responsibilities, and (3) evaluate the extent to which the FEBs can contribute to emergency preparedness and response to pandemic influenza.

To address our objectives, we selected 14 FEBs for our study. The selected FEBs are Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth, Denver, Los Angeles, Minnesota, New Orleans, New York City, Oklahoma, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Seattle. These FEBs were selected because they coordinate the greatest number of federal employees or have recent experience with specific emergency management events. We obtained and reviewed FEB documents, such as annual reports, monthly

activity reports, minutes, and correspondence, and interviewed at least two key FEB representatives from each selected board, including the chair or vice chair and executive director. We also had discussions with and obtained pertinent documentation from officials at OPM and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) at their headquarters in Washington, D.C. Because the FEBs and FEMA collaborate closely on continuity of operations (COOP) activities in the field, we also interviewed the FEMA regional directors in regions V and VI based in Chicago, Illinois, and Denton, Texas, respectively.³ In addition, we reviewed academic literature and prior GAO reports about leveraging collaborative networks.

We conducted our review in the 14 case study FEB cities and Washington, D.C., from March 2006 through February 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Detailed information on our scope and methodology appears in appendix I.

Results in Brief

OPM and the FEBs are developing a strategic plan for the boards that will establish emergency preparedness, security, and employee safety as a core FEB function with a common set of expectations for the boards' emergency activities. This strategic plan should more fully ensure that the federal employees located in the FEB service areas receive the needed level of emergency support. OPM officials recognize that the FEBs can add value to regional preparedness efforts as vehicles for communication, coordination, and capacity building but acknowledge that the emergency support activities provided by the FEBs vary. However, all of the selected boards were involved in emergency activities such as disseminating emergency preparedness information, serving as federal liaisons for state and local emergency management officials, and organizing preparedness training. Officials from FEMA, which provides guidance and assistance for COOP planning across the executive branch, and almost all of the executive directors or chairs from the selected boards cited a positive and beneficial working relationship. In addition, although not all of the FEB representatives felt this was a responsibility the boards should assume, some of the selected boards have played a role in responding to emergencies in the past. For example, the Oklahoma FEB staff played a role in helping first responders locate building occupants after the April 19, 1995, bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City.

³COOP planning is an effort conducted by agencies to ensure that the capability exists to continue essential agency functions across a wide range of potential emergencies.

The FEBs face several key challenges in providing support for the nation's emergency preparedness and response efforts. First, the FEB role in supporting the nation's emergency response structure is not developed or identified in federal emergency guidance and plans. According to several FEMA officials, including the FEBs in a formal role within federal emergency structures would help the boards carry out their emergency support role more effectively by identifying and communicating the value the boards can add to emergency support. In addition, the framework under which the boards operate poses accountability challenges. Although OPM is responsible for providing program direction and oversight to the boards, many of the FEB representatives said OPM cannot provide sufficient leadership and feedback to 28 boards with its one-person FEB program office. Also, aligning performance expectations for the FEB executive directors consistent with OPM direction was hampered by the fact that the executive directors report to a host agency and are usually subject to that agency's rating and performance management system. Finally, the differing sizes of the FEB service areas and their funding and resource levels, coupled with the voluntary nature of their funding structure, affect the capacities of the boards to support emergency preparedness. The Los Angeles FEB, for example, primarily serves a six-county area in the immediate vicinity of Los Angeles with approximately 120,000 federal employees, yet the executive director noted that its staffing is similar to FEBs covering much smaller areas and numbers of employees and agencies. With FEB resources dependent on the continued willingness of the host agency and other member agencies to contribute, several of the executive directors from the selected boards said it was difficult to plan and commit to providing emergency support services. Many of the FEB representatives from the selected boards expressed concern that their activities will be further affected by reduced agency funding and resource support as agency budgets grow more constrained.

Despite these FEB challenges, the nature of an influenza pandemic makes the boards a particularly valuable asset in planning for and responding to a national disaster of this nature. Unlike a localized disaster, such as a hurricane or earthquake, for which national resources can be mobilized and deployed to assist in the disaster response, pandemic influenza will be largely addressed by the resources available to each community it affects. In the current pandemic planning stages, many of the selected FEBs were already using their community relationships to facilitate communication and coordination with local federal agency leaders and state and local governments. These FEBs were also building capacity for pandemic influenza response within their member agencies and community organizations through hosting pandemic influenza training and exercises.

For example, 13 of the 14 selected FEBs were involved in pandemic-related activities that ranged from sponsoring informational briefings to coordinating pandemic exercises. The Minnesota FEB hosted a pandemic influenza exercise in October 2006 that included approximately 180 participants from 100 organizations within federal agencies, state and local government, and the private sector. Given their knowledge of the federal agencies within their jurisdictions, during pandemic influenza FEBs have the potential to provide a forum to inform the decisions of member agency leaders and emergency coordinators, similar to what the boards provide for other hazards. Additionally, several of the selected FEBs were considering how they could support the federal workforce during pandemic influenza and provide assistance in coordinating resources to federal agencies responding to the pandemic.

This report contains four recommendations to the Director of OPM to work with the FEBs and FEMA to improve the capacity of the boards to enhance their emergency support services. OPM and FEMA should formalize the FEBs' contribution to FEMA's emergency preparedness efforts, and OPM should initiate discussion with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other responsible stakeholders to determine the feasibility of integrating the FEB emergency support responsibilities into the established emergency response framework. In addition, OPM should also continue to work on a common set of performance standards for emergency support responsibilities across the FEB system, for which the boards will be held accountable. As part of the FEB strategic planning process, OPM should also develop a proposal for alternative funding mechanisms to help ensure that the FEBs can provide the appropriate level of emergency support for the federal workforce.

We provided a draft of the report to the Director of OPM and to the Secretary of Homeland Security. We received written comments from OPM, which are included in appendix IV. While not commenting specifically on the recommendations, OPM stated that it understands the importance of the issues raised in the report. By documenting results and creating a consistent accountability mechanism, and through institutionalized relationships with strategic partners like FEMA, OPM believes that it is building a strong business case through which it can address the resources FEBs need to continue operations. In comments received from FEMA by e-mail, FEMA concurred with the findings of the report and welcomed the opportunity to work with OPM to develop a memorandum of understanding that more formally defines the FEB role in emergency planning and response.

Background

FEBs were established by a Presidential Directive in 1961 to improve coordination among federal activities and programs outside Washington, D.C. The boards' overall mission includes supporting and promoting national initiatives and responding to the local needs of federal agencies and their communities. They provide a point of coordination for the development and operation of federal programs having common characteristics. Approximately 85 percent of all federal employees work outside the greater Washington, D.C., area, and the number of FEBs has grown from 10 to 28 over the past 46 years. When President Kennedy established the FEBs, they were located in the major cities in each of the 10 Civil Service Commission administrative regions. He later added 2 more boards, while President Johnson authorized 3 more, President Nixon added 10, and President Ford added 1. Two more boards were added by OPM in the 1990s bringing the total number of boards to 28. Figure 1 shows the metropolitan areas where the 28 boards are located.⁴

⁴Federal executive associations or federal executive councils may be located in places where FEBs do not exist. They have purposes and objectives similar to those of the FEBs, although they do not function within the same formal set of parameters as FEBs (e.g., they are not officially established by Presidential Memorandum nor do they receive policy direction and guidance from OPM).

Figure 1: Location of the 28 FEBs



Sources: GAO analysis based on OPM data and Map Resources (map).

According to the regulations that guide the FEBs, the Director of OPM is responsible for overseeing and directing the operations of all of the FEBs consistent with the law and with the directives of the President. The boards are composed of the federal field office agency heads and military commanders in their cities, and the regulations state that each FEB should have a chair elected by the FEB members to serve a term not to exceed a year. The regulations also state that the boards should be governed by bylaws or other rules for their internal governance that are developed for each board. Although through Presidential Directive FEB membership is mandatory for the senior agency officials within the FEB's geographic

boundaries, the boards have no independent authority and they rely on the voluntary cooperation of their members to accomplish their goals.

The FEB funding structure is unusual within the federal government. The boards have no legislative charter and receive no congressional appropriation. Rather, each FEB is supported by a host agency, usually the agency with the greatest number of employees in the region. These host agencies provide varying levels of staffing, usually one or two full-time positions—an executive director and an executive assistant. Some agencies also temporarily detail employees to the FEB staff to assist their local boards and to provide developmental opportunities for their employees. Additionally, the FEBs are supported by member agencies through contribution of funds as well as in-kind support, such as office space, personal computers, telephone lines, and Internet access.⁵ In 2006, OPM estimated the cost of FEB operations at approximately \$6 million.

