United States Government Accountability Office

Report to Congressional Committees

September 2016

FIRE GRANTS

FEMA Could Enhance Program Administration and Performance Assessment

FIRE GRANTS

FEMA Could Enhance Program Administration and Performance Assessment

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.

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

Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG)		Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)		Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S)	
Equipment/ operations	Training/ health	Firefighter salaries	Volunteer recruitment/ retention	Prevention projects/ education	Fire research

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.

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U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

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September 15, 2016

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
House of Representatives

Public fire departments in the U.S. responded to almost 1.3 million fires occurred in the United States in 2014, resulting in 3,275 civilian deaths, 15,775 injuries, and $11.6 billion in property loss.[1] To help support local firefighters in their efforts to safely and effectively respond to fire-related hazards, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—allocated almost $5.8 billion from 2009 to 2016 to fund three competitive grant programs: the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program (AFG), Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), and Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S). FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate (GPD) is responsible for administering these programs.[2] Enacted in January 2013, the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012 (FGRA) required changes to both the application and award policies of these grants, and called for the establishment of a performance assessment system to better measure and report on the contribution of the grants to their program goals.[3]

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[1]National Fire Protection Association (NFPA): *Fire Loss in the United States During 2014,* (Quincy, MA: September 2015).

[2]FEMA administers the fire grants programs in accordance with the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, as amended.

[3]15 U.S.C. §§ 2229, 2229a.

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In October 2009, we reported on FEMA's implementation of statutory and program requirements for awarding fire grants and its management of the grants. We found that FEMA met most statutory and program requirements and had taken actions to ensure that its fire grants award process is accessible and clear to grant applicants. We recommended, among other things, that FEMA ensure that grant priorities are aligned with application questions and scoring values, and provide specific feedback to rejected applicants.[4] In June 2013, we reviewed how selected grant programs collect, validate, and report data to report progress toward agency-wide performance goals including FEMA's fire grants.[5] We found that FEMA did not have a standardized tool with which to validate program performance data that are self-reported by grant recipients and we recommended that FEMA ensure there are consistent procedures in place at the program office and regional level to promote verification and validation of grant performance data. FEMA is in the process of developing the data verification and validation checks, as we discuss later in this report.

The Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012 (FGRA), which amended and reauthorized the three grant programs, included a provision for GAO to review changes to the grant programs and FEMA's assessment of the fire grants' performance.[6] This report addresses the following questions: (1) To what extent did fire grant policies and performance assessments change as a result of FEMA's implementation of FGRA, and (2) To what extent are there opportunities to enhance FEMA's management of fire grant processes and performance assessment efforts?

To address the first question, we identified relevant statutory requirements from FGRA and program requirements established in (1) FEMA's official grant application solicitation documents, referred to as "Notice of Funding Opportunity," for the AFG, SAFER, and FP&S fire

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[4]GAO, *Fire Grants: FEMA Has Met Most Requirements for Awarding Fire Grants, but Additional Actions Would Improve Its Grant Process*, GAO-10-64 (Washington, D.C: Oct. 30, 2009).

[5]GAO, *Grants Performance: Justice and FEMA Collect Performance Data for Selected Grants, but Action Needed to Validate FEMA Performance Data*, GAO-13-552 (Washington, D.C: June 24, 2013).

[6]Pub. L. No. 112-239, § 1806, 126 Stat. 1631, 2114 (2013).

grants and (2) in other related grant documents. We also reviewed FEMA grant application and awards data from fiscal year 2009 through fiscal year 2014.[7] We compared the FGRA amendments to the actions and changes FEMA made to its application and awards policies, and matched these changes to the awards data. We also analyzed data on a number of other characteristics, such as the type of community served by the applicant (e.g. urban, suburban, or rural) to identify changes in applications and awards over time because FGRA requires FEMA, in considering applications, to consider factors such as population served and geographic response area. To assess the reliability of data provided by FEMA, we reviewed and discussed the sources of data with knowledgeable agency officials and discussed how the data are collected and controls for collecting and maintaining the data. We then performed electronic testing of required data elements to identify any missing data, outliers, and obvious errors. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. We did not assess FEMA's post-award grant financial management processes, as this was beyond the scope of our review. We also reviewed relevant FEMA and United States Fire Administration (USFA) documents, including FEMA's three reports to Congress on the agency's Performance Assessment System for the fire grant programs. We interviewed agency officials responsible for implementing the policy changes and establishing the performance assessment system.

To address the second question, we reviewed the three FEMA reports to Congress on the agency's Performance Assessment System[8] for FEMA's fire grants, and compared the information contained in these reports against our body of work on performance measurement. We also reviewed FEMA's efforts to develop measures of national preparedness capabilities. In addition, we reviewed existing and proposed systems for collecting data on fire-related hazards; interviewed officials from USFA, national fire service associations, and other relevant fire hazard data sources to understand how they are being used or could be used for

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[7]FEMA had not completed its fiscal year 2015 grant awards process at the time we initiated our review.

[8]FEMA submitted annual reports to Congress on the AFG and SAFER programs on November 2014, along with a second annual report to Congress on the AFG program on October 2015.

assessing fire grants. We assessed whether FEMA's efforts were consistent with project management practices identified by the Project Management Institute (PMI ®).[9] We reviewed USFA's participation in the program in the context of our body of work on collaboration across the federal government.[10] We collected and reviewed FEMA documents and interviewed officials from GPD FEMA's National Preparedness Assessment Division, and USFA officials. In addition, we interviewed officials from each of the nine national fire service associations who serve as subject matter experts and assist FEMA in setting program priorities and developing other facets of the grant application and awards process.[11]

We conducted this performance audit from September 2015 to September 2016, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Fire Grant Roles and Responsibilities

FEMA's GPD is responsible for managing DHS's suite of preparedness grants, including three fire grants designed to provide funding for local fire departments, emergency medical service (EMS) organizations, and

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[9]PMI® is a registered mark of Project Management Institute, Inc.

[10]See, *GAO, Managing for Results: Implementation Approaches Used to Enhance Collaboration in Interagency Groups*, GAO-14-220: (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 14, 2014); *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms,* GAO-12-1022 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012); and *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

[11]In its grant guidance, FEMA identified the following nine major fire service organizations: the Congressional Fire Service Institute, the International Association of Arson Investigators, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Firefighters, the International Society of Fire Service Instructors, the North American Fire Training Directors, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the National Fire Protection Association, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.

firefighter and fire prevention interest groups.[12] GPD's AFG Program Office administers the three fire grant programs:

- AFG program grants fund personal protective equipment, vehicles, and other operational equipment for fire service and EMS organizations, as well as projects to modernize facilities, deliver training, and develop health and fitness programs.[13]

- SAFER grants fund the hiring of salaried firefighters and the costs of recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.[14]

- FP&S grants fund research and community initiatives, such as installing smoke detectors among high-risk populations or performing fire prevention research studies to support firefighter safety.

Figure 1 illustrates the general uses for each fire grant program, and the award funding available in fiscal year 2014.

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[12]Other preparedness grants managed by GPD include the State Homeland Security Program, Urban Area Security Initiative, Port Security Grant Program, and Transit Security Grant Program. DHS centralized grant management responsibilities in FEMA's GDP as a result of requirements in the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2007.

[13]Authority for the AFG and FP&S programs derives from section 33 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974. Congress amended the act in 2000 to establish the AFG and FP&S programs, and appropriated funds to the programs beginning in fiscal year 2001.

[14]Authority for the SAFER program derives from section 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974. Congress amended the Act in 2003 to establish the SAFER program, and appropriated funds to SAFER beginning in fiscal year 2005.

Figure 1: Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Fire Grant Programs and Award Funding Available in Fiscal Year 2014
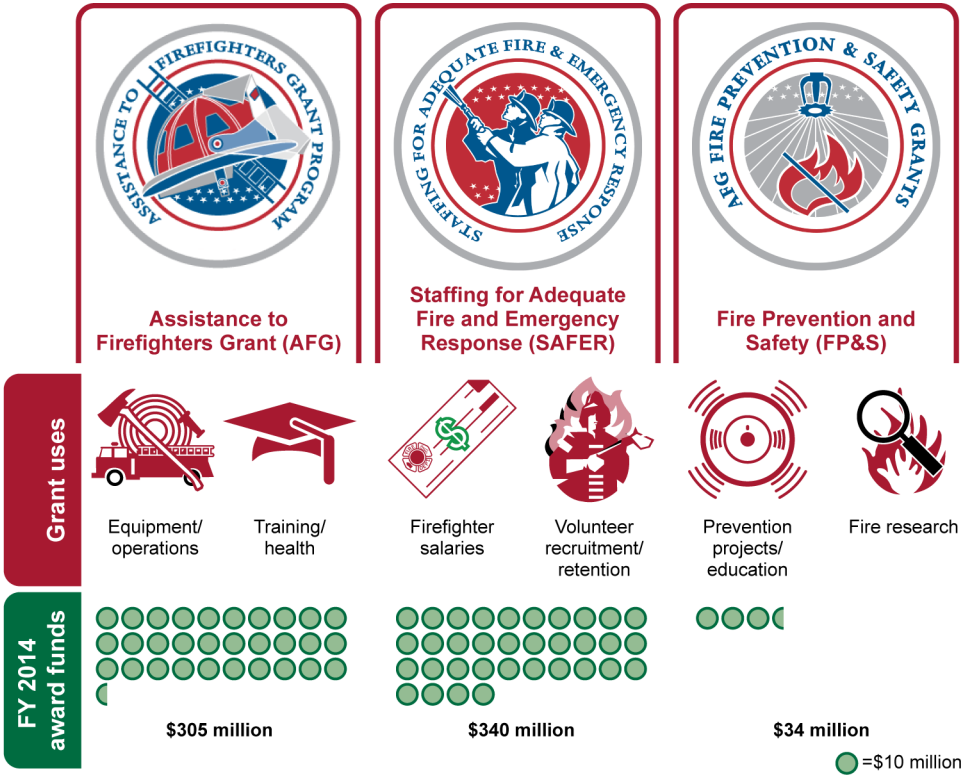
Source: GAO analysis of FEMA grant application solicitation documents; Art Explosion (clip art). | GAO-16-744

Figure 2 shows the grant award levels for each fire grant program.[15] For further information on annual funding levels, see appendix I table 3.

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[15]Congress amended the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 to establish the AFG and FP&S programs (2000), and the SAFER program (2003). FEMA began managing FP&S separately from AFG beginning in fiscal year 2005. SAFER was appropriated funds beginning in fiscal year 2005.

