

Why GAO Did This Study

Coordination challenges among the different levels of government have been a concern during past disaster recovery efforts. As part of the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, Congress required FEMA to create a national disaster recovery strategy. In response, FEMA developed the NDRF—a comprehensive framework intended to facilitate coordination of recovery assistance across all levels of government.

GAO was asked to examine FEMA's implementation of the NDRF. This review assessed (1) the roles and responsibilities of FEMA and state emergency management offices in implementing the NDRF and (2) the extent to which FEMA has worked with selected states to implement the NDRF. GAO selected for review five states—Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, New York, and Oklahoma—based on factors including the range and type of disasters. GAO reviewed state recovery plans and other documents and interviewed state officials. GAO also reviewed statutes, FEMA plans and policies, and interviewed FEMA officials, including 5 of its 10 regional offices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that FEMA conduct a systematic analysis of its assessments to determine the effectiveness of its NDRF outreach efforts; and develop and disseminate best practices and lessons learned for conducting NDRF outreach to FEMA regional offices. DHS concurred with the recommendations and described the actions it planned to take in response.

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DISASTER RECOVERY

FEMA Needs to Assess Its Effectiveness in Implementing the National Disaster Recovery Framework

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for implementing the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) and working in partnership with states as they play a lead role in the recovery process. As shown in the figure below, FEMA coordinates federal recovery stakeholders using six Recovery Support Functions—structures through which federal coordinating agencies provide assistance to state and local communities, before and after a disaster. FEMA's regional offices facilitate pre-disaster recovery planning at the state and local level, promote state adoption of NDRF principles into state pre-disaster recovery plans, and coordinate collaboration between federal, state, local, and tribal governments. Under the NDRF, states have primary responsibility for managing recovery in their communities, including developing pre-disaster recovery plans based on the principles and structures in the NDRF.

The National Disaster Recovery Framework's Recovery Support Functions and Corresponding Federal Coordinating Agencies

Recovery Support Function	Federal Coordinating Agency
 Community Planning and Capacity Building	Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency
 Economic	Department of Commerce/Economic Development Administration
 Health and Social Services	Department of Health and Human Services
 Housing	Department of Housing and Urban Development
 Infrastructure Systems	Department of Defense/Army Corps of Engineers
 Natural and Cultural Resources	Department of the Interior

Source: GAO analysis of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) information. | GAO-16-476

Through a number of outreach activities, such as workshops, technical assistance, and training, FEMA took action to promote state adoption of the NDRF. Nevertheless, officials in four of the five selected states GAO reviewed said they did not understand aspects of the NDRF, including how it related to other FEMA disaster programs and the level of federal technical assistance available. Moreover, GAO found that only two of the five states had developed pre-disaster recovery plans based on the NDRF. FEMA officials estimated that nationwide, more than three-quarters of states do not have NDRF-based recovery plans. Further, GAO found that although FEMA employs readiness assessments to track and assess its regional NDRF implementation efforts, it has not used these assessments to systematically analyze changes over time and across regional offices. As a result, FEMA has not used these assessments to help it identify management challenges, inform decision making, or identify best practices and lessons learned across its regional offices. Such analyses could help enhance outreach efforts among FEMA's regional offices and potentially improve implementation of the NDRF nationwide.