FEB Emergency Preparedness and Response Roles and Responsibilities Are Being Developed as a Core Function of the Boards

To assist in standardizing emergency activities across the FEB system, OPM and the FEBs are establishing an emergency preparedness, security, and employee safety set of activities with performance measures that will be common to all of the boards. Although this effort is not completed, all of the selected FEBs were doing some emergency activities, such as hosting emergency preparedness training and exercises. For example, FEMA officials and the FEB representatives reported working together, often with the General Services Administration (GSA), on COOP training and exercises. In the past, some of the selected FEBs also played a role in responding to emergencies, although not all of the FEB representatives felt this was an appropriate activity for the boards.

⁵For a time, under a governmentwide restriction against interagency financing of boards, commissions, or other groups, interagency financing of FEBs was prohibited, including both cash and in-kind financial support. See, 67 Comp. Gen. 27 (1987). However, beginning in 1996, Congress exempted FEBs from this restriction. Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act, Pub. L. No. 104-208, § 613, 110 Stat. 3009, 3009-356 (1996).

OPM and the FEBs Continue to Work on a Common Set of Performance Standards for FEB Emergency Support Activities

OPM and the FEBs are developing a multiyear strategic plan that will include a core function for the FEBs called emergency preparedness, security, and employee safety. The plan will include expectations and measures to assess how well each FEB is performing the activities. OPM has reported working with the boards on emergency planning issues since 2001, and in March 2004, a document summarizing the FEB role in emergency situations was finalized. The boards' emergency support responsibilities include elements such as serving as a federal liaison between state and local emergency officials, establishing notification networks and interagency emergency preparedness councils, and hosting emergency preparedness exercises for agencies. A complete list of the FEB emergency support responsibilities detailed in the 2004 document can be found in appendix II. According to an OPM official, designating emergency support as a core function of the FEBs will further enhance the FEB role in emergency situations. OPM officials recognize that the FEBs can add value to regional preparedness efforts as vehicles for communication, coordination, and capacity building but acknowledge that the emergency activities of the FEBs have varied from board to board. The emergency support function is intended to provide consistent delivery of FEB emergency preparedness and response programs and activities for the federal workforce across the system of 28 boards.

Not all of the representatives from the selected FEBs were convinced that the boards should have an expanded emergency service support role. Although all of the selected boards had some type of emergency communication network and emergency preparedness council in place, there was disagreement among the FEB representatives on the role the FEBs should play in emergency service support, particularly during an emergency. Without adequate staff and resources, some of the executive directors expressed concern that they will not be able to meet expectations. One executive director, for example, noted that because her local board lacked 24/7 communication and coordination abilities, it could not be held accountable for emergency service roles and responsibilities. Another executive director commented that there was a general expectation within the board's metropolitan federal community that the FEB will assume a significant leadership role during a possible future emergency. However, he observed that limited and declining funding does not provide for an effective communication system. As a consequence, he felt this expectation was unrealistic and may contribute to major misunderstandings in the event of a significant emergency.

On the other hand, several of the executive directors felt that the FEBs would be able to accomplish much more in this area with additional

resources. For example, one executive director, with an emergency operations background, emphasized that if the boards were given dependable funding and increased stature within the federal government by formal recognition of their emergency support role, their return on investment in terms of emergency support functions would be substantial. In general, the consensus among those who viewed the FEBs as having an increased role in emergency operations was that with dependable funding and resources, all the boards in the FEB system could and should provide a similar level of emergency operations support. Several FEB representatives also stated that OPM leadership and direction in clearly outlining emergency operations expectations and OPM's oversight of these activities would diminish uncertainty about the boards' role in emergency support, both among the boards and federal agencies in general. They were encouraged by the designation of emergency services as a core FEB function.

All of the Selected FEBs Were Performing Some Emergency Activities

The FEBs are charged with providing timely and relevant information to support emergency preparedness and response coordination, and OPM expects the boards to establish notification networks and communications plans to be used in emergency and nonemergency situations. The boards are also expected to disseminate relevant information received from OPM and other agencies regarding emergency preparedness information and to relay local emergency situation information to parties such as OPM, FEB members, media, and state and local government authorities. FEB representatives generally viewed the boards as an important communications link between Washington and the field and among field agencies. For example, the Atlanta FEB's executive director described the boards as a conduit for both emergency and nonemergency information to member agencies through e-mail, telephone, and Web sites. While many of the items needing dissemination are also passed through normal agency channels, several FEB representatives noted that it usually takes longer for communication to be received through their agency headquarters than through the FEB channel. The Oklahoma FEB chair described the FEBs as central depositories that receive information from headquarters and quickly disseminate that information to the field, reducing the information gap between Washington, D.C., and the rest of the country.

Previously, much of the emergency support responsibility of FEBs was in providing communication regarding hazardous and inclement weather conditions. Almost all of the selected FEBs reported this as an emergency activity for which they continue to have responsibility. For example, the Atlanta FEB executive director said that during potential weather

emergencies, she and members of the Policy and Steering Committee from GSA and the National Weather Service gather information about the forecast and road conditions. The executive director, FEB chair, and members of the Policy and Steering Committee then conduct a 4:00 a.m. conference call to make a decision about suggested agency closings or delayed reporting. Following the conference call, the FEB executive director posts a message on the board's emergency hazard line that designated agency employees can check. This message is also posted to the FEB general telephone line and the FEB Web site. Several of the executive directors emphasized that they can only make recommendations to the federal agencies in their areas of service, but they cannot mandate that federal agencies close for weather or other emergencies.

Although each of the selected boards we reviewed reported conducting communications activities as a key part of its emergency support service, they used a number of different types of communication systems. The Boston FEB, for example, operates two electronic communications mechanisms to be in contact with senior federal agency officials during local and national emergencies, both during and after hours. The first is an Internet portal, developed and maintained by the DHS Federal Protective Service, which is designed to provide senior agency officials access to up-to-date information, such as threat assessments and emergency weather. The second communications system is called EDIAL, housed and maintained by the First U.S. Coast Guard District's 24-hour command system. EDIAL, funded for the FEB by GSA New England, enables the board to communicate with agency officials simultaneously via an electronic telephone message in times of emergency. Several of the executive directors mentioned the importance of having access to the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) cards, a White House-directed emergency phone service. GETS provides emergency preparedness personnel a high probability of completion for their phone calls when the probability of completing a call through normal channels is significantly decreased. The majority of the selected boards reported keeping an emergency contact list for officials in their member agencies.

Several of the executive directors emphasized the importance of standardizing the communications systems of the boards so that every FEB is communicating in the same way. The communication abilities among the selected FEBs did vary, often dependent on the communication system provided by a supporting agency. For example, the Atlanta FEB reported previously using an emergency call-down system supplied by the Atlanta U.S. District Court, but the system was too slow. The executive

director there said she was exploring the possibility of transferring to the Southwestern Emergency Response Network, which would give her greater capacity to notify area agencies in emergency situations. A complaint about many of the FEB communication systems was that they were slow or needed to be manually updated. The Dallas-Fort Worth FEB executive director noted that with the boards becoming more of a national network and serving as backups to one another, the importance of a fully supported national communication network for the FEBs is becoming even more evident.

According to OPM, the FEB role in emergency service support also includes coordination activities. For example, OPM reported that it expects the boards to serve as federal liaisons for state and local emergency officials and to assess local emergency situations in cooperation with federal, state, and local officials. Although all of the boards reported some involvement of state and local officials in their emergency activities, the degree of board connections with state and local officials varied. The Minnesota FEB and the Oklahoma FEB, for example, reported strong relationships with state and local government officials, state and local emergency management leaders, and private sector businesses. The Dallas-Fort Worth FEB executive director reported that the board partners with state and local government representatives, the private sector, law enforcement, and first responders, all of which are key players in assessing local emergency situations. On the other hand, the Chicago FEB executive director said that because Chicago is so large, the board has few established relationships with state and local officials. The chair of the Boston FEB said its board had 24-hour contact numbers for some state officials but not city officials.

In terms of coordination, the FEBs are also charged with identifying a core group of federal leaders in each community to discuss planned courses of action, such as delayed arrival and shelter in place, in the event of an emergency. All of the selected boards had some type of emergency preparedness council. In the case of the Los Angeles FEB, however, the emergency preparedness committee had to disband because of significant transportation challenges in the Los Angeles area. The board's executive director said they now have an emergency preparedness e-mail group. In addition, OPM expects the boards to provide problem resolution assistance as appropriate, to include identifying federal resources that may be available to assist the community in responding to, or recovering from, an emergency. Examples of some of the selected boards' past responses during emergencies are detailed in a section below.

OPM expects the FEBs in their capacity-building role to facilitate training for member agencies regarding their responsibilities related to occupant emergency plans, COOP planning, and other emergency preparedness topics. All of the selected FEBs reported hosting at least one emergency preparedness briefing, training, or exercise during the past year. The Minnesota FEB, for example, hosted homeland security briefings by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Transportation Security Administration, the Minnesota Department of Health, the Secret Service, FEMA, the Federal Protective Service, state and county emergency management directors, and the Department of Defense. The Denver FEB conducts a yearly scenario-based COOP exercise usually in conjunction with FEMA, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), and GSA. In addition to other preparedness exercises, the Chicago FEB hosted an exercise dealing with emergency preparedness and people with disabilities. Several FEB representatives made the point that these emergency preparedness exercises and activities are particularly valuable for the smaller federal agencies. While military, law enforcement, and public safety federal agencies may have a solid grasp of emergency preparedness, some of the smaller administrative agencies need help defining what their responsibilities are in this area. In addition, an FEB executive director and a chair said that the interagency exercises help to ensure that federal workers are receiving consistent treatment across the agencies.