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Figure 2: Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Fire Grant Awards by Program, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2014

Dollars (in millions)
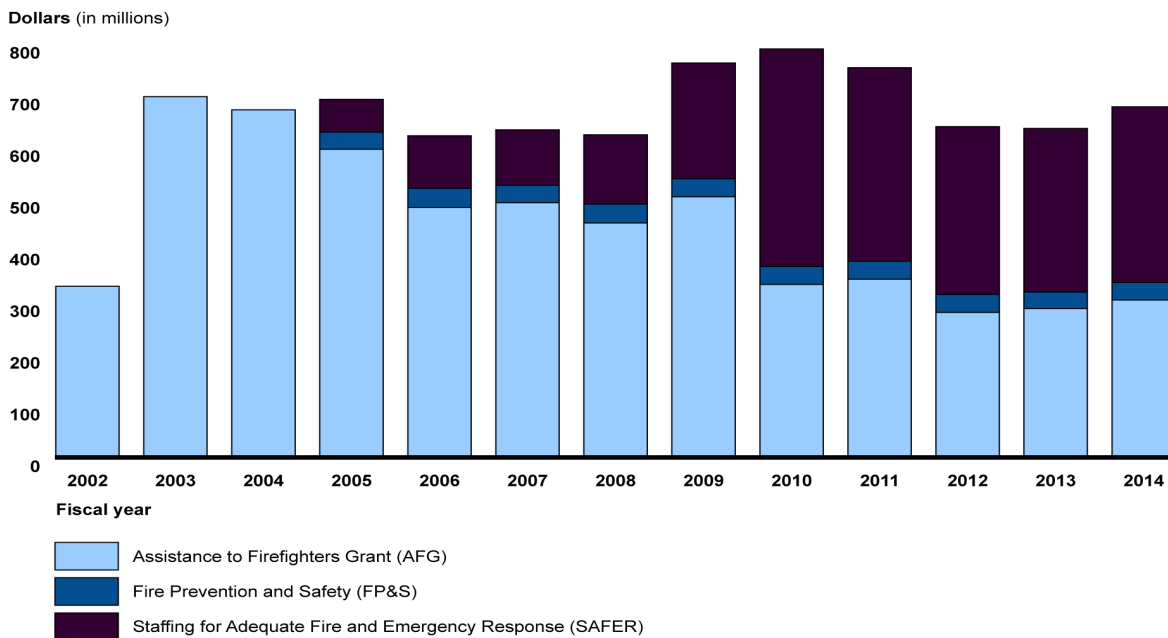
Source: GAO analysis of FEMA eGrant data. | GAO-16-744

Notes: Congress amended the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 in 2003 to establish the SAFER program, and appropriated funds to SAFER beginning in fiscal year 2005. FEMA grants award funding for Award funding for the AFG and FP&S programs come from the same appropriation of funds. Funding available for awards differs from appropriated amounts in some cases due to the subtracting of administrative costs from appropriated amounts in certain years.

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) is another component in FEMA. Its mission is to provide national leadership for fire and emergency services stakeholders in prevention, preparedness, and response efforts. USFA initially administered the AFG program when it was established in December 2000, and DHS subsequently transferred program management responsibilities in fiscal year 2004. Since 2005, report language accompanying appropriations acts directed FEMA to fund fire grant applications according to local priorities and those established by USFA. USFA's goals are to reduce fire and life safety risk through preparedness, prevention and mitigation, promote response, local planning and preparedness for all hazards, enhance the fire and emergency services' capability for response to and recovery from all hazards, and advance the professional development of fire service personnel and of other people engaged in fire prevention and control. USFA staff also work with local responders to increase national capacity of firefighters by providing free training and education programs that

support fire departments and emergency services organizations in preparing for, preventing and responding to fires and other hazards through the USFA National Fire Academy.

FEMA's National Preparedness Assessment Division is responsible for assessing national "whole community" preparedness[16] to, among other things, analyze and illustrate the impact of GPD's preparedness grants.[17] Officials conduct qualitative and quantitative assessments of 32 core capabilities that support the National Preparedness Goal by, among other things, analyzing State Preparedness Reports (SPR) and developing the National Preparedness Report. According to FEMA, the 32 national preparedness core capabilities provide a common standard to integrate federal, state, local, and tribal preparedness efforts. States use the core capabilities to conduct their Threat and Hazard Identification Risk Assessments (THIRA) and submit annual SPRs to FEMA on the level of that state's preparedness, as a requirement for non-fire preparedness grants. In September 2015, FEMA updated the National Preparedness Goal to, among other things, include a new core capability for Fire Management and Suppression.[18] Beginning in 2017, states will be required to include an assessment of their level of fire management and suppression capabilities to FEMA as a requirement to receive non-fire preparedness grants, according to FEMA officials.

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[16]FEMA describes the "whole community" as a means by which individuals and families—including those with access and functional needs, businesses, faith-based and community organizations, nonprofit groups, schools and academia, media outlets, and all levels of government, can become involved in the development of national preparedness documents and ensure that their roles and responsibilities are reflected in the content of the materials..

[17]In February 2016, DHS announced funding opportunities for ten DHS non-fire preparedness grant programs totaling more than $1.6 billion: the State Homeland Security Program, Urban Area Security Initiative, Operation Stonegarden, Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program, Nonprofit Security Grant Program, Intercity Passenger Rail - Amtrak Program, Port Security Grant Program, Transit Security Grant Program, Intercity Bus Security Grant Program, and Emergency Management Performance Grants.

[18]FEMA: *National Preparedness Goal, Second Edition* (Washington, D.C.: September 2015).

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Fire Grants Application and Awards Process

Each year, FEMA organizes a panel of subject matter experts to identify that year's funding priorities and criteria for fire grants.[19],[20] Following review and discussion of the previous year's information, the criteria development panel submits its recommendations for funding priorities and grant award criteria—including those on which participants do not reach consensus—in a report to GPD. After considering the panel's recommendations and developing the grant guidance for the three grant programs, GPD submits the proposed grant guidance to other offices within FEMA for internal review. Subsequently, GPD sends the guidance to OMB for approval. Following approval, FEMA announces the availability of each grant program, providing Notices of Funding Opportunity online to potential applicants.

The grant application review process for all three competitive grant programs includes three evaluation stages: an automated scoring or manual prescreening process to determine eligibility and alignment with the grant programs' funding priorities; a peer review panel, in which practitioners within the fire service community evaluate and score the applications;[21] and a final technical review by subject matter specialists and GPD officials. The grant review and award processes are represented in Figure 3.

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[19]GAO-10-64.

[20]The criteria development panel is made up of officials from nine national fire service organizations: the Congressional Fire Service Institute, the International Association of Arson Investigators, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Firefighters, the International Society of Fire Service Instructors, the North American Fire Training Directors, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the National Fire Protection Association, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.

[21]To perform FEMA's peer review of grant applications, FEMA recruits volunteers from the memberships of the nine national fire service organizations.

Figure 3: Federal Emergency Management Agency's Application and Awards Process for Fire Grants

Criteria development panel

Makes recommendations for funding priorities and criteria for awarding grants

Guidance development and approval

AFG Program Office develops guidance and submits to other offices within FEMA, DHS, and OMB for approval

Application period

Grant guidance and application are available online

Automated scoring and prescreening

AFG and SAFER applications are electronically scored; FP&S applications are prescreened for eligibility

Peer review panel

Panelists evaluate each application according to established criteria

Technical review

Highly scored applications are reviewed by subject matter experts and others

Grants awarded

Awards are announced over several months

Grants rejected

Rejection letters are sent to unsuccessful applicants

Legend

AFG	Assistance for Firefighters Grant	FP&S	Fire Prevention and Safety
DHS	Department of Homeland Security	OMB	Office of Management and Budget
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency	SAFER	Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA grant information. | GAO-16-744

FEMA Changed Fire Grants Policies and Developed a Performance Assessment System in Response to FGRA Amendments

FEMA Changed Applications and Awards Policies Related to FGRA Amendments, and Grant Outcomes Generally Reflected These Changes

Our analysis of FGRA identified 26 amendments related to fire grant application and award policies. FEMA incorporated 16 of these 26 changes into its existing grant application and awards processes (see table 1). For the remaining 10 cases, FEMA used existing authorities to waive changes related to FGRA amendments or found that no change to existing policy was necessary. See Appendix II for a summary of these amendments and a detailed description of FEMA's corresponding changes to the grant programs (see app. II, table 4).

Table 1: Analysis of Changes GAO Identified in the Fire Grants Reauthorization Act (FGRA) Related to Application and Award Policies and Changes FEMA Made and Waived, by Fire Grants Program

Fire Grants Program	Application Policy Changes		Award Policy Changes	
	Implemented	Waived/No Change Needed	Implemented	Waived/No Change Needed
Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG)	2	2	7	0
Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)	1	0	0	6
Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S)	0	2	6	0
Total	**3**	**4**	**13**	**6**

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

The number of fire grants applications and awards from 2009 through 2014 are shown in Figure 4 and the outcomes associated with specific amendments and related policy changes are described below.

Figure 4: AFG, SAFER, and FP&S Applications and Awards, Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

Number of applications and grants awarded (in thousands)

Fiscal year

Submitted	Awarded	
		Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG)
		Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)
		Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S)
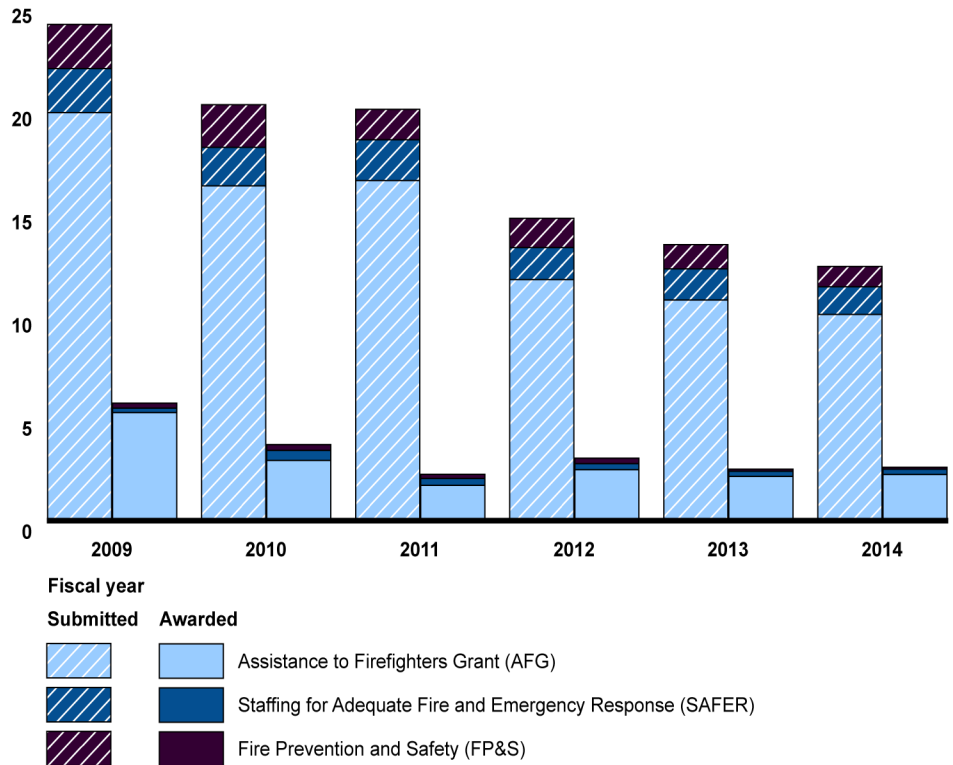
Source: GAO analysis of FEMA eGrant data. | GAO-16-744

AFG Application Policy Changes—Four of the 26 FGRA amendments are related to application policies for the AFG program. FEMA addressed two of the amendments by expanding the criteria for eligible AFG applicants. For example, state fire training academies are now eligible to apply for fire grants,[22] and two or more entities can now submit regional applications for a grant to fund a joint program or initiative.[23] For the

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[22]15 U.S.C. § 2229(c)(1)(C).

