

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-744](#), a report to congressional committees.

Why GAO Did This Study

Public fire departments in the U.S. responded to almost 1.3 million fires occurred in the United States in 2014, which resulted in more than 3,275 civilian deaths, 15,775 injuries, and \$11.6 billion in property loss. To help support local firefighting efforts, FEMA, within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), allocated almost \$5.8 billion from 2009 to 2016 to award grants to fire departments and other organizations for equipment, staffing, research, and other needs.

The Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012 (FGRA), which amended and reauthorized the three grant programs, includes a provision for GAO to review changes to the grant programs and FEMA's assessment of the fire grants' performance. This report examines (1) the extent to which the fire grants' policies and performance assessments changed as a result of FEMA's implementation of FGRA, and (2) what additional opportunities exist to enhance FEMA's management of fire grant processes and performance assessment efforts. GAO reviewed FGRA and FEMA grant policy documents, and interviewed FEMA officials and relevant stakeholders who provided insights on key actions taken.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations, including that FEMA establish measurable performance targets, and define and document the roles and responsibilities of GPD and USFA in administering the fire grants. DHS concurred with all four recommendations, and described planned actions to address them.

View [GAO-16-744](#). For more information, contact Chris Currie at (202-512-8777) or CurrieC@gao.gov.

September 2016

FIRE GRANTS

FEMA Could Enhance Program Administration and Performance Assessment

What GAO Found

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Grant Programs Directorate (GPD) revised fire grant policies for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG), Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), and Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) grant programs in response to the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012 (FGRA). GPD incorporated a majority of these changes into its existing application and award processes. For example, FGRA established minimum award allocations for three types of fire departments. In 2013 and 2014, each of these types of departments received more than the minimum of fire grant funds. FEMA also developed a performance assessment system for the AFG and SAFER programs in response to FGRA. The figure summarizes the types of uses for each fire grant program.

Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Fire Grant Programs



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA grant application solicitation documents; Art Explosion (clip art). | GAO-16-744

FEMA has several opportunities to enhance its administration of fire grants and how their contributions to national preparedness are assessed. For example, while FEMA developed performance measures for the AFG and SAFER programs, the agency did not include measurable performance targets linked to AFG and SAFER program goals that could help better assess the impact of the program and report program achievements. Establishing measurable performance targets linked to program goals could enhance the quality and utility of the new performance assessment system by providing a yardstick against which these investments can be evaluated. In addition, the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) provides firefighter training and education as well as fire-related research, data collection, and analysis, and acts as a consultant for GPD's fire grant programs, but FEMA has not defined and documented USFA's specific role or responsibilities with the fire grants program. As a result, there is no formalized relationship or policy regarding, for example, how the two organizations' programs could work together to achieve common goals. Using collaborative mechanisms GAO's work has identified across the federal government could help GPD better leverage USFA's expertise and resources to support programmatic management of the fire grants programs. Both GPD and USFA officials agreed that defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of GPD and USFA would enhance the administration of the fire grants programs.