FEB Representatives Reported Working with FEMA on COOP Planning

One of the FEB emergency support responsibilities is facilitating COOP training for federal agencies, and the FEB representatives reported working with FEMA and, in many cases, GSA to accomplish this. As mentioned previously, COOP planning is an effort conducted by agencies to ensure that the capability exists to continue essential agency functions across a wide range of potential emergencies. FEMA, GSA, and OPM are the three agencies that have the most direct impact on individual agency efforts to develop viable COOP capabilities. FEMA, as the lead agency for executive branch COOP planning, has responsibility for formulating guidance, facilitating interagency coordination, and assessing the status of executive branch COOP capabilities. GSA is responsible for working with FEMA in providing COOP training for federal agencies and assisting agencies in acquiring alternate facilities in the event of an emergency, while OPM is responsible for maintaining and revising human capital management guidance for emergency situations and assisting the heads of other departments and agencies with personnel management and staffing during national security emergencies.

FEB representatives said they work with FEMA and GSA to develop and strengthen agency COOP and other emergency plans. For example, most of the boards have COOP working groups or emergency committees, often lead by FEMA and GSA, which help conduct various emergency exercises. The exercises are designed to provide insight and guidance that can be used to develop specific action plans that address interruptions in services provided by their agencies, and FEB representatives said that COOP plans are tested through these exercises. A FEMA official testified in May 2006 that the COOP working groups established with the FEBs in New Orleans, Houston, and Miami prior to the hurricanes of 2005 and the many COOP training and exercise activities conducted by these organizations were instrumental in facilitating federal agency recovery and reconstitution efforts following hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma.⁶ During the past year, FEMA Region III nominated the Philadelphia FEB COOP working group for a 2006 Excellence in Government Award because the group had improved the federal image of preparedness among the Philadelphia community through training, exercises, and interagency coordination projects. The group received a Silver Medal Award as a result of the nomination. As another example of joint activities, through a campaign that is a collaboration between FEMA, the Red Cross, and other emergency response groups, the Boston FEB hosted a series of seminars aimed at educating employees about home preparedness.

Almost all of the FEB executive directors or chairs from the selected boards cited a positive and beneficial working relationship with FEMA. Some of the executive directors also said that a strong relationship exists between their boards and the FEMA regional directors in their areas. In addition, the regional FEMA officials we interviewed all said the FEBs assist FEMA with its mission. Another FEMA official noted that reaching out to the field can be difficult, but the FEBs provide communications and access to the majority of federal agencies, which makes FEMA's job much easier. Although FEMA does not have a formal agreement with the FEBs, FEMA and the FEBs have common interests in making sure the federal workforce is protected, and the relationship proves mutually beneficial. According to a FEMA official, many of the agencies in the field have COOP policies, procedures, and planning in place in part because the FEBs have assisted FEMA in getting this program out to them. He noted that the FEBs carry the COOP activities forward and, although the boards operate under

⁶Statement of Robert Shea, Acting Director of Operations Federal Emergency Management Agency, House Committee on Government Reform, May 24, 2006.

tenuous conditions, their outreach is invaluable. Similar to most of the opinions expressed regarding FEMA's work with the FEBs, the Seattle FEB chair said that FEMA has displayed active leadership and has proven to be a good connection for sharing information.

FEBS Have Played a Role in Responding to Past Emergencies

The Oklahoma FEB response to the bombing of the Oklahoma City Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995, illustrates the role of some of the boards in aiding emergency response. The board staff knew all of the agencies in the Murrah Building; the home telephone numbers of critical staff; the city, county, and state principals in Oklahoma City; and which federal agencies were available to provide immediate relief and support. According to the Oklahoma executive director, with the information the FEB was able to provide and a blueprint of the Murrah Building, the first responders were able to determine where they might find more people after the bombing. The FEB staff also played a role in providing support to the victims and families of those who died in the bombing through activities such as arranging counseling. In addition, shortly after the disaster the Oklahoma FEB hosted a meeting with the Vice President in which local agency leaders discussed what worked well and what needed attention in recovering from the disaster.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita represented huge disasters in the history of our nation, and according to a FEMA official, through these catastrophes the New Orleans FEB's executive director established and maintained an essential communication link between FEMA's Office of National Security Coordination (ONSC) and OPM. A FEMA official noted that many federal agencies, specifically smaller agencies or agencies with limited resources, were better prepared because of the coordination, collaboration, training, and resource sharing the New Orleans FEB was able to provide. The New Orleans FEB executive director also became part of the nation's first federal agency COOP and Reconstitution Team, made up of representatives from the New Orleans and Dallas-Fort Worth FEBs, GSA, NARA, OPM, and FEMA. Additionally, following the interruption of communications and loss of contact with federal leaders, the executive director was able to work through ONSC to locate and reestablish contact with all members of the FEB Policy Committee at their alternate sites, beginning the reconstitution of the New Orleans FEB. The FEB served as a conduit for information between Washington and the representative local agencies, and the Policy Committee was able to provide status updates to identify common needs or problems that agency leaders were facing that required expedited assistance to resolve. According to a FEMA official, the lessons learned during the conference calls with the New Orleans FEB

Policy Committee following Hurricane Katrina allowed for better national response and coordination during Hurricane Rita. The New Orleans FEB executive director reported that part of her role during Hurricane Katrina was to raise awareness that many of the essential personnel of the federal workforce in New Orleans had no housing and, therefore, were not able to return to work. Eventually, essential federal and local workers and members of the New Orleans police and fire departments and their families were housed aboard ships.

As another example of FEB support following hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, FEMA Region V put into place a temporary Chicago call center that was scheduled to open in early September 2005. The call center was created in response to the projected volume of calls from victims of the disasters to enable FEMA to more effectively and rapidly communicate with them. Because of the requirement that call center staff must be fingerprinted and have security clearances, federal employees were the only ones who could immediately meet FEMA's need to staff the center. The Chicago FEB executive director coordinated with agency officials in soliciting nearly 300 federal employees who were detailed to the center while negotiations were being conducted with a contractor who would then backfill these positions. According to FEMA and the Chicago FEB, the effort in sharing federal personnel was highly successful.

During nonemergency but disruptive events, such as political conventions or rallies, the FEBs in the affected areas have helped to contain the potential disturbance for federal agencies' operations. For example, the FEB representatives from Boston and New York City said their boards played a role during the national political conventions held there in the summer of 2004. In preparation for the events, OPM conducted a series of emergency preparedness seminars for local agency representatives through the FEBs in both cities. The sessions provided information on emergency planning and human resource flexibilities available to agencies for use in emergency situations and during major public events and were designed to prepare all federal agencies for emergencies, both natural and man-made. In addition, OPM gave the Boston FEB vice chair and the New York City chair onetime authority during the event to make decisions regarding the nonemergency workforce should that become necessary. As another example, during the immigration rallies in the summer of 2006 in Chicago, the Chicago FEB reported that it was communicating with the Federal Protective Service, which shared security information with the board. The Chicago FEB was able to pass this information on to the local agencies so employees could prepare and make alternative travel arrangements since some streets were closed.

The FEBs Face Key Challenges in Providing Emergency Support Services

The distinctive characteristics of the FEBs within the federal government help to explain the key challenges the boards face in providing emergency support services. Factors including the boards' lack of a defined role in national emergency support structures, their accountability framework, and the differences in their capacities present challenges in providing a needed level of emergency support across the FEB service areas.

A Defined FEB Role in National Emergency Plans Would Better Ensure That the Boards Can Effectively Carry Out Their Emergency Support Role

According to several FEMA officials we interviewed, the FEBs could carry out their emergency support role more effectively if their role was included in national emergency management plans. FEMA officials from two different regions with responsibility for emergency activities in 11 states said they felt the boards could be used more effectively and that they add value to the nation's emergency operations. They agreed with several of the FEB executive directors we interviewed who felt the boards lacked recognition within the federal government's emergency response structure and that their value in emergency support was often overlooked by federal agency officials unfamiliar with their capabilities. A FEMA regional director noted that it is very important that the FEB emergency support role is understood, and he believed including the boards in emergency management plans was an opportunity to communicate the role of the FEBs and how they could contribute in emergencies involving the federal workforce.