[23]15 U.S.C. § 2229(e)(3).

remaining two amendments, FEMA officials identified existing grant policies related to eligible grant uses or considerations required by FGRA when awarding AFG grants, and did not make changes since these policies were already in place. For example, AFG prioritizes firefighter personal protective equipment grants to increase the degree to which an award will reduce deaths and injuries among firefighters.[24] Although FEMA expanded the criteria for eligible AFG applicants, AFG grant applications decreased from about 19,800 in fiscal year 2009 to about 10,000 in fiscal year 2014. FEMA officials and national fire service associations attributed the decrease, in part, to application fatigue—when departments give up after not receiving an award after applying over multiple years—and the increase in administrative requirements and the associated workload.[25] According to FEMA officials and national fire service association representatives, these factors may have affected decreasing application rates for SAFER and FP&S grants as well.

AFG Award Policy Changes—Seven of the 26 FGRA amendments are related to FEMA's award policies for the AFG program, which FEMA implemented by changing its AFG award policies. Specifically, FGRA included an amendment that established minimum award allocations for career, volunteer, and combination fire departments.[26] Prior to FGRA, the distribution of AFG funds among career, combination, and volunteer departments fluctuated more across fiscal years. For example, volunteer departments received 43 percent of fiscal year 2009 funds, and 25 percent of fiscal year 2011 funds. After implementation of FGRA in the fiscal year 2013 grant cycle, career, combinations and volunteer fire departments received slightly more than 30 percent of AFG funds in fiscal years 2013 and 2014 (see app. III table 5). FGRA also requires that FEMA make not more than 3 percent of AFG funds available for grants to state fire training academies, with a $1 million grant maximum.[27] Previous policy did not allow state academies to apply, so FEMA changed AFG

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[24]See 15 U.S.C. § 2229(g).

[25]For example, beginning in fiscal year 2011, FEMA required applicants to apply for a Data Universal Numbering System number, which is needed to register in Grants.gov, and annually update their information on the System for Award Management at SAM.gov.

[26]See 15 U.S.C. § 2229(h).

[27]15 U.S.C. § 2229(i)(2).

policy accordingly and set a $500,000 grant maximum. In both fiscal years 2013 and 2014, state fire training academies received 3 percent of AFG funding and no academies were awarded grants larger than $500,000 (see app. III table 8). According to FEMA officials, they reached an agreement with the national fire service organizations to limit the grants to $500,000 to ensure that a larger number of academies could receive grants. FEMA implemented other FGRA amendments requiring that no individual AFG grant exceeds one percent of total AFG funding,[28] revising grantee cost matching requirements for jurisdictions of various sizes,[29] and allowing FEMA to waive the revised grantee cost matching requirements for economic hardship.[30]

SAFER Application Policy Changes—One of the 26 FGRA amendments is related to application policies for the SAFER program. Specifically, FGRA makes national and tribal firefighter interest organizations eligible to apply for SAFER Recruitment and Retention grants.[31] Under previous application policy, national organizations were ineligible to apply and tribal organizations were eligible but had to classify themselves as local entities in their applications. FEMA changed SAFER policies to allow national organizations to apply for recruitment and retention grants and for tribal organizations to be classified separately from local organizations beginning in the fiscal year 2013 SAFER grant cycle.

SAFER Award Policy Changes—Six of the 26 FGRA amendments are related to FEMA's award policies for the SAFER program, establishing the length of the grant period[32] and amounts for local cost sharing,[33] among other changes. FEMA waived all six of these requirements for the SAFER program, citing provisions in the American Recovery and

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[28] 15 U.S.C. § 2229(c)(2)(B).

[29] 15 U.S.C. § 2229(k)(1).

[30] 15 U.S.C. § 2229(k)(4). According to FEMA, matching requirements are calculated during the application phase. However, it is not reviewed until grant closeout.

[31] 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(2).

[32] 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(B).

[33] 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(E).

Reinvestment Act and annual Fire Grant appropriations as their authority to do so.[34] These post-award requirements have been waived by FEMA since fiscal year 2009. FEMA officials said that they chose to waive the award policy amendments to provide greater flexibility to grantees since the award conditions for SAFER grants, both in FGRA and in previous law, are too restrictive and grantees frequently defaulted on their cost matching and performance responsibilities. As a result, SAFER grants have been 100 percent federally funded from fiscal year 2009 through fiscal year 2015. This waiver authority was not included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016.[35] Appendix III, table 4 provides a detailed description of the FGRA amendments to SAFER award policies waived by FEMA.

FP&S Application Policy Changes—Two of the 26 FGRA amendments are related to application policies for the FP&S program, with one amendment allowing FEMA to fund the establishment of up to three fire safety research centers using FP&S funds,[36] and another specifying eligible uses of FP&S funds.[37] Using existing authorities, FEMA decided not to implement policies that would allow applicants to receive grants for the establishment of fire safety research centers. According to FEMA officials, there was not a common understanding of intent among stakeholders, and it was difficult to define how these research centers would work within the FP&S program.[38] Additionally, FEMA officials stated that establishing research centers would require grants with multi-year periods of performance and would not be consistent with other shorter term FP&S grants, and their establishment would be difficult due to the small amount of funding for FP&S.

FP&S Award Policy Changes—Six of 26 FGRA amendments are related to FEMA's award policies for the FP&S program. FEMA

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[34]See, e.g., Pub. L. No. 113-76, § 565, 128 Stat. 5, 286 (2013).

[35]Pub. L. No. 114-113, 129 Stat. 2242 (2015).

[36]15 U.S.C. §§ 2229(d)(1)(C), 2229(j)(4)(C)(i).

[37]15 U.S.C. § 2229(d)(3).

[38]One stakeholder we contacted said that FEMA should implement this policy and provide funding for specialized research centers to guide national fire research and to disseminate results nationally.

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implemented all six of these changes by revising FP&S award policies such as changing the minimum funding for FP&S grants as a percentage of the total grant funding,[39] increasing the cap for FP&S grants from $1 million to $1.5 million,[40] and changing the matching requirement for FP&S grants to 5 percent.[41] According to FEMA officials, the total number of FP&S grants awarded decreased post-FGRA as a result of the increased grant size. Specifically, since there was not a corresponding increase in available FP&S funds, the result was FEMA giving fewer FP&S awards since these larger awards each take a larger proportion of FP&S funding. Due to the decrease in the number of awards, FEMA has prioritized FP&S projects that will have national benefits. FEMA officials expect that FP&S award numbers will increase, as FEMA instituted a policy of dedicating six percent of FP&S funds to micro-grants beginning in fiscal year 2015, following advice from stakeholders. These micro-grants will be for up to $25,000 each, so FEMA expects to award over 80 FP&S micro-grants in fiscal year 2015. See figure 5 for FP&S grant awards pre- and post-FGRA.

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[39]See 15 U.S.C. § 2229(h)(5).

[40]See 15 U.S.C. § 2229(d)(2).

[41]See 15 U.S.C. § 2229(k)(2).

Figure 5: Number of Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grants Awarded Pre- and Post-Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012 (FGRA)
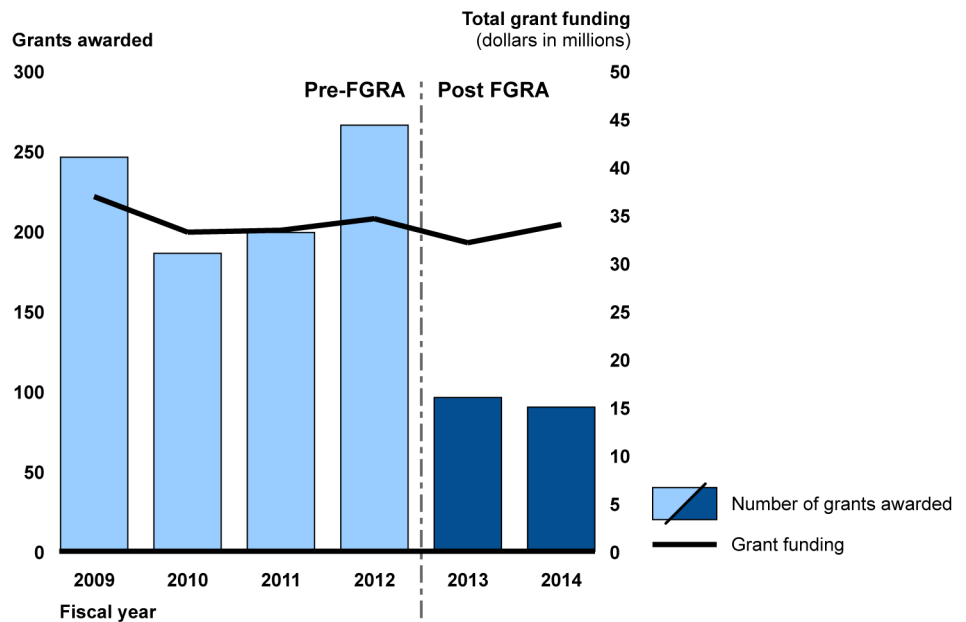
Source: GAO analysis of FP&S grants awarded. | GAO-16-744

| FEMA Developed a Performance Assessment System in Response to FGRA | FGRA also required that FEMA establish a performance assessment system to track grant program progress and report to Congress on the effectiveness of fire grants.[42] In response, FEMA developed a fire grant performance assessment system with 10 performance measures for the AFG program and 11 more for the SAFER program.[43] According to FEMA, each measure is aligned with the achievement of program goals |

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[42]15 U.S.C. §2229(p)(2). FEMA submitted annual reports to Congress on the AFG and SAFER programs in November 2014, along with a second annual report to Congress on the AFG program in October 2015.

[43]According to FEMA officials, they chose not to include performance measures for the FP&S program. FEMA officials noted difficulties in identifying statistically-valid, reportable performance measures due to the wide range of eligible project categories and the small number of FP&S grants awarded each year.

and objectives, and many are based on fire service standards.[44] According to FEMA, increased compliance with industry standards reduces fire department response times and enhances operational capacity. In addition, these standards help fire departments minimize the possibility of fire-related injuries, property damage, and other effects, according to FEMA. A complete listing of FEMA's 21 performance measures is included in appendix IV.[45]

AFG performance measures reflect the extent to which grant recipients purchase equipment that brings them into compliance with national standards of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), or the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and with state and local regulations (or otherwise provide health or safety benefits). FEMA developed measures to take into account the extent to which equipment is used to protect critical infrastructure, replace aging fire vehicles, or supports automatic and mutual aid.[46] For example, in 2015, FEMA reported that AFG grants awarded during fiscal years 2008 through 2011, increased the average percent of all on-duty firefighters equipped with industry-compliant protective gear from 90.7 percent to 98.4 percent; enabled 99 percent of fire departments receiving a vehicle grant to replace a sub-standard vehicle from service; and increased the percent of awardees whose equipment purchases primarily benefitted the health and safety of their members, from 90.1 percent to 94.6 percent.