The FEMA officials provided examples of areas where the FEBs could support the existing emergency response structure and where the boards' role could be defined in emergency management plans. For example, while FEBs are not first responders, the National Response Plan's⁷ emphasis on local emergency response suggests using the existing local connections and relationships established by the FEBs. The National Response Plan is also intended to provide a framework for how federal departments and agencies will work together and coordinate with state, local, tribal, private sector, and nongovernmental organizations during incidents through the establishment of several multiagency coordination structures. Among other activities, these coordination structures are

⁷The National Response Plan is designed to provide the structure for the coordination of federal support for disaster response with a basic premise that incidents are generally handled at the lowest jurisdictional level possible. State and local resources provide the first line of emergency response and incident management support.

responsible for maintaining situational awareness,⁸ information sharing, and communications; coordinating internal operations; and coordinating among the different entities. The FEMA officials agreed that the FEBs could provide support to the existing emergency response structure via these multiagency coordination centers, given the FEBs' connections and knowledge of their local communities. The boards could provide real-time information to the centers and have access to status reports that they could share with high-level federal officials within their service areas during an emergency affecting the federal workforce.

FEMA officials had specific suggestions for where formal inclusion of the FEBs should be considered in multiagency coordination centers. One official noted that when a disaster threatens the federal community, it would be advantageous for the FEB to have a seat in the joint field office (JFO). A JFO is a temporary federal facility established locally to coordinate operational federal assistance activities to the affected areas during incidents of national significance. Within the JFO, senior federal representatives form a multiagency coordination entity and direct their staff in the JFO to share information, aid in establishing priorities among incidents and associated resource allocation, and provide strategic coordination of various federal incident management activities. The reasoning behind the suggestion to include the FEBs was that the boards have knowledge of the departments and agencies in their cities, making them able to assess the status of the local federal community affected by the disaster. According to the same official, another place for the FEBs to contribute that merits consideration is the regional response coordination center, which coordinates regional response efforts, establishes federal priorities, and implements local federal program support until a JFO is established.

FEMA officials also suggested that the FEBs could maintain the vital records related to COOP, such as alternative COOP sites, phone numbers, and emergency contacts. FEMA officials proposed that FEMA could

⁸See GAO, *Homeland Security: Opportunities Exist to Enhance Collaboration at 24/7 Operations Centers Staffed by Multiple DHS Agencies*, GAO-07-89 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 20, 2006). This report described situational awareness as a continual process of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating intelligence, information, and knowledge to allow organizations and individuals to anticipate requirements, react effectively, and establish a common operational picture. Additionally, situational assessment includes the evaluation and interpretation of information gathered from a variety of sources that when communicated to emergency managers and decision makers, can provide a basis for incident management decision making.

provide technical assistance to the FEBs to develop a COOP directory format containing the specific information for their member agencies, while the FEBs would be responsible for maintaining, updating, protecting, and distributing the directory. FEMA officials also suggested that it may be helpful for the FEBs and FEMA to draft a memorandum of understanding that formalizes the role and responsibilities of the FEBs in assisting FEMA with COOP and other emergency activities.

The need for formal agreements on emergency roles and responsibilities has been highlighted in our previous work.⁹ For example, in assessing the response to Hurricane Katrina, we recommended that it was important for FEMA and the Red Cross to clarify their respective roles and responsibilities. In May 2006, the two organizations entered into a memorandum of understanding that outlines their areas of mutual support and cooperation in disaster response and recovery operations and in performance of their respective roles under the National Response Plan.

The Operational Framework for the Boards Poses Accountability Challenges

According to OPM, leadership and oversight of the FEBs is conducted from OPM Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Although the FEB regulations state that the chairs of the FEBs should report to OPM through regional representatives, who were charged with overseeing the activities of their FEBs, an OPM official explained that the regional oversight these regulations refer to is now done from headquarters. Within OPM, the Associate Director for Human Capital Leadership and Merit System Accountability (HCLMSA) supervises the Director for FEB Operations. Within the HCLMSA division, the field services group managers are intended to serve in a liaison and support role with the FEBs in their geographic areas. An OPM official said there are five field service managers who interact with the FEBs in their jurisdictions. While the official said the managers are not expected to provide oversight of FEB activities, they are expected to regularly attend FEB executive board meetings and help coordinate OPM-provided training. Some FEB representatives reported that their OPM field service managers were active in their FEBs, while others said their managers were not.

⁹See, for example, GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005), and *Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: Coordination between FEMA and the Red Cross Should Be Improved for the 2006 Hurricane Season*, [GAO-06-712](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 8, 2006).

In light of the recent emphasis on systemwide expectations and accountability measures for the boards, many of the FEB representatives we interviewed believed OPM needs to provide additional leadership and feedback to them. The relationship between OPM and the FEBs is complicated, in part because the boards need a certain level of autonomy to address regionally identified issues through projects and programs specific to their localities. More recently, however, particularly with the emergency support expectations for the boards that cut across the FEB system, many of the FEB representatives felt more assistance and feedback from OPM on FEB activities are warranted. Many were frustrated with what they perceived as a lack of priority given to the boards by OPM. For example, some noted that the Director of FEB Operations is a one-person office, which they felt was inadequate to meet the needs of and provide oversight for the 28 boards. Several of the FEB representatives also pointed to a recent incident where the FEB system's host Web site server, contracted out by OPM, was defaced. Service was not restored to some of the FEB Web sites until several weeks later.

The accountability structure for the FEB executive directors poses additional challenges. An OPM official reported that the executive directors are rated by their supervisors of record in their host agencies. In 2004, OPM worked with the FEB executive directors to develop critical performance standards to be used by the FEB chairs to provide input to the host agency supervisors on the performance of the FEB executive directors. Executive directors were asked by OPM to use the standards to solicit input from their FEB chairs for their performance evaluations, although there is no provision to ensure the performance standards are consistently applied among the individual director ratings. Of the 14 selected boards, 5 boards had an arrangement where the performance appraisal was done by the host agency supervisor who received performance appraisal input from the FEB chair. Four executive directors reported they were rated by their host agencies with no input from the FEB chairs, while for four of the executive directors, the chair provided the executive director's rating to the host agency. One executive director did not receive a performance appraisal because she was still considered an employee of one agency even though her salary was paid by another agency.

Some of the executive directors we interviewed said that under their current accountability structure, they answer to OPM, the chair or policy committee of the FEB, and the board's host agency, which generally pays their salaries. When asked about accountability, some of the executive directors said they would follow the host agency's guidance given that

their salaries were paid by them. Others said they would answer primarily to their chairs or policy committees. One of the FEB representatives noted that he believes the current performance system does not reward high-performing FEBs.

Varying FEB Capacities Test the Boards' Ability to Provide Consistent Levels of Emergency Support Services across the Country

As we reported in 2004, the context in which the FEBs operate, including varying capacities among the boards for emergency preparedness efforts, could lead to inconsistent levels of preparedness across the nation.¹⁰ Figure 2 illustrates that the service areas of the FEBs differ substantially in the size of their formal jurisdictions, and table 1 shows how the number of federal employees¹¹ and agencies served by each board varies. These factors may affect a board's capacity to provide emergency support. For example, FEB representatives from Chicago and Los Angeles said their locations in large cities made providing FEB emergency support services for their service areas more difficult. The Los Angeles executive director, for example, noted that the Los Angeles FEB primarily serves a six-county area in the immediate vicinity of Los Angeles with notable transportation problems. This makes in-person meetings a challenge. The service area includes approximately 120,000 federal employees from 230 different agencies. Yet the executive director noted that the FEB's staffing is similar to that of FEBs covering much smaller areas and numbers of employees and agencies. The Cincinnati FEB, in contrast, covers approximately 15,000 federal employees from 90 different agencies. Appendix III lists the 28 FEBs along with their host agencies.

¹⁰[GAO-04-384](#).

¹¹The figures include military employees.

Figure 2: Jurisdictional Boundaries of the 28 FEBs



Source: GAO presentation of OPM information.

^aIncludes civilian agencies in Guam.

Table 1: Number of Federal Employees and Agencies Served by Each FEB in Descending Order of Employees Served

FEB	Federal employees served	Number of federal agencies
Los Angeles	118,250	230
San Antonio	91,130	68
Oklahoma	78,681	252
Honolulu-Pacific	72,155	96
San Francisco	70,000	150
Baltimore	69,488	140
Chicago	64,803	180
St. Louis	62,155	82
New York City	61,578	152
Atlanta	58,020	120
Dallas-Fort Worth	49,855	144
Philadelphia	48,238	154
Seattle	47,233	147
Boston	45,479	150
Denver	39,161	160
Kansas City	38,906	134
Newark	38,270	79
Minnesota	35,806	120
South Florida	35,672	129
Detroit	32,733	85
New Mexico	32,102	94
Oregon	31,000	225
Houston	29,419	115
Cleveland	25,842	91
Pittsburgh	24,898	107
New Orleans	20,141 ^a	71 ^a
Buffalo	15,935	100
Cincinnati	14,727	90

Source: OPM.

^aNumbers are under review because of Hurricane Katrina.