Similarly, the SAFER performance measures reflect the extent to which grant recipients conduct structural fire responses in compliance with industry standards, have agreements to provide aid to neighboring or regional organizations (mutual and automatic), estimate a department's

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[44]For example, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is an international nonprofit organization of subject-matter experts that develops codes and standards for the fire, electrical, and construction trades with the goal of reducing the worldwide burden of fire—including fire-related injuries, property damage, and other effects. According to FEMA officials, increased departmental compliance with NFPA standards demonstrates progress in advancing firefighter and public safety.

[45]We assess the performance management system in the next section.

[46]FEMA uses the definition of automatic aid as "assistance dispatched automatically by contractual agreement between two communities or fire districts to all first alarm structural fires;" and mutual aid as "arranged case by case depending on response needs."

staffing needs based on a department's risk or needs analysis, protect critical infrastructure, and hire veterans. For example, FEMA reported in 2014, that SAFER awards increased or maintained full compliance with NFPA fire department standards for 77 percent of awardees across career, volunteer, and combined departments during fiscal years 2009 through 2012;[47] identified challenges for "mostly volunteer" SAFER grantees to sustain compliance with NFPA standards; and demonstrated FEMA's compliance with the statutory requirement that at least 10 percent of SAFER funding is set-aside for volunteer fire departments, by exceeding the 10 percent minimum each award year, including 16 percent in fiscal year 2013.[48]

Opportunities Exist to Further Enhance FEMA's Management of Fire Grant Processes and Performance Assessment Efforts

Establishing Defined and Measurable Targets

While FEMA developed performance measures as part of its new performance assessment system 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

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[47]According to FEMA, the NFPA's response and operational standards for career and volunteer departments defines adequate levels of personnel. For career departments, NFPA standard 1710 describes assembly standards and response times and specifies the minimum requirements for fire suppression and emergency medical operations. Similarly, NFPA standard 1720 describes assembly standards for volunteer and combined departments and sets baseline staffing levels and response times.

[48]15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(H).

program and report program achievements. According to FEMA officials, they consulted with fire service representatives in developing the performance system and its measures, as required by FGRA.[49] According to FEMA officials, they considered measurable targets associated with program goals in developing the performance assessment reports for 2014 and 2015, but chose to present data for each performance measure that reflected trends. For example, FEMA reported in 2015 that 74 percent, 78 percent, and 77 percent of AFG awardees for equipment in fiscal years 2009, 2010, and 2011, respectively, used the grants to achieve compliance with state, local, NFPA, or OSHA standards. However, measures like this did not include a target goal that would provide a basis to better assess AFG program performance, such as the desired percentage of awardees who used grants to achieve compliance with equipment standards.

We have previously reported that performance measures should have quantifiable targets to help assess whether goals and objectives were achieved by comparing projected performance and actual results.[50] The National Academy of Public Administration identified the need for quantified targets for measures, and recommended baselines for measuring and predicting improvement in outcome measures after reviewing the AFG program in 2007.[51] Thus, establishing measurable performance targets linked to AFG and SAFER program goals could enhance the quality and utility of the new performance assessment

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[49]15 U.S.C. § 2229(p)(2)(B).

[50]Our body of work has identified successful performance measures should have four general characteristics (demonstrate results, be limited to a vital few, cover multiple priorities and provide useful information for decision making) and key attributes such as linkage, clarity, measureable targets, objectivity and balance. For example, see GAO, *International Space Station: Measurable Performance Targets and Documentation Needed to Better Assess Management of National Laboratory*, GAO-15-397 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 27, 2015.); and GAO, *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, GAO-03-143 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 22, 2002). The characteristics are based on Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), Pub. L. No. 103-62, as modified by GPRA Modernization Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-352, guidance on assessing strategic planning, performance measurement, and reporting in the federal government. GPRA was enacted, in part, to hold federal agencies accountable for achieving program results.

[51]National Academy of Public Administration, *Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program: Assessing Performance* (Washington, D.C.: April 2007).

system by providing a yardstick against which the national investments in the programs can be evaluated. FEMA officials agreed that measureable performance targets could help them better assess and report on the results and impact of fire grants and said they are examining the possibility of developing measureable targets, along with clearer performance measures, to include in their 2016 report to Congress.

Substantiating Grantee Information on Program Goals

FEMA officials said they were implementing a process to verify and validate grantee information on program goals that could further enhance the performance assessment system, in response to a recommendation in our previous report. Specifically, we reported in June 2013 on the AFG program's performance data collection efforts, noting at the time that FEMA relied on self-reported data that was collected from awardees' progress reports, and that FEMA lacked data validation tools to ensure data reliability.[52] We found that FEMA did not have a standardized tool or process to verify and validate the performance data that grant recipients provide to FEMA headquarters and FEMA's 10 regional offices. We recommended that FEMA ensure that there are consistent procedures in place at the program office and regional level to validate and verify grant performance data that allow FEMA to attest to the reliability of data used to report progress toward goals. DHS concurred with our recommendation.

According to FEMA officials, to address our past recommendation they have developed quality assurance tools to verify and validate the post-award grant monitoring information that awardees are required to provide as part of their progress and close-out reports. However, they said that the regional offices have not yet implemented these tools and GPD is developing an implementation work plan that includes additional verification steps. GPD officials said they are negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding to provide structure and guidance to the 10 regional offices, and plan to distribute quality assurance tools to the regional offices, once this agreement is in place. As these efforts are ongoing, our recommendation will remain open until FEMA demonstrates that they have fully implemented the additional verification and validation steps. Substantiating the post-award, grant monitoring information that

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[52]GAO-13-552.

awardees are required to provide will be important, particularly in light of recently completed assessments of AFG and SAFER grants' post-award activities by the DHS Office of Inspector General. Specifically, the Inspector General reported in June 2016 that GPD did not sufficiently manage or oversee AFG or SAFER grants, grantees did not comply with grant guidance and requirements, and, as a result, FEMA cannot ensure grant funds were spent appropriately or used for their intended purpose.[53] FEMA concurred and is planning to implement validation processes by December 31, 2016.

Aligning Performance Measures with National Standards

The data that FEMA collects and analyzes for two of its program measures do not fully align with national standards used for similar assessments related to national preparedness efforts. As a result, the information that FEMA reports will be of limited utility for broader national preparedness assessments. Specifically, in developing its 21 performance assessment system measures, FEMA identified a subset of six measures as program priority measures that were intended to identify the AFG and SAFER programs' contributions to promoting fire safety and national preparedness.[54] Two of these measures are designed to help describe the extent to which AFG and SAFER grantees are "responsible for protecting critical infrastructure." According to FEMA, fire grant program policies define critical infrastructure as "any system or asset that if attacked would result in catastrophic loss of life or catastrophic economic loss" and include a list of examples, such as public water and power systems, chemical facilities, and facilities that support large public gatherings, such as sporting events or concerts. Using this definition, fire grant applicants indicate on their applications whether they have critical infrastructure within their jurisdiction, and FEMA counts the instances when applicants provide this information on their application. For

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[53]U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, *FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate Did Not Effectively Manage Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program - AFG Grants*, OIG-16-100 (Washington, D.C.: June 9, 2016); and *FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate Did Not Effectively Manage Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program - SAFER Grants*, OIG-16-98 (Washington, D.C.: June 8, 2016).

[54]For the purpose of this analysis we will refer to these as program priority measures. FEMA's 2014 SAFER report referred to these as "administrative" measures, although in our assessment, the measures relate to automatic or mutual aid agreements and protecting critical infrastructure are consistent with the program priority measures contained in the AFG reports

example, for fiscal years 2013 and 2014, 91 percent of all fire grant applicants indicated that they had critical infrastructure within their jurisdictions.

In contrast, DHS's National Protection and Programs Directorate (NPPD), as part of its efforts to support the National Infrastructure Protection Plan, is responsible for the National Critical Infrastructure Prioritization Program list, a single prioritized list of systems and assets that reflect the National Preparedness Goal's definition of critical infrastructure: assets that would, if destroyed or disrupted, cause national or regional catastrophic effects. As we noted in a March 2013 report,[55] the prioritization program uses the National Preparedness Goal's definition to coordinate a voluntary effort with states and other partners to identify, prioritize, and categorize high-priority critical infrastructure in terms of four factors—fatalities, economic loss, mass evacuation length, and degradation of national security.[56] According to the National Infrastructure Protection Plan, the list derived from the National Preparedness Goal's definition of critical infrastructure identifies nationally significant critical infrastructure that DHS uses to enhance decision making, including implementing FEMA homeland security grant programs and federal incident management planning and response efforts. For example, FEMA uses the National Critical Infrastructure Prioritization Program list based on the National Preparedness Goal's definition of critical infrastructure in prioritizing other homeland security preparedness grant programs, basing annual risk-based calculations on the differences in criticality of infrastructure in other preparedness grants such as the State Homeland Security Grant program and the Urban Area Security Initiative grants. In addition, committee report language states that there is an interest in maximizing the efforts of FEMA and NPPD through close coordination and information sharing and encourages the two components to work together on stakeholder

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[55]GAO, *Critical Infrastructure Protection: DHS List of Priority Assets Needs to Be Validated and Reported to Congress,* GAO-13-296 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 25, 2013).

[56]According to DHS, the overwhelming majority of the assets and systems identified through the National Critical Infrastructure Prioritization Program are categorized as level 2. Only a small subset of assets meet the level 1 consequence threshold—those whose loss or damage could result in major national or regional impacts similar to the impacts of Hurricane Katrina or the September 11, 2001, attacks.

outreach and sharing information internally on issues, including critical infrastructure protection.[57]

However, because FEMA does not use this definition in its fire grants program performance assessments, it relies on applicants' perceptions of the criticality of the infrastructure in their jurisdiction that may not be consistent with DHS priorities. GPD officials recognize that fire grant applicants provide information on critical infrastructure that may not be consistent with the NPPD definition, but said that they wanted to provide applicants with greater latitude to make their own local risk assessments using the fire grant programs' definition because it is useful during the peer review process in evaluating an applicant's need. However, FEMA officials agreed that using the national standardized definition would enhance their program performance reporting. Thus, using the National Preparedness Goal's definition of critical infrastructure as the basis of collecting information from applicants and using the National Critical Infrastructure Prioritization Program list to measure fire grant programs' performance could enhance FEMA's efforts to assess and integrate the fire grant programs' contributions to national preparedness.

Integrating New Data Systems

FEMA has awarded about $8.7 million in FP&S grants from 2011 to 2015, to national fire service associations to lead the development of two new information systems—the National Fire Operations Reporting System (NFORS) and the Fire Community Assessment Response Evaluation System (FireCARES)—that contain more extensive and detailed data on fire service operations than the data GPD collects from grant applicants and grantees.[58] While GPD officials intend to use the new data from these systems to enhance program management, they have not reviewed the fire grants application and award processes or the new performance assessment system to determine what data elements could be used.

[57]S. Rep. No. 114-264, at 95-96 (2016).

[58]The project team developing NFORS and FireCARES includes officials from the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the National Fire Protection Association. According to project team officials, they intend to use these systems to advance national fire service organizations data collection capabilities to improve fire departments' evidence-based decision-making, and ultimately make fire department operations more efficient, effective, and safe.

According to national fire service association officials, NFORS is designed to enable fire fighters to enter information on their fire response efforts to provide detailed descriptions of each fire department, and the community that each department serves and the manner in which it provides fire protection. The system is also designed to collect health and wellness data on firefighter or civilian exposure, injury, or death. The project team is also developing FireCARES, a complementary system to NFORS, which is designed to assess community risks and fire department performance, and evaluate how well fire department resources are deployed. According to the project team officials, they designed FireCARES to provide information on the risks fire fighters and the public face, and what they need in their fire departments to do the job safely and effectively. They said that a community will be less vulnerable to firefighter injury and death, civilian injury and death, and property loss when fire departments use FireCARES to deploy resources that match the community's risk levels. At the time of our review, the project team was testing the data systems in 10 major metropolitan fire departments, and plans to expand the systems to 125 fire departments later in 2016 and then implement the new systems nationwide by 2019.

According to GPD officials, the information in NFORS and FireCARES could help improve the grant application and awards processes, as well as program performance measurement.[59] For example, such data would provide more insight on firefighting operations and capability gaps and could be used by FEMA and its subject-matter experts during annual grant priorities and application criteria development sessions.[60] GPD officials said these data systems could also be used to better inform the grant awards process, as NFORS could provide more detailed information on an applicant's operational needs, and FireCARES data could provide qualitative information on an applicant's community fire risk level. Finally, these systems could further inform the fire grant's

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[59]GPD currently uses data from the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) maintained by USFA that contains data that is about 2 years old by the time it is compiled and reported, according to GPD officials.

[60]According to GPD officials, the International Association of Fire Fighters has requested to transfer ownership of the two systems to the NFPA. GPD officials said that NFPA will provide stability and long-term funding for these systems and that they have secured the rights to access and use data from these systems for federal purposes (with the proviso that FEMA does not distribute information from these systems to non-government parties).

performance measures by providing data on vehicles, protective gear, and equipment purchased with fire grants, according to GPD officials. Although GPD intends to use the information in these new systems, officials have not developed a plan to identify relevant data elements in the systems and determine how they can be used to improve the fire grants application and award processes and the performance assessment system, or what GPD resources may be required to make associated changes in grant program processes and policies.

According to the Project Management Institute, project management plans help establish project objectives and outline the course of action required to attain those objectives, defining how projects are to be executed and controlled and providing a means to track, review, and report progress and performance of the project by defining project activities and developing cost and schedule estimates, among other things.[61]

FEMA officials said that they have not developed a plan for how they intend to integrate NFORS and FireCARES information into their existing fire grant program processes because the systems are still being piloted, and they intend to wait until the systems have been more broadly implemented to conduct more detailed planning after the systems contain enough data to be operationalized. However, FEMA officials are familiar with the data elements and goals of NFORS as GPD has assisted in the development of the NFORS data system, and GPD receives updates on the status of implementation. Additionally, since NFORS was funded at least in part through FP&S grants, NFORS data will be available free of charge for use by FEMA. Therefore program officials could, while system testing was still ongoing, evaluate their application and award processes, as well as their performance assessment system to identify what data elements in the new NFORS and FireCARES systems could be beneficial to enhance program management and how these data can be incorporated. Thus, a plan to determine what, and how, new NFORS and FireCARES data elements can be used to improve the fire grants' application and award processes and performance assessment system

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[61]Project Management Institute: *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK ® Guide), Fifth Edition, 2013.

could help enhance program management efforts and subsequent changes to information systems and policies.

Enhancing Collaboration between GPD and USFA

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) plays an informal role as a consultant to GPD's fire grant programs, but GPD could better leverage USFA's expertise and resources to support programmatic management of the fire grant programs using collaborative mechanisms that our work across the federal government has identified. USFA supports the efforts of state and local fire and emergency medical services departments by providing training and education, applied research and technology, data collection and analysis, public education and awareness, and dissemination of information and deployment assistance. For example, according to USFA officials, USFA has regular and ongoing interactions with fire service organizations, including through USFA's free training courses and programs delivered at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland, online, and throughout the nation. This opportunity to interact with firefighters and emergency medical service technicians provides USFA with direct feedback and perspectives from fire grant programs constituencies. In addition, USFA also manages the National Fire Data Center, which operates the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS),[62] conducts regular analyses of NFIRS data and publishes reports on national fire service trends.[63] Finally, the USFA Administrator also serves as the fire protection and emergency response community expert to the FEMA Administrator and acts as a federal advocate to address challenges facing the nation's fire service.

According to GPD officials, USFA plays a strategic role in fire grant program priorities, although there is no formal relationship between the two components. For example, USFA provides assistance to GPD such

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[62]NFIRS is a standard national reporting system that can be used by U.S. fire departments to report fires and other incidents to which they respond and maintain records of these incidents in a uniform manner. According to USFA officials, approximately 23,000 of an estimated 30,000 fire departments use NFIRS to voluntarily report on their activities.

[63]For example, USFA conducted research to identify gaps and needs in first responder training and resources and reported on solutions to better prepare local-level fire services for all-hazard events and interact with federal resources. See Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Fire Administration, *Operational Lessons Learned in Disaster Response*, (Emmitsburg, MD, June 2015).

as providing facilities for GPD's annual criteria development panels, and to review GPD's draft Notice of Funding Opportunity.

USFA's programs and GPD's fire grant programs reflect the same broad area of national need—support of national fire service organizations—and both components have similar goals, target similar beneficiaries, and provide complementary services and products that align with these program goals. For example, USFA's goals are to reduce fire and life safety risk through preparedness, prevention and mitigation; promote response, local planning, and preparedness for all hazards; enhance the fire and emergency services' capability for response to and recovery from all hazards; and advance the professional development of fire service personnel and of other people engaged in fire prevention and control. GPD's stated goals in managing the fire grants programs are to enhance the safety of the public and firefighters; provide a continuum of support for emergency responders regarding fire, medical, and all-hazard events; assist fire prevention programs; support firefighter health and safety research and development; and help build, sustain, and deliver core capabilities that are essential to achieving the National Preparedness Goal; assist local fire departments with staffing and deployment capabilities; and assure that communities have adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards.

Despite the similarities in the goals and missions of the two organizations, key USFA and GPD policy documents do not describe how the two organizations' programs could work together to achieve their common goals, and officials from both offices said there is no formalized relationship between them regarding program management. For example, USFA's Strategic Plan for 2014-2018 does not include any reference to the fire grants programs or GPD when it describes its key initiatives in building fire service capabilities. Nor does GPD identify any program-wide role for USFA in supporting the fire grants programs in the AFG, SAFER, and FP&S grant policies presented in the annual Notice of Funding Opportunity, and according to GPD officials, have not historically used NFIRS data in reviewing the fire grants programs.[64]

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[64]According to GPD officials, some data in NFIRS is not sufficiently current for use in managing the fire grants programs. However, according to GPD officials, GPD began requiring AFG applicants to submit NFIRS call volume data (as a measure of response activity) to inform the application and awards processes in the fiscal year 2015 grant cycle.

For programmatic management of other non-fire preparedness grants, GPD leverages the subject matter expertise of other DHS components. For example, the Transportation Security Administration was established after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to ensure the security of the nation's transportation system, and the agency works with GPD to assist with programmatic management of the Transit Security Grant Program. Similarly, the Coast Guard works with GPD to assist with programmatic management of the Port Security Grant Program. The relationships between GPD and these other DHS component subject-matter-expert agencies in coordinating their relative responsibilities are established in different ways. For example, GPD and the Coast Guard define their relative roles and responsibilities in the annual port security grant Notice of Funding Opportunity. Additionally, GPD and the Transportation Security Administration have an established Memorandum of Agreement to define their respective responsibilities with regard to surface transportation security grant programs.

These efforts reflect the types of mechanisms our work has shown that federal agencies have used to implement interagency collaborative efforts to address a range of purposes, including policy development; program implementation; oversight and monitoring; information sharing and communication; and building organizational capacity, such as staffing and training.[65] Although collaborative mechanisms such as written agreements differ in complexity and scope, our prior work found that they were most likely to be successful if they addressed certain key features— such as clarity of roles and responsibility, and bridging organizational cultures. In addition, since 2005, report language accompanying appropriations acts has directed FEMA to fund fire grant applications according to local priorities and those established by USFA.

According to GPD and USFA officials, their collaboration in the fire grants program is informal. GPD officials said the current level of coordination between the staff and leaders of the two respective offices is effective and

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[65]See, GAO, *Managing for Results: Implementation Approaches Used to Enhance Collaboration in Interagency Groups*, GAO-14-220 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 14, 2014); *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, GAO-12-1022 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012); and *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies,* GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

they have not sought to define or document roles and responsibilities because the current relationship meets program needs. They added that the coordination of programs and policies between USFA and GPD is effectively maintained through FEMA's regular policy working group meetings of senior officials. According to USFA officials, however, their role and participation in the fire grants program is minimal, limited to providing facilities, observing the annual criteria development meetings, and reflects and depends on the level of interest and ability of staff from the two components; and as a result, USFA does not have a meaningful impact on fire grant application processes or in peer review panels, according to USFA officials. USFA officials said that they would prefer a more formal role in the fire grants program and could contribute more to the programmatic management of fire grants by providing access to subject matter experts in fire departments nationwide, and by providing expertise on long-term trends and current practices in the fire service industry, fire prevention, and research and development efforts. For example, USFA officials said that they could enhance GPD's review and approval of FP&S grants because the purposes of FP&S grants are directly linked to USFA's mission and role in prevention and research and development. They also said they could serve as a repository for the results of work conducted under the FP&S program.

USFA officials also said their National Fire Data Center office performs quantitative fire service trend analysis based on data in USFA's system (NFIRS) that could also add value to fire grants program management. For example, the officials said that their subject matter expertise could have enhanced the utility of the new NFORS and FireCARES systems—and better coordinate the integration of NFIRS with these systems—if they had been involved earlier in the systems' development. USFA officials provided us NFIRS data that indicated that the majority of fire service organizations response efforts are often not related to fire response. According to FEMA officials, greater consideration of USFA's perspectives in developing the new systems could have helped GPD better align with the all-hazards approach used for national preparedness efforts, as documented in the National Response Framework.[66] They

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[66]According to FEMA, the National Response Framework is a guide to how the nation responds to all types of disasters and emergencies. The framework describes specific authorities and best practices for managing incidents ranging from local events to large-scale disasters.

added that it is difficult to strategically determine, plan, or assess the impact of their collaborative efforts on the fire grants programs when the efforts are based on personalities, rather than documented roles and responsibilities. Officials from both GPD and USFA agreed that formalizing USFA's role would benefit fire grant program management.

Although a level of informal coordination exists between GPD and USFA, enhancing these efforts by using collaborative mechanisms that our work across the federal government has identified as key features and issues to consider during implementation —such as clearly defining and agreeing upon USFA's role and responsibilities and documenting agreement regarding how they will be collaborating—could help GPD further leverage USFA expertise and resources in support of the fire grants programs, which could also help GPD manage the integration of fire grants into broader national preparedness efforts.