There is no consistency for funding the FEBs nationwide, and the levels of support provided to the boards in terms of operating expenses, personnel, and equipment vary considerably. For example, some of the executive directors reported they received an operating budget allocation for travel

and supplies, while others said they received nothing or very little in this regard. Without adequate and consistent levels of funding and resources across the FEB system, some FEB representatives we interviewed were skeptical as to whether any standardization of emergency activities could be implemented.

The FEBs' dependence on host agencies and other member agencies for their resources also creates uncertainty for the boards in planning and committing to provide emergency support services. The lack of funding in a particular year may curtail the amount of emergency support an individual board could provide. Many of the FEB representatives characterized the board funding structure as dysfunctional, and some expressed concern that their activities will be further affected by reduced agency funding and resource support as agency budgets grow more constrained. When boards' funding is precarious, the executive directors spend the majority of their time soliciting resources from member agencies, without adequate time or resources to focus on mission-related activities. Federal agencies that have voluntarily funded FEB positions in the past have begun to withdraw their funding support. Of our 14 case study boards, representatives from 3 of the boards said they had recently had their host agencies withdraw funding for their boards' executive assistant positions. Several FEB representatives felt the uncertainty about the funding of the FEBs raises questions as to the survivability of the system and its ability to fulfill its emergency support function.

Recognizing that the capacities of FEBs vary across the nation, OPM established an internal working group in August 2003 to study the strengths and weaknesses of the boards. According to OPM, the working group reviewed funding and staffing levels for possible recommendations of funding enhancements in challenged areas and developed several products to assist OPM in communicating the value of the FEBs to agencies. In 2006, OPM proposed a three-part plan, including restructuring the network of 28 boards to try to address the resource issues of some of the boards by combining them with other boards. Federal population numbers and geographic proximity of existing FEBs were used to develop the proposed structure, which reduced the 28 boards into a system of 21 boards. The majority of the FEBs did not support the restructuring component of the plan, asserting that the proposal was not well developed and stressing the importance of maintaining local presence for FEB operations and activities in the current locations. OPM decided not to pursue the approach. However, OPM officials said they will revisit restructuring the FEB network if resource issues remain a problem.

There have been different options considered for FEB funding in the past. For example, in 1988, OPM developed a budget proposal to include in its fiscal year 1990 budget submission base dollars and full-time equivalents to fully fund the FEBs. Ultimately, OPM reported only receiving a fraction of the money requested, and OPM did not request additional funding for the next fiscal year. OPM has not requested funding of this type for the FEBs since that time. The current funding arrangements continue to emphasize local agency responsibility whereby usually one major department or agency in each city provides funding for an executive director and an assistant, although other federal agencies can contribute. OPM officials said they continue to support local agency commitment to the FEBs. From OPM's vantage point, the boards that have developed strong relationships with their partner agencies have more success securing the necessary resources within existing funding arrangements. Although OPM officials stated they play an integral role in facilitating discussions to resolve FEB funding issues, some of the FEB representatives reported that OPM told them that if any of the FEBs encountered funding difficulties, the boards were on their own to solve the problems since the FEBs were unwilling to accept OPM's restructuring proposal.

The problem of unstable resources is one that could affect any networked organization similar to the FEBs that relies, more or less, on voluntary contributions from members. Agencies may be reluctant to contribute resources to an initiative that is not perceived as central to their responsibilities, especially during periods of budgetary constraints. This reluctance may, however, limit the long-term investment of the federal government in working more collaboratively. For example, we recently reported on the Joint Planning and Development Office (JPDO), a congressionally created entity designed to plan for and coordinate a transformation from the current air traffic control system to the next generation air transportation system by 2025.¹² Housed within the Federal Aviation Administration, JPDO has seven federal partner agencies. One of the greatest challenges that JPDO officials cited was creating mechanisms to leverage partner agency resources. Although leveraging efforts have worked well so far, we noted that JPDO could face difficulties in securing needed agency resources if the priorities of the partner agencies change

¹²GAO, *Next Generation Air Transportation System: Progress and Challenges Associated with the Transformation of the National Airspace System*, [GAO-07-25](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 13, 2006).

over time. This has been a long-standing problem for the FEBs as well. In a 1984 report, we concluded that although the FEBs have contributed to improved field management, the future of the boards was uncertain because funding for staff and board participation had declined.¹³ Similar to the boards' current situation, in 1983, five FEBs lost all or part of their staff support as agency budgets grew more constrained.

In Canada, the federal government has adopted a mix of both central funding and departmental contributions for its regional coordinating entities. Regional federal councils, the Canadian equivalent of the FEBs, are sustained by a balance between central funding and departmental contributions at the local level. The role of the councils was the subject of in-depth consideration by Canadian government officials in 1996, and at that time, the Treasury Board increased the level of support it provided to the councils, including central funding to support staff positions and some operating expenses. A 2000 report on the councils concluded that a balance between central funding and departmental contributions at the local level may well be the model best suited to financially sustain the councils.¹⁴

Although OPM and the FEBs are now involved in a strategic planning effort, OPM has not to date considered the resource requirements to support an expanded emergency support role for the FEBs. Yet, as we have pointed out in our previous reports, a strategic plan should include a description of the resources—both sources and types—that will be needed for the strategies intended to achieve the plan's goals and objectives.

¹³GAO, *Federal Executive Boards Contribute To Improved Field Management But Future Is Uncertain*, GAO/GGD-84-31 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 6, 1984).

¹⁴Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, *Regional Federal Councils*, January 2000.

The Nature of Pandemic Influenza May Make the FEBs a Particularly Valuable Asset in Pandemic Preparedness and Response

Despite the challenges the FEBs face in providing emergency support, their potential to add value to the nation's emergency preparedness and response is particularly evident given an event like pandemic influenza. 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. Using their established and developing community relationships to facilitate communication and coordination with local federal agency leaders and state and local governments, FEBs are well positioned to assist in pandemic preparedness and response. In the current pandemic planning stages, many of the selected FEBs were already acting as conveners, hosting pandemic influenza preparedness events, such as briefings and training and exercises, and were considering how federal agencies could share resources during a pandemic.

Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response Present Different Concerns Than Localized Natural Disasters

According to the Homeland Security Council, the distributed nature of a pandemic, as well as the sheer burden of disease across the nation, means that the physical and material support states, localities, and tribal entities can expect from the federal government will be limited in comparison to the aid it mobilizes for geographically and temporarily bounded disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes. Unlike those incidents that are discretely bounded in space or time, an influenza pandemic could spread across the globe over the course of months or over a year, possibly in waves, and would affect communities of all sizes and compositions. While a pandemic will not directly damage physical infrastructure, such as power lines or computer systems, it threatens the operation of critical systems by potentially removing the essential personnel needed to operate them from the workplace for weeks or months.

The Homeland Security Council issued two documents to help address the unique aspects of pandemic influenza. The November 2005 National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza is intended to guide the overall effort to address the threat and provide a planning framework consistent with the National Security Strategy and the National Strategy for Homeland Security. This planning framework is also intended to be linked with the National Response Plan. In May 2006, the Homeland Security Council also issued the Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza. This plan lays out broad implementation requirements and responsibilities among the appropriate federal agencies and also describes expectations for nonfederal stakeholders, including state and local governments, the private sector, international partners, and individuals. Further, all federal agencies are expected to develop their own pandemic plans that along with other requirements, describe how each agency will

provide for the health and safety of its employees and support the federal government's efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a pandemic.

The Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza states that the greatest burden of the pandemic response will be in the local communities. Local communities will have to address the medical and nonmedical effects of pandemic influenza with available resources. The implementation plan maintains that it is essential for communities, tribes, states, and regions to have plans in place to support the full spectrum of their needs over the course of weeks or months, and for the federal government to provide clear guidance on the manner in which these needs may be met. As pandemic influenza presents unique challenges to the coordination of the federal effort, joint and integrated planning across all levels of government and the private sector is essential to ensure that available national capabilities and authorities produce detailed plans and response actions that are complementary, compatible, and coordinated.

FEBs' Unique Role in the Local Federal Community Can Aid in Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response

Research has shown that systems like the FEBs have proven to be valuable public management tools because they can operate horizontally, across agencies in this case, and integrate the strengths and resources of a variety of organizations in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to effectively address critical public problems, such as pandemic influenza.¹⁵ Government leaders are increasingly finding that using traditional hierarchical organizations does not allow them to successfully address complex problems. As a result, they are beginning to explore the use of collaborative networks that reach across agencies and programs.

The boards bring together the federal agency leaders in their service areas and have a long history of establishing and maintaining communication links, coordinating intergovernmental activities, identifying common ground, and building cooperative relationships. Documents supporting the establishment of the FEBs noted that it is important that field executives have a broader picture of government and a general understanding of the interrelationships of government activity. The boards also partner with

¹⁵See, for example, [GAO-06-15](#), and Donald P. Moynihan, *Leveraging Collaborative Networks in Infrequent Emergency Situations* (Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for the Business of Government, June 2005).

community organizations and participate as a unified federal force in local civic affairs. This connection to the local community could play a role in pandemic influenza preparedness and response as predisaster relationship building and planning are often the cornerstones to incident management.