Incorporating Fire Grants into Broader National Preparedness Efforts

Moving forward, FEMA's addition of a new fire service-related core capability to the National Preparedness Goal in September 2015 will require states to realign information on fire management capabilities from public and private services and resources and integrate information from other core capabilities into their assessments of the new fire management and suppression core capability, according to FEMA officials. To help transition the fire grants programs into these broader national preparedness assessment efforts, FEMA officials said that they are taking steps to educate states, territories, tribes, and locals on the new core capability and encourage them to include capability improvements resulting from the fire grants in their assessments.

In addition, FEMA officials said that they are working to increase the involvement of fire service stakeholders in annual state Threat and Hazard Identification Risk Assessments (THIRA) and State Preparedness Reports (SPR) to more effectively reflect the impact of fire grants.[67] For

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[67]In June 2013, we reported that that fire grants program data from fire departments and local emergency medical services organizations may have an impact on the National Preparedness Goal and core capabilities, and would thus have value in each state's SPR. See GAO-13-552. According to FEMA, fire service and emergency medical service stakeholders accounted for about 9 percent of contributors to THIRA nationwide, and about 8 percent of contributors to SPRs nationwide from 2013 through 2015. (See appendix V, table 23.)

example, FEMA released revisions to national planning frameworks and new guidance on developing THIRAs and SPRs in June 2016, along with a schedule of webinars to provide additional information and answer questions.[68] States are expected to include an assessment of their level of fire management and suppression capabilities beginning in 2017. While these initial steps to increase involvement of fire service stakeholders into broader assessments of national preparedness are promising, the success of these efforts will not be measurable until after the new fire management-related capability assessments are made.

FEMA officials also said they planned to develop and implement a consolidated grant management system to integrate data used to manage fire grant programs with the data gathered and used for FEMA's non-fire preparedness grants, and ultimately better measure the impact of fire grants on national preparedness efforts. Specifically, as we reported in May 2016, FEMA plans to develop and implement a new Grants Management Modernization system to provide agency-wide management for all of FEMA's disaster and preparedness grants.[69] According to the FEMA officials, the system is to be implemented in 2020.[70] They said states will be able to use fire grant program information on AFG-purchased personal protective equipment, fire service vehicles, and training in developing SPRs because states use equipment and training as elements for assessing capabilities under existing national preparedness assessment efforts. Since GPD's grant management systems consolidation will not occur for several years, it is too early to assess its potential for enhancing FEMA's efforts to measure the impact

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[68]The National Planning Frameworks, which are part of the National Preparedness System, set the strategy and doctrine for building, sustaining, and delivering the core capabilities identified in the National Preparedness Goal. They also describe the coordinating structures and alignment of key roles and responsibilities for the whole community to ensure interoperability across all mission areas. FEMA provides support to states, territories, tribes, and urban areas in completing their THIRA, SPR, and other reporting requirements through FEMA's Unified Reporting Tool. FEMA is hosting the 2016 Unified Reporting Tool on MAX.gov, an online platform managed by the Office of Management and Budget to help government agencies collaborate and collect information.

[69]GAO, *Information Technology: FEMA Needs to Address Management Weaknesses to Improve Its Systems*, GAO-16-306 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 5, 2016.)

[70]In FEMA's fiscal year 2017 Congressional Budget Justification, the agency requested $11.4 million for the Grants Systems Management Modernization initiative.

of fire grants on national preparedness efforts. Because measuring national preparedness is an issue we have previously identified for FEMA's management of its other preparedness grants, we will continue to monitor the planned consolidation as part of our ongoing review and annual report on efforts to address fragmentation, overlap, and duplication across federal programs.[71]

Conclusions

FEMA has provided almost $5.8 billion since 2009 to fund fire grant programs that help firefighters and emergency medical service departments enhance their capabilities to respond to the needs of localities across the nation. In response to statutory amendments to the programs through FGRA in 2012, FEMA changed a number of its fire grants policies and the agency's grant awards in 2013 and 2014 generally reflected these changes. FEMA also enhanced its assessment of program performance by establishing and reporting on measures of the effectiveness of these national investments. Yet, the performance measures do not include measurable performance targets linked to AFG and SAFER program goals that could enhance their quality and utility. In addition, aligning the fire grants programs' use of data on, and definitions of, critical infrastructure to award fire grants and assess program performance with the more objective, quantitative approach used by DHS and GPD for other programs and non-fire preparedness grants could enhance GPD's efforts to integrate the fire grants program into larger national preparedness efforts and more objectively assess the impact of fire grants.

Moving forward, FEMA is seeking to advance national fire service data collection by funding new systems—NFORS and FireCARES—that can be used to gather more extensive and comprehensive data on fire service organizations operation, but program officials have not taken steps to identify what and how data from the new systems could be used to enhance fire grants program management. A project management plan could help enhance the effectiveness of subsequent changes to FEMA's information systems and program management policies that will be needed to operationalize the data. Finally, although a level of informal

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[71]GAO, *2016 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Other Financial Benefits*, GAO-16-375SP (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 13, 2016).

coordination exists between FEMA's GPD and the USFA, enhancing these efforts by clearly defining responsibilities and documenting their agreement regarding how they will be collaborating could help GPD further leverage USFA's expertise and resources in support of the fire grants programs, as well as help GPD manage the integration of fire grants into broader national preparedness efforts.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To better assess the impact of the fire grants program, the Secretary of Homeland Security should direct the FEMA Administrator to establish measurable performance targets linked to AFG and SAFER program goals, such as the desired percentage of awardees who used grants to achieve compliance with equipment standards.

To enhance FEMA's efforts to assess and integrate the fire grant programs' contributions to national preparedness, the Secretary of Homeland Security should direct the FEMA Administrator to use the National Preparedness Goal's definition of critical infrastructure as the basis of collecting information from applicants and using the National Critical Infrastructure Prioritization Program list to measure fire grant programs' performance in addressing national priorities.

To enhance FEMA's efforts to incorporate new NFORS and FireCARES data elements into fire grants program management activities, the Secretary of Homeland Security should direct the FEMA Administrator to develop a project management plan for identifying relevant data elements in the new NFORS and FireCARES systems and determining how they can be used to improve fire grant applications and awards processes and the performance assessment system.

To further leverage the expertise and resources in support of FEMA's fire grants programs, the Secretary of Homeland Security should direct the FEMA Administrator to define and document the roles and responsibilities of USFA in administering the fire grant programs.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DHS for review and comment. In response, DHS provided written comments on August 25, 2016, which are summarized below and reproduced in appendix VI. DHS concurred with all four recommendations and described planned actions to address them. DHS had no technical comments on the draft report.

DHS concurred with our first recommendation that FEMA establish measurable performance targets linked to AFG and SAFER program goals, such as the desired percentage of awardees who used grants to achieve compliance with equipment standards. DHS stated that FEMA is reviewing all metrics to determine the feasibility for targets on the current set of metrics and will include approved targets in the annual report to Congress that will be issued by the end of fiscal year 2016. These actions, if implemented effectively, should address the intent of our recommendation.

DHS also concurred with our second recommendation that FEMA use the National Preparedness Goal's definition of critical infrastructure as the basis of collecting information from applicants and using the National Critical Infrastructure Prioritization Program list to measure fire grant programs' performance in addressing national priorities. DHS stated that FEMA will incorporate the National Preparedness Goal's definition of national critical infrastructure into the fire grant performance measures and will conduct an assessment of data from AFG program application and awards in order to verify recipients are reporting infrastructure that aligns with the National Preparedness Goal definition of critical infrastructure. According to DHS, the assessment will be completed by the end of calendar year 2016 and FEMA will report the measures in the fiscal year 2017 Annual Report to Congress, expected to be completed by December 30, 2017. These actions, if implemented effectively, should address the intent of our recommendation.

DHS concurred with our third recommendation that FEMA develop a project management plan for identifying relevant data elements in the new NFORS and FireCARES systems and determining how they can be used to improve fire grant applications and awards processes and the performance assessment system. DHS stated that FEMA will develop a plan to assess the data collected to determine feasibility for integration in to the fire grants programs. According to DHS, the plan will incorporate ways to improve the applications, awards processes, and tracking of performance and should be completed by March 31, 2017. These actions, if implemented effectively, should address the intent of our recommendation.

DHS concurred with our last recommendation that FEMA define and document the roles and responsibilities of USFA in administering the fire grant programs. DHS stated that FEMA will prepare a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) between USFA and GPD to assign roles and responsibilities for coordination of their separately

legislated responsibilities to (a) maximize FEMA's service to the Fire and Fire Based Emergency Management Services, and (b) prevent programmatic inconsistencies and conflicts. According to DHS, this effort should be completed by October 31, 2016. These actions, if implemented effectively, should address the intent of our recommendation.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committee, the Director of OMB, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and other interested parties. The report will also 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) 512-8777 or CurrieC@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 key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VII.

Chris P. Currie

Chris Currie, Director
Homeland Security and Justice Issues

Funding Distribution of Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG), Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), and Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Awards Pre- and Post-Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2014

Table 2 shows the distribution of grants awards for the three grant programs fiscal years 2002 through 2014.[1] The amount of funding increased from fiscal year 2002, peaking in fiscal year 2010 with a total amount awarded of $788.9 million.

Table 2: Fire Grant Awards, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2014

Dollars in millions

Fiscal year	Assistance to Firefighters Grants	Fire Prevention and Safety	Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response	Total
2002	$332			**332**
2003	698.5			**698.5**
2004	672.9			**672.9**
2005	596.5	33.1	63.5	**693.1**
2006	484.6	37.3	101.5	**623.4**
2007	493.1	33.9	107.3	**634.3**
2008	453.9	36.4	134.1	**624.4**
2009	504.4	36.9	224.1	**765.4**
2010	334.9	33.2	420.8	**788.9**
2011	341	33.4	374.5	**748.9**
2012	280.8	34.6	324.4	**639.8**
2013	288.3	32.1	316.5	**636.9**
2014	304.7	34	340	**678.7**

Source: GAO Analysis of FEMA award data | GAO-16-744

Notes: Congress amended the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 in 2003 to establish the SAFER program, and appropriated funds to SAFER beginning in Fiscal Year 2005. FEMA grants Award funding for AFG and FP&S come from the same appropriation of funds. Funding available for awards differs from appropriated amounts in some cases due to the subtracting of administrative costs from appropriated amounts in certain years.

[1]When recording grant activity by fiscal year, FEMA records information according to which grant cycle an application or award applies, rather than the date an application was made or an award was given. For example, FEMA received an AFG and FP&S appropriation of $340 million for fiscal year 2014, but set an application deadline for awards from this appropriation for December 5, 2014, and an anticipated award date of March 9, 2015. Both the application deadline and the anticipated award date fell within fiscal year 2015, but FEMA defines activity related to this grant cycle as fiscal year 2014 grant activity.

Table 3 shows the outcomes for the AFG, SAFER, and FP&S grants awarded in the fiscal year 2014 grant cycle subdivided by the eligible activities under each grant program. AFG grants received the majority of applications and awarded the largest number of grants. In addition, this table corresponds to information in GAO-10-64, Table 2.