Many of the selected FEBs cultivated relationships within their federal, state, and local governments and their metropolitan area community organizations as a natural outgrowth of their general activities. For example, FEB activities, such as the Combined Federal Campaign and scholarship programs, brought the boards into contact with local charities and school boards. In addition, through activities such as hosting emergency preparedness training or through participation in certain committees, some of the selected FEBs reported a connection with emergency management officials, first responders, and health officials in their communities. Through their facilitation of COOP exercises and training, the FEBs bring together government leaders, health officials, and first responders in a venue where the parties can share ideas, discuss plans, and coordinate approaches. The San Francisco FEB executive director and chair said they attend FEMA's Regional Interaction Steering Committee meetings, which brought them in contact with federal, state, and local government emergency management partners. The Minnesota FEB plays an active role in both the Association of Minnesota Emergency Managers (AMEM) and the Metropolitan (Twin Cities) Emergency Managers Association. The Minnesota FEB executive director, for example, serves on the AMEM board of directors as federal agency liaison, a newly created partnership with the organization. As another example, the Oklahoma FEB partnered with the fire departments in Oklahoma City and Tulsa to provide site visits to the federal agencies there to help strengthen emergency preparedness plans and update evacuation and shelter-in-place plans. The executive director said the site visits also provided agency leaders with the opportunity to interact with the most likely first responders in the event of an emergency and to obtain valuable information to include in emergency preparedness plans.

As with the boards' emergency support role in general, some of the FEB representatives envisioned their boards taking a more active role in pandemic influenza preparedness and response than others did. While some FEB representatives stressed the unique characteristics of the boards that position them to help prepare and respond to pandemic influenza, others noted the boards' limited staffing and resources. One FEB executive director remarked that although the boards have no real authority, they are valuable because of the community relationships they have forged and their unique ability to coordinate resources and

communicate. As previously discussed, several representatives were concerned, however, about the role the FEBs could play in the event of a large-scale emergency, such as an influenza pandemic.

FEBs Are Acting as Conveners to Deliver Planning and Training Needed for Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Have a Potential Role in Pandemic Response

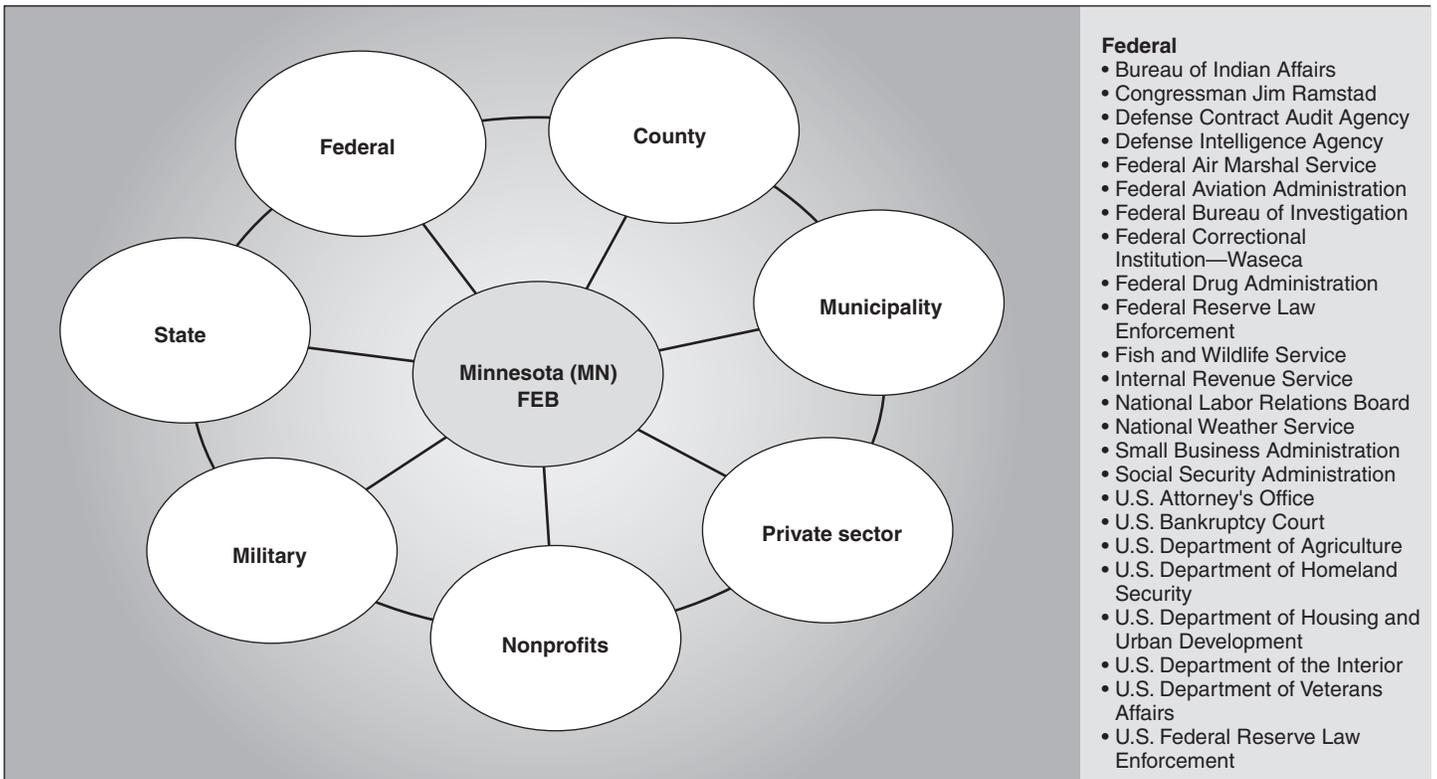
In terms of current pandemic planning, many of the selected FEBs were building capacity for pandemic influenza response within their member agencies and community organizations by hosting pandemic influenza training and exercises. The Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza highlights training and exercises as an important element of pandemic planning. For example, 13 of the 14 selected FEBs were involved in pandemic influenza-related activities that ranged from informational briefings to coordinating pandemic exercises, some that included nonprofit organizations, the private sector, and government. The one exception was the New Orleans FEB, where the executive director said the board is still too heavily involved with Hurricane Katrina recovery to focus on helping agencies to collaborate on pandemic influenza preparedness.

A number of the selected FEBs have held pandemic influenza tabletop exercises. A pandemic influenza tabletop exercise would be based on a fictitious account of a plausible outbreak of pandemic influenza with scenarios constructed to facilitate problem solving and to provoke thinking about gaps and vulnerabilities. The Boston FEB, together with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency and FEMA, held a pandemic influenza tabletop exercise in November 2006. The exercise objectives included goals such as helping to increase the awareness of federal, state, local, and tribal government agencies of the requirement to incorporate pandemic influenza procedures into COOP planning and identifying special considerations for protecting the health and safety of employees and maintaining essential government functions and services during a pandemic outbreak. In addition, the Baltimore FEB hosted a pandemic influenza exercise on November 1, 2006, facilitated by FEMA Region III and the Maryland Emergency Management Agency. The Seattle FEB, with the assistance of FEMA and the City of Seattle, sponsored an all-day conference in October 2006 called Pandemic Flu: Get Smart, Get Ready! Conversation Tools and Tips.

The Minnesota FEB has been a leader among the boards in pandemic influenza planning. Using a tabletop exercise it created, the board hosted its first pandemic influenza exercise in February 2006, with a follow-up exercise in October 2006. The October exercise included approximately 180 participants from 100 organizations within federal agencies, state and

local government, and the private sector. Figure 3 illustrates the breadth of participation in the exercises, including key infrastructure businesses such as power and telecommunications. The Minnesota FEB executive director noted that Minnesota has excellent state and local government relationships, which help to facilitate planning of this nature. Examples of partnerships the board has with state and local entities include those with the State of Minnesota Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, the Minnesota Department of Health, the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce, and the American Red Cross.

Figure 3: Participants in Two Minnesota FEB Pandemic Tabletop Exercises



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Geological Survey • U.S. Marshals Service • U.S. Postal Service • U.S. Probation District of MN • U.S. Secret Service • Veterans Health Administration <p>State</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airport Police Department • Metropolitan Airports Commission • MN Dept. of Agriculture • MN Dept. of Employee Relations • MN Dept. of Finance • MN Dept. of Health • MN Dept. of Human Services • MN Dept. of Revenue • MN Homeland Security and Emergency Management • MN Office of Enterprise Technology • MN State Lottery • MN-1 Disaster Medical Assistance Team • State of MN <p>Military</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airlift Wing-133rd • Airlift Wing-934th 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Defense—Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officer • Military Affairs • MN National Guard • U.S. Air Force Reserve • U.S. Army Corps of Engineers • U.S. Army—88th Regional Readiness Command • U.S. Army Reserve • U.S. Navy Reserve Center • U.S. Pacific Command Joint Information Operations Center • Other representatives from the Army, Navy, and Air Force <p>County</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anoka • Dakota • Dodge • Eagan • Fillmore • Hennepin • Human Services of Faribault and Martin Counties • Martin • Meeker • Mower • Olmsted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramsey • Scott • Steele • Wabasha • Washington • Watonwan • Winona • Yellow Medicine <p>Municipality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blaine • Bloomington • Brooklyn Center • Brooklyn Park • Burnsville • Edina • Metropolitan Emergency Services Board • Minneapolis • Plymouth • Robbinsdale • St. Louis Park • St. Paul • West St. Paul <p>Nonprofits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Red Cross • Greater Twin Cities United Way • National Marrow Donor Program • Western Lake Superior 	<p>Private sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agribank • American Radio Relay League • American Security • Ameriprise • Best Buy • Cargill • CFC Technology • Channel One • Christensen Farms • Deluxe • E. Lord Consulting • Electrical Utility • First Premier Bank • GMAC Enterprise Risk Services • Medtronic • Mission Mode Solutions • Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant • Nuclear Management Company • Simple Computing Solutions • Target • Time Warner Cable • United Health Group • Valspar • West Health • Wells Fargo
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Source: GAO presentation of MN FEB information.

The *Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza* emphasizes that government and public health officials must communicate clearly and continuously with the public throughout a pandemic. The plan recognized that timely, accurate, credible, and coordinated messages will be necessary. According to many of the FEB representatives we interviewed, the communications function of the boards is a key part of their activities and could be an important asset for pandemic response. For example, when asked about the role they envision the FEBs playing in the response to a pandemic, the Dallas-Fort Worth FEB representatives said that because the board is viewed by its member agencies as a credible source of information, the board’s role should be to coordinate communications among member agencies. They gave the example of the Department of Health and Human Services working through the board to disseminate medical information to their local community.

In addition to their communications role, during pandemic influenza the FEBs have the potential to broaden the situational awareness of member agency leaders and emergency coordinators and provide a forum to inform their decisions, similar to what the FEBs provide for other hazards, such as inclement weather conditions. A FEMA official noted that FEBs have vital knowledge of the federal agencies in their jurisdictions, which can provide valuable situational awareness to community emergency responders.

Some of the FEBs were also considering the role they can play in assisting member agencies by supporting human capital functions, such as supporting the federal workforce and coordinating the deployment of personnel among member agencies as may be appropriate. Several FEB representatives said, for example, that they were considering how they could provide assistance in coordinating support to federal agencies responding to pandemic influenza, such as addressing personnel shortages by locating available resources among member agencies. Other FEB representatives we interviewed reiterated a theme that even the critical federal employees in the field can be left to fend for themselves when disasters strike their communities. Consequently, they are not able to handle the emergency issues of the federal government. For example, according to the New Orleans executive director, in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina the oil and gas workers had their companies as powerful advocates in securing housing for them so they could resume working. She reported that in sharp contrast, there was no entity nationally that was an advocate for the local federal workforce to ensure the speedy reconstitution of essential services. In the majority of cases, she said that essential federal employees queued up for temporary housing in long lines. She intervened to bring attention to the need for expedited temporary housing for federal employees, who were responsible for providing essential functions, but who were also victims of the disaster.

To avoid a similar situation during pandemic influenza, the Minnesota and Oklahoma FEBs are trying to negotiate with their states to create memorandums of agreement between the states and the federal agencies, represented by the FEBs. Their objectives are to identify how medical supplies and vaccines from the Advanced Pharmaceutical Cache (APC) or the Strategic National Stockpile, which will be distributed by the states, will be dispersed to essential federal government employees in the event of a pandemic or bioterrorist attack. To accomplish this, the FEBs are working with their federal members to apply the states' guidelines for vaccine priorities to the federal workforce in their areas of service so that essential federal employees, such as air traffic controllers, federal law

enforcement officers, and correctional facilities staff, are appropriately integrated in the state vaccine distribution plans. They also want to identify federal agencies and their resources that can augment the states' operation of the mass vaccine dispensing sites. The Minnesota FEB has inventoried all of the federal agencies within its jurisdiction and feels it has a good idea of the resources that will be needed. According to the Minnesota FEB executive director, however, Minnesota currently does not have enough medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, and vaccines in its APC to cover the emergency personnel of the federal government in Minnesota nor does it have the resources for purchasing these supplies.

Conclusions

Achieving results for the nation increasingly requires that federal agencies work with each other and with the communities in which they serve. The federal executive boards are uniquely able to bring together federal agency and community leaders in major metropolitan areas outside Washington, D.C., to meet and discuss issues of common interest, such as preparing for and responding to pandemic influenza. As we reported in 2004, such a role is a natural outgrowth of general FEB activities and can add value in coordinating emergency operations efforts.

Several interrelated issues limit the capacity of FEBs to provide a consistent and sustained contribution to emergency preparedness and response. These issues may present limitations to other areas of FEB activities, not solely to emergency preparedness. Among them are the following:

- The role of the FEBs in emergency support is not defined in national emergency guidance and plans.
- Performance standards, for which the boards will be held accountable, with accompanying measures, are not fully developed for FEB emergency support activities.
- The availability of continuing resource support for the FEBs is uncertain and the continued willingness of host and member agencies to commit resources beyond their core missions may decrease, especially in times of increasing budgetary constraints.

While the FEBs and FEMA have established important working relationships in a number of locations, these have, to date, been largely informal. As FEMA officials have noted, including the FEBs in federal emergency guidance and plans provides an opportunity for the FEBs to leverage the network of community relationships they have already established. OPM and FEMA could formalize the FEBs' contribution to

FEMA's emergency preparedness and response efforts through a memorandum of understanding, or some similar mechanism, between FEMA and the FEBs, and a formal designation of the FEB role in FEMA guidance. Likewise, recognition of the FEB emergency support role in the national emergency structure could help the boards carry out their emergency support role more effectively by underscoring the value they add, which may be overlooked by federal agency officials unfamiliar with their capabilities.

The ability of FEBs and organizations like them to fulfill important collaborative national missions is hampered if they are dependent on the willingness of host agencies to provide support. OPM has determined that the FEBs should have an important and prominent role in emergency support and envisions a set of emergency support activities across the FEB system. The current structure of host agencies and in-kind contributions puts at risk the achievement of that goal.

OPM's work on a strategic plan with the FEBs affords the opportunity to complete the development of clear expectations for the FEBs in emergency operations and to develop appropriate performance measures for these expectations. OPM also has an opportunity, as part of this planning process, to consider alternative funding arrangements that would better match the roles envisioned for the FEBs. As noted earlier, a strategic plan should describe how goals and objectives are to be achieved, including how different levels of resources lead to different levels of achievement and the sources of those resources.

Recommendations for Executive Action

Consistent with OPM's ongoing efforts in this regard, we recommend that the Director of OPM take the following four actions to help improve the ability of the FEBs to contribute to the nation's emergency preparedness efforts, particularly given the threat of pandemic influenza:

- Once OPM completes defining emergency support expectations for the FEBs, OPM should work with FEMA to develop a memorandum of understanding, or some similar mechanism, that formally defines the FEB role in emergency planning and response.
- OPM should initiate discussion with DHS and other responsible stakeholders to consider the feasibility of integrating the FEB emergency support responsibilities into the established emergency response framework, such as the National Response Plan.
- OPM should continue its efforts to establish performance measures and accountability for the emergency support responsibilities of the FEBs

before, during, and after an emergency event that affects the federal workforce outside Washington, D.C.

- As an outgrowth of the above efforts and to help ensure that the FEBs can provide protection of the federal workforce in the field, OPM, as part of its strategic planning process for the FEBs, should develop a proposal for an alternative to the current voluntary contribution mechanism that would address the uncertainty of funding sources for the boards.

Agency Comments

We provided the Director of OPM and the Secretary of Homeland Security a draft of this report for review and comment. We received written comments from OPM, which are reprinted in appendix IV. While not commenting specifically on the recommendations, OPM stated that it understands the importance of the issues raised in the report, noting that it is building the boards' capacity by developing a national FEB strategic and operational plan that will ensure consistent delivery of services across the FEB network. By documenting results and creating a consistent accountability mechanism, OPM said it is building a strong business case through which it can address the resources FEBs need to continue operations. OPM also stated that it believed institutionalized relationships with strategic partners like FEMA can demonstrate FEBs' business value and help address ongoing funding issues. In comments received from FEMA by e-mail, FEMA concurred with the findings of the report and welcomed the opportunity to work with OPM to develop a memorandum of understanding that more formally defines the FEB role in emergency planning and response. FEMA also recognized the current personnel and budget limitations of the FEBs in supporting emergency planning and response activities and said that a proposal for an alternative to the current FEB voluntary contribution mechanism should assist with providing an improved capability for the boards.

We are sending copies of this report to the Director of OPM and the Secretary of Homeland Security and appropriate congressional committees. We will also provide copies to others upon request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff members have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-6806 or steinhardtb@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 major contributions to this report are listed in appendix V.