Table 3: Fire Grants Submitted and Awarded Fiscal Year 2014

Grant	Activity	Number of Applications Submitted	Number of Grants Awarded
Assistance to Firefighters Grant (Fiscal Year 2014)	Operations and Safety	6,891	1,908
	Vehicle Acquisition	2,585	201
	Regional	483	98
	State Fire Training Academies	40	34
	AFG Total	**9,999**	**2,241**
Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (Fiscal Year 2014)	Hiring	864	165
	Recruitment and Retention	471	89
	SAFER Total	**1,335**	**254**
Fire Prevention and Safety (Fiscal Year 2014)	Fire Prevention	936	83
	Research and Development	46	5
	Research and Prevention	5	2
	FP&S Total	**987**	**90**

Source: GAO Analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a] State Fire Training Academies submit applications for Operations and Safety or Vehicle Acquisition grants, but FEMA tracks these applications separately.

[b] Research and prevention applications are those of applicants that submitted requests for both fire prevention and research and development activities in a single application.

Appendix II: Fire Grants Applications and Awards Policies Related to Fire Grant Reauthorization Act (FGRA) Amendments

Our analysis of FGRA identified 26 amendments related to fire grant application and award policies. FEMA incorporated most of these changes into its existing grant application and awards processes (see table 4 below). In some cases, FEMA used existing authorities to waive changes related to FGRA amendments or found that no change to existing policy was necessary.

Table 4: Fire Grants Reauthorization Act (FGRA) Application and Award Policies: Changes and Waived by Fire Grants Program

FGRA Amendments to Fire Grant Policy in 15 U.S.C. §§ 2229, 2229a.	Grant Policy Change Required?	Status and Effects of FGRA Amendments
Application Policy Changes		
Assistance to Firefighter Grant program (AFG) Application Policy		
1. Grants may be used to[a] a. Certify building inspectors whose responsibilities include fire safety inspections and who are employed by or serving as volunteers with a fire department b. Establish programs dedicated to raising awareness of, and prevention of, job-related mental health issues c. Support such other activities, consistent with the purposes of this subsection, as the Administrator of FEMA determines appropriate	No	a. Previous AFG policy included the training and certification of building fire safety inspectors as an eligible use of grants, so no policy change was necessary. Building inspector training and certification remains as an eligible use of AFG grant funds. b. Previous AFG policy included wellness and fitness programs related to job-related mental health issues as an eligible use of grants, so no policy change was necessary. Such programs remain as eligible uses of AFG grant funds. c. This requirement is met through FEMA's administration of the AFG program, so no specific policy change was necessary.
2. State fire training academies are eligible grant recipients for purposes of acquiring firefighting vehicles, equipment, and personal protective equipment.[b]	Yes	State fire training academies were previously not eligible to apply for AFG grants. FEMA made state fire training academies eligible for these grant purposes beginning in the fiscal year 2013 AFG grant cycle. (See app. I table 3 for the number of state fire training academy of applications and awards during fiscal year 2014.)
3. Two or more entities may submit an application for a grant to fund a joint program or initiative, including acquisition of shared equipment or vehicles; FEMA must publish guidance on applying for and administering grants for joint programs and initiatives.[c]	Yes	Multiple-entity regional applicants previously could not submit applications for vehicles, but could apply for other shared equipment. FEMA made regional applicants eligible for vehicle grants beginning in the fiscal year 2013 grant cycle. For example, FEMA received 49 regional vehicle applications during its 2014 grant application cycle.

FGRA Amendments to Fire Grant Policy in 15 U.S.C. §§ 2229, 2229a.	Grant Policy Change Required?	Status and Effects of FGRA Amendments
4. FEMA shall make the following considerations when evaluating applications[d] a. The degree to which an award will reduce deaths, injuries, and property damage by reducing the risks associated with fire-related and other hazards b. The extent of the need of an applicant for a grant under this section and the need to protect the United States as a whole c. The broad range of factors important to the applicant's ability to respond to fires and related hazards, such as[e] • Population served • Geographic response area • Hazards vulnerability • Call volume • Financial situation, including unemployment rate of the area being served • Need for training or equipment	No	FEMA officials identified fire grant policies that address the considerations in FGRA: a. AFG seeks to reduce deaths, injuries, and property damage by prioritizing improvements to fire departments' capabilities towards these ends. For example, AFG specifically prioritizes preventing death and injury among firefighters by making personal protective equipment, a high priority for grants. b. FEMA works to meet this AFG award priority by attempting to prioritize local areas with the greatest in the US. According to FEMA officials, AFG primarily addresses these considerations in the peer review process. FEMA officials noted that the FP&S program also funds national programs that benefit the United States as a whole. c. AFG: 1. Includes population served as a factor in vehicle pre-scoring. 2. FEMA classifies applicants as Urban, Suburban, Rural, or State Fire Training Academies for AFG, and adjusts priorities for certain items depending on their geographic classification. 3. Includes hazards vulnerability as a consideration in the peer review of application narratives. 4. Includes call volume as a factor in vehicle pre-scoring. 5. Includes the financial situation of a department and its jurisdiction as considerations in the peer panel review process. If a department requests a waiver for grant cost-sharing requirements, FEMA will use Census Bureau data on the jurisdiction's poverty and unemployment rates in considering whether to grant a waiver. 6. AFG grant applications for training and equipment include questions about training type or equipment type, use, and age that address an applicant's need for the equipment. These application elements are factors in FEMA's pre-scoring system. Panelists also consider applicants' need for the requested training and equipment.

FGRA Amendments to Fire Grant Policy in 15 U.S.C. §§ 2229, 2229a.	Grant Policy Change Required?	Status and Effects of FGRA Amendments
Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Application Policy		
5. In addition to volunteer and combination fire departments, national, state, local, and tribal fire interest organizations are eligible for SAFER Recruitment and Retention grants.[f]	Yes	Before FGRA, national fire interest organizations were not eligible to apply for Recruitment and Retention grants, but according to FEMA officials, tribal organizations were eligible to apply as local organizations. FEMA made national organizations eligible for these grants and classified tribal organizations as separate from local organizations beginning in the fiscal year 2013 SAFER grant cycle.
Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Application Policy		
6. Grants may be awarded to institutions of higher education, national fire service organizations, or national fire safety organizations to establish and operate fire safety research centers; may establish not more than 3 fire safety research centers.[g]	No – Optional	Organizations were not allowed to apply for fire safety research center establishment grants before FGRA. According to FEMA officials, FEMA chose not to include research center establishment grants in FP&S after FGRA due to a lack of a clear definition for how these research centers would work within FP&S, the difficulty in implementing research centers within the small amount of FP&S funding, and because allowing multi-year research center grants would be incongruous with shorter-term FP&S grants.
7. FP&S grants must be for one or more of the following purposes:[h] a. To enforce fire codes and promote compliance with fire safety standards b. To fund fire prevention programs, including programs that educate the public about arson prevention and detection c. To fund wildland fire prevention programs, including education, awareness, and mitigation programs that protect lives, property, and natural resources from fire in the wildland-urban interface d. In the case of a grant to institute of higher education, etc., to fund the establishment or operation of a fire safety research center for the purpose of significantly reducing the number of fire-related deaths and injuries among firefighters and the general public through research, development, and technology transfer activities e. To support other activities consistent with the purposes of this subsection as the Administrator determines appropriate	No	Before FGRA, FP&S grants had to be used for the following purposes: -General Education/Awareness -Includes Wildland Fire Prevention Programs -Fire and Arson Investigation -Code Enforcement/Awareness -National/State/Regional Programs and Studies -Clinical Studies -Technology and Product Development -Database System Development -Dissemination and Implementation Research -Preliminary Studies Because these grant purposes are related to the purposes specified in FGRA, no changes to policy were needed. FEMA kept these grant purposes following FGRA. FEMA did not allow use of grants to establish research centers due to their decision not to fund research center establishment grants.

FGRA Amendments to Fire Grant Policy in 15 U.S.C. §§ 2229, 2229a.	Grant Policy Change Required?	Status and Effects of FGRA Amendments
Award Policy Changes		
Assistance to Firefighters Grant program (AFG) Award Policy		
8. FEMA must ensure that of the available grant funds in each fiscal year[j] a. Not less than 25 percent are awarded to career fire departments b. Not less than 25 percent are awarded to volunteer fire departments c. Not less than 25 percent are awarded to combination fire departments and fire departments using paid-on-call firefighting personnel d. Not less than 10 percent are available for open competition among career fire departments, volunteer fire departments, combination fire departments, and fire departments using paid-on-call firefighting personnel	Yes	Previous law required FEMA to distribute grant funding among a variety of departments, with combination and volunteer departments receiving a percentage of grant funds at least equal to the percentage of the population they protect. In fiscal year 2012, for example, FEMA set a maximum of 48 percent for career departments, a minimum of 33 percent for combination departments, and a minimum of 19 percent for volunteer departments. FEMA implemented the new distribution system beginning in the fiscal year 2013 AFG grant cycle. (See app. III table 5 for examples of applications and awards by department type for fiscal years 2009 through 2014.)
9. Not more than 3 percent of grant funds may be made available for state fire training academies; FEMA may not award a grant to a fire training academy that exceeds $1 million in any given year.[j]	Yes	State fire training academies were not eligible to apply for AFG grants under previous law. FEMA made state fire training academies eligible for AFG grants beginning in the fiscal year 2013 grant cycle. FEMA set the maximum grant level for academies at $500,000, recommended a maximum grant level below the $1 million allow by FGRA to help increase the number of awards to state fire training academies.
10. FEMA may not award a grant in excess of[k] a. For jurisdictions with 100,000 people or fewer: $1 million; b. For jurisdictions with more than 100,000 but not more than 500,000 people: $2 million; c. For jurisdictions with more than 500,000 but not more than 1,000,000: not more than $3 million; d. For jurisdictions with more than 1,000,000 but not more than 2,500,000 people: $6 million; e. For jurisdictions with more than 2,500,000 people: $9 million.	Yes	Previous law set the following grant limits according to jurisdiction size: For jurisdictions with less than 500,000 people: not more than $1 million For jurisdictions with more than 500,000 but not more than 1,000,000 people: not more than $1.75 million For jurisdictions with more than 1,000,000 but not more than 2,500,000 people: not more than $2.75 million FEMA implemented the new limits beginning in the fiscal year 2013 AFG grant cycle.
11. No grant may exceed the amount that is one percent of the available grant funds in that fiscal year.[l]	Yes	Previous law set the grant maximum at the lesser of $2.75 million or half of one percent of funds appropriated under the section for that fiscal year. FEMA implemented this change beginning in the fiscal year 2013 AFG grant cycle.