Bernice Steinhardt
Director, Strategic Issues

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objectives of our review were to

- identify the actions the federal executive boards (FEB) have taken to fulfill their emergency preparedness and response roles and responsibilities,
- describe the key challenges facing the FEBs in fulfilling these roles and responsibilities, and
- evaluate the extent to which the FEBs can contribute to emergency preparedness and response to pandemic influenza.

To address these objectives, we reviewed FEB annual reports and academic literature as well as prior GAO reports about leveraging collaborative networks. Additionally, we reviewed the National Response Plan, Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, and the Joint Field Office Activation and Operations Interagency Integrated Standard Operating Procedure to assess the feasibility of FEB involvement in those plans. We interviewed Office of Personnel Management (OPM) officials, and we consulted with three GAO field office managers who are members of their local FEBs to gain a greater understanding of FEB activities. We selected 14 of the 28 FEBs for more detailed review. Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth, Denver, Los Angeles, New York City, Oklahoma, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Seattle were selected because they are 12 of the 15 largest FEBs in terms of number of federal employees served. Minnesota was selected because it is considered a leader in pandemic influenza planning, and New Orleans was selected because of its recent emergency management experience with Hurricane Katrina. GAO headquarters and field office teams interviewed at least two key FEB representatives, including the chair or vice chair and the executive director from the 14 selected boards. Additionally, we obtained and reviewed FEB documents, such as annual reports, monthly activity reports, minutes, and correspondence, at the selected sites. Because our selection of FEBs was nonprobabilistic, the results of our review of these selected FEBs are not generalizable to all other FEBs. However, the challenges and issues that were identified in our coverage of half of all FEBs along with our review of materials concerning the FEBs as a group suggests that these matters are not limited to just the selected FEBs.

OPM provided data on the counties of jurisdiction for all of the boards as well as their host agencies and the number of federal and military employees and agencies in each service area. We determined these data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

We also interviewed Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials at their headquarters in Washington, D.C. FEMA serves as the Department of Homeland Security's designated lead agent for continuity of operations (COOP) plans for the FEBs' executive branch members. Because the FEBs and FEMA collaborate on COOP activities in the field, we interviewed the FEMA regional directors in regions V and VI based in Chicago, Illinois, and Denton, Texas, respectively, to obtain an outside perspective of the boards and their role in emergency operations. Our analysis of the capacity of FEBs to support emergency preparedness is drawn from our collective review and assessment of information and documents provided to us by officials from OPM and FEMA and the FEB representatives at the selected FEBs as well as our examination of the relevant literature described above.

Our review was conducted from March 2006 through February 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Appendix II: Office of Personnel Management Document Describing the FEB Role and Responsibilities in Emergency Situations

ROLE: PROVIDE EMERGENCY LIAISON AND COMMUNICATIONS - FEBs stand ready to provide timely and relevant information to support emergency preparedness and response coordination.

Emergency Preparedness

- FEBs will serve as a Federal liaison for State and Local emergency officials.
- FEBs will establish notification networks and develop a protocol (Communications Plan) to be used in nonemergency and emergency situations.
- FEBs will disseminate relevant information received from OPM/DC regarding emergency preparedness information (memorandums from OPM officials, emergency guides, training opportunities, information from other departments/agencies, etc.)
- FEBs will identify a core group of Federal leaders in each community who will meet regularly to discuss planned courses of action (delayed arrival, early dismissal, shelter in place, emergency personnel only, etc.) in the event of an emergency.
- FEBs will survey and/or facilitate training for member agencies regarding their roles and responsibilities related to occupant emergency plans.
- FEBs will facilitate training on Continuity of Operations (COOP), and other emergency preparedness topics, i.e., shelter in place, triage, onsite responder, etc. for Federal agencies.

Response Coordination

- FEBs will assess local emergency situations in cooperation with Federal, State and Local officials.
- FEBs will activate established notification system for transmission of local emergency information, as prescribed by the FEB's protocol (Communications Plan).
- FEBs will provide problem resolution assistance as appropriate, to include identifying Federal resources which may be available to assist the community in responding to, or recovering from, an emergency.
- FEBs relay local emergency situation information, by way of periodic reports to the appropriate authorities, to include, but not limited to: OPM/DC, FEB members, media, State and Local government authorities.
- FEBs will disseminate information received from OPM/DC regarding emergency information at the national level – decision on employee work status, information from other departments/agencies, etc.

Communications Plan

- FEBs alert those responsible for implementing the Occupant and Agency Emergency Plans and serve as a redundant (back-up) communication vehicle to ensure notification.

Source: OPM.

Appendix III: FEBs' Host Agencies

FEB	Host agency
Atlanta	Social Security Administration-Regional Office
Baltimore	Department of Defense-U.S. Army/Fort Meade
Boston	Environmental Protection Agency-Regional Office
Buffalo	Department of Homeland Security-Immigration and Customs Enforcement U.S. Coast Guard
Chicago	General Services Administration-Regional Office
Cincinnati	Department of Veterans Affairs-Regional Medical Center
Cleveland	National Aeronautics and Space Administration-Glenn Research Center
Dallas-Fort Worth	Health and Human Services-Regional Office
Denver	Department of Defense-Defense Finance and Accounting Service
Detroit	Department of Defense-U.S. Tank Automotive Command
Honolulu-Pacific	Department of Defense-Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard
Houston	Department of Homeland Security-Customs and Border Protection
Kansas City	Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration/Federal Aviation Administration
Los Angeles	Department of Homeland Security-Customs and Border Protection/Los Angeles Field Office
Minnesota	Department of the Interior-Headquarters National Business Center
New Mexico	Department of the Interior-Bureau of Land Management
New Orleans	Department of Agriculture-National Finance Center
New York City	Department of Transportation-Federal Aviation Administration
Newark	Department of Homeland Security-Customs and Border Protection
Oklahoma	Department of Defense-Tinker Air Force Base
Oregon	Department of Veterans Affairs-Portland Veterans Affairs Medical Center
Philadelphia	Department of Defense-Defense Logistics Agency
Pittsburgh	Office of Personnel Management
San Antonio	Department of Veterans Affairs-Regional Medical Center
San Francisco	Department of Labor-Office of Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management
Seattle	Department of Housing and Urban Development-Regional Office Social Security Administration-Regional Office of Personnel Management
South Florida	Department of Commerce-Headquarters
St. Louis	Department of Defense-National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

Source: OPM.

Appendix IV: Comments from the Office of Personnel Management



The Director

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

APR 12 2007

The Honorable David Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report entitled *The Federal Workforce: Additional Steps Needed to Take Advantage of Federal Executive Boards' Ability to Contribute to Emergency Operations* (GAO-07-515).

I appreciate GAO's recognition of the Federal Executive Boards' (FEB) contributions to the Federal Government's effectiveness in the field. The report's focus on FEBs' work in emergency preparedness is particularly useful for understanding the critical role FEBs play in Federal planning for natural and man-made disasters. While the Report's design did not include the broader scope of FEBs' work, the Boards' combined focus on human capital management, emergency preparedness and community relations make them an effective part of Federal emergency planning efforts.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) understands the importance of the issues raised in the GAO Report. Because they reflect areas of concern to us as well, OPM has addressed these issues in the past, and continues to do so today. For example, to address FEB funding issues, OPM successfully obtained Congressional approval for cross-agency funding authority by FEB member agencies. Currently, we are building the network's capacity to deliver by developing a National FEB Strategic and Operational Plan. This Plan -- currently in draft -- identifies core activities under two lines of business: Emergency Preparedness, Security & Employee Safety and Human Capital Readiness. Each line of business defines measurable outcomes and deliverables to assure consistent delivery of services across the FEB network. By documenting results and creating a consistent accountability mechanism, OPM is building a strong business case through which we can address the resources FEBs need to continue operations.

Through this process, we are continuing to build collaboration mechanisms with our strategic partners such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). As the GAO report points out, the FEBs' emergency support activities are critical for FEMA's ability to accomplish its mission. We believe that institutionalized relationships with

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strategic partners like FEMA can demonstrate FEBs' business value and help address ongoing funding issues.

I am providing specific technical corrections to the draft report and would ask for your consideration of these changes.

Sincerely,



Linda M. Springer
Director

Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Bernice Steinhardt (202) 512-6808 or steinhardtb@gao.gov

Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, key contributors to this report were William Doherty, Assistant Director; Dominic Barranca; Scott Behen; Kathleen Boggs; Deirdre Brown; Beverly Burke; Jimmy Champion; Betty Clark; Derrick Collins; Daniel Concepcion; Amber Edwards; Richard Guthrie; Bonnie Hall; Charles Hodge; Aaron Kaminsky; Judith Kordahl; Susan Mak; Signora May; Samuel Scrutchins; Gabriele Tonsil; George Warnock; and Daniel Zeno. In addition, William Bates, Thomas Beall, David Dornisch, and Donna Miller provided key assistance.

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