FGRA Amendments to Fire Grant Policy in 15 U.S.C. §§ 2229, 2229a.	Grant Policy Change Required?	Status and Effects of FGRA Amendments
12. FEMA can waive maximum aggregate grant (1 percent maximum) for extraordinary need.[m]	Yes	Previous law did not allow FEMA to waive the grant maximum of $2.75 million or one half of one percent of funds appropriated under the section for that fiscal year. FEMA implemented this change beginning in the fiscal year 2013 AFG grant cycle.
13. Grantees must agree to make available non-federal funds in an amount equal to not less than[n] a. For jurisdictions with 1,000,000 or more residents: 15 percent; b. For jurisdictions with more than 20,000 but not more than 1,000,000 residents: 10 percent; c. For jurisdictions with 20,000 residents or fewer: 5 percent.	Yes	Previous law set cost sharing requirements at the following levels: For jurisdictions with more than 50,000 people: 20 percent For jurisdictions with 50,000 or fewer people: 10 percent For jurisdictions with 20,000 or fewer people: 5 percent FEMA implemented the new requirements beginning in the fiscal year 2013 AFG grant cycle.
14. FEMA may waive matching requirement for economic hardship.[o]	Yes	Previous law did not allow waivers of cost sharing requirements. FEMA implemented a waiver policy beginning in the fiscal year 2013 AFG grant cycle.
Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Award Policy		
15. The period of performance for Hiring grants is three years.[p]	Yes, but waived	FEMA received the authority to waive SAFER award requirements at the program-wide level for fiscal years 2009 through 2010 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and supplemental appropriations, and for fiscal years 2011 through 2015 through DHS appropriations. As a result, FEMA did not implement this requirement following the passage of FGRA. According to FEMA officials, previous award requirements were burdensome on the grant process and on grantees. According to FEMA officials, FEMA will reinstate this requirement for the fiscal year 2016 grant cycle, because FEMA did not receive waiver authority for that cycle. FEMA set the Hiring grant period of performance to two years both before and after the passage of FGRA. According to FEMA officials, this shorter period of performance eases grant administration and personnel maintenance requirements for grantees.
16. The portion of the costs of hiring firefighters may not exceed:[q] a. 75 percent in the first year; b. 75 percent in the second year; and c. 35 percent in the third year of the grant.	Yes, but waived	FEMA received the authority to waive SAFER award requirements at the program-wide level for fiscal years 2009 through 2010 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and supplemental appropriations, and for fiscal years 2011 through 2015 through DHS appropriations. As a result, FEMA did not implement this requirement following the passage of FGRA According to FEMA officials, FEMA will reinstate this requirement for the fiscal year 2016 grant cycle because FEMA did not receive waiver authority for that cycle. Hiring grants covered 100 percent of costs for hiring firefighters, both before and after FGRA.

FGRA Amendments to Fire Grant Policy in 15 U.S.C. §§ 2229, 2229a.	Grant Policy Change Required?	Status and Effects of FGRA Amendments
17. FEMA is authorized to waive local cost sharing requirements in cases of economic hardship.[r]	Yes, but waived	Since Hiring grants covered 100 percent of costs before and after passage of FGRA, FEMA did not have a case-by-case waiver policy in place for Hiring grants.
18. The amount of funding provided for hiring a firefighter in any fiscal year may not exceed:[s] a. In the first year, 75 percent of the usual annual cost of a first-year firefighter in that department at the time the grant application was filed; b. In the second year, 75 percent of the usual annual cost of a first-year firefighter in that department at the time the grant application was filed; and c. In the third year, 35 percent of the usual annual cost of a first-year firefighter in that department at the time the grant application was filed.	Yes, but waived	FEMA received the authority to waive SAFER award requirements at the program-wide level for fiscal years 2009 through 2010 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and supplemental appropriations, and for fiscal years 2011 through 2015 through DHS appropriations. As a result, FEMA did not implement this requirement for following the passage of FGRA. According to FEMA officials, previous award requirements were burdensome on the grant process and on grantees. According to FEMA officials, FEMA will reinstate this requirement for the fiscal year 2016 grant cycle because FEMA did not receive waiver authority for that cycle. FEMA did not set salary limits or maximum amounts for Hiring grants, both before and after FGRA.
19. FEMA is authorized to waive the following requirements for economic hardship:[t] a. Funds made available under this section to fire departments for salaries and benefits to hire new, additional firefighters shall not be used to supplant state or local funds, or, in the case of Indian tribal governments, funds supplied by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but shall be used to increase the amount of funds that would, in the absence of federal funds received under this section, be made available from state or local sources, or in the case of Indian tribal governments, from funds supplied by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. b. No grant shall be awarded pursuant to this section to a municipality or other recipient whose annual budget at the time of the application for fire-related programs and emergency response has been reduced below 80 percent of the average funding level in the 3 years prior to November 24, 2003.	Yes, but waived	FEMA received the authority to waive SAFER award requirements at the program-wide level for fiscal years 2009 through 2010 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and supplemental appropriations, and for fiscal years 2011 through 2015 through DHS appropriations. As a result, FEMA did not implement this requirement for following the passage of FGRA. According to FEMA officials, previous award requirements were burdensome on the grant process and on grantees. According to FEMA officials, FEMA will reinstate this requirement for the fiscal year 2016 grant cycle because FEMA did not receive waiver authority for that cycle.

FGRA Amendments to Fire Grant Policy in 15 U.S.C. §§ 2229, 2229a.	Grant Policy Change Required?	Status and Effects of FGRA Amendments
20. FEMA must publish guidelines for determining what constitutes economic hardship and must consider the following:[u] Changes in rates of unemployment from previous years. Whether the rates of unemployment of the relevant communities are currently and have consistently exceeded the annual national average rates of unemployment. Changes in percentages of individuals eligible to receive food stamps from previous years. Such other factors as FEMA considers appropriate.	Yes, but waived	Since award requirements were waived for the fiscal year 2009 through 2015 SAFER grant cycles, FEMA did not implement a case-by-case waiver policy and did not develop waiver guidance before or after FGRA.
Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Award Policy		
21. Not be less than 10 percent of total AFG grant funding is to be awarded for FP&S grants.[v]	Yes	Previous law set the minimum for FP&S funds at not less th 5 percent of total AFG grant funding. FEMA implemented this change beginning in the fiscal year 2013 FP&S grant cycle.
22. A grant may not exceed $1.5 million.[w]	Yes	Previous law set the maximum grant size at $1 million. FEMA implemented this change beginning in the fiscal year 2013 FP&S grant cycle.
23. Applicants must agree to make available non-federal funds in an amount equal to not less than 5 percent of the awarded grant;[x] FEMA may waive the matching requirement for economic hardship.[y]	Yes	Previous law set FP&S matching levels for fire departments at AFG. FEMA implemented this change beginning in the fiscal year 2013 FP&S grant cycle.
24. No grant may be awarded to the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) or any of its affiliates.[z]	Yes	Previous law did not prohibit grants to ACORN or its affiliates. According to FEMA officials, FEMA has an office of Fiscal Integrity Review within GPD that reviews grant applications to ensure that no FP&S awards are made to known ACORN affiliates.
25. Applicants must maintain not less than 80 percent of the average amount of such expenditures over the two preceding fiscal years.[aa]	Yes	Previous law set the maintenance of expenditure requirement at the average of the two preceding fiscal years. FEMA implemented this change in the fiscal year 2013 FP&S grant cycle.
26. FEMA may waive the maintenance of expenditures requirement for economic hardship.[ab]	Yes	Previous law did not contain waiver authority for maintenance of expenditures since there was no requirement regarding maintenance of expenditures. FEMA implemented a waiver policy in the fiscal year 2013 FP&S grant cycle.

Source: GAO analysis of 15 U.S.C. §§ 2229, 2229a. | GAO-16-744

[a]15 U.S.C. § 2229(c)(3)

[b]15 U.S.C. § 2229(c)(1)(C).

[c]15 U.S.C. § 2229(e)(3).

[d]15 U.S.C. § 2229(g).

[e]15 U.S.C. § 2229(j)(1).

[f]15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(2).

[g]15 U.S.C. § 2229(d)(1)(C).

[h]15 U.S.C. § 2229(d)(3).

[i]15 U.S.C. § 2229(h).

[j]15 U.S.C. §2229(i)(2).

[k]15 U.S.C. § 2229(c)(2)(A).

[l]15 U.S.C. § 2229(c)(2)(B)(i).

[m]15 U.S.C. § 2229(c)(2)(B)(ii).

[n]15 U.S.C. §2229(k)(1).

[o]15 U.S.C. § 2229(k)(4).

[p]15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(B).

[q]15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(E).

[r]15 U.S.C. § 2229a(d)(1)(B).

[s]15 U.S.C. § 2229a(c)(4).

[t]15 U.S.C. § 2229a(d)(1).

[u]15 U.S.C. § 2229a(d)(2).

[v]15 U.S.C. § 2229(h)(5).

[w]15 U.S.C. § 2229(d)(2).

[x]15 U.S.C. § 222(k)(2).

[y]15 U.S.C. § 2229(k)(4).

[z]15 U.S.C. § 2229(d)(4).

[aa]15 U.S.C. § 2229(k)(3).

[ab]15 U.S.C. § 2229(k)(4).

Appendix III: Fire Grants Funding, Applications, and Awards

Analyses of AFG, SAFER and FP&S Application and Awards Distributions, Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

The following tables below provide additional information on fire grant applications and awards. In addition, some tables correspond to data analyses performed as part of our October 2009 review of the fire grants program to offer comparisons of data for fiscal years 2002 through 2008.[1]

Table 5 shows the distribution of Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) awards from fiscal years 2009 through 2014 by department types (i.e., career, combination, volunteer, paid on call/stipend, or a combination of these). In addition, this table corresponds to information in GAO-10-64, appendix VI.

Table 5: Distribution of Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) Awards by Department Type for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

Fiscal Years/ (AFG) Awards		Department Type				
		Career	Combination	Volunteer	Paid on call/stipend	Total
2009	Amount Awarded[a]	$133,651,544	$127,161,185	$217,236,158	$26,387,251	**$504,436,138**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	26	25	43	5	
2010	Amount Awarded[a]	$90,047,249	$113,037,753	$110,802,019	$20,969,694	**$334,856,715**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	27	34	33	6	
2011	Amount Awarded[a]	$130,676,135	$114,779,888	$83,690,676	$11,862,570	**$341,009,268**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	38	34	25	3	
2012	Amount Awarded[a]	$96,583,853	$84,885,634	$88,279,296	$11,096,287	**$280,845,071**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	34	30	31	4	
2013	Amount Awarded[a]	$97,393,266	$89,801,924	$90,860,832	$10,240,632	**$288,296,654**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	34	31	32	4	
2014	Amount Awarded[a]	$105,840,645	$94,385,889	$94,384,787	$10,135,431	**$304,746,752**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	35	31	31	3	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

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[1]GAO, *Fire Grants: FEMA Has Met Most Requirements for Awarding Fire Grants, but Additional Actions Would Improve Its Grant Process*, GAO-10-64 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 30, 2009).

[a]The sum of the dollars awarded by department type may not equal the total amount due to rounding.

[b]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 6 shows the distribution of Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) awards from fiscal years 2009 through 2014 by department types (i.e., career, combination, volunteer, interest organizations, or fire department/fire district). In addition, this table corresponds to information in GAO-10-64, appendix VI.

Table 6: Distribution of Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Awards by Department Type for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

Fiscal Years/ SAFER Awards		Career	Combination	Volunteer	Department Type — Interest Organizations	Fire Department/Fire District[a]	Total
2009	Amount Awarded[b]	$173,539,887	$33,517,035	$5,040,712	$11,989,604	0	**$224,087,237**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	77	15	2	5	0	
2010	Amount Awarded[b]	$288,356,326	$90,734,120	$18,964,751	$21,502,415	$1,203,080	**$420,760,691**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	69	22	5	5	0	
2011	Amount Awarded[b]	$255,442,741	$95,308,194	$10,990,441	$12,745,384	0	**$374,486,761**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	68	25	3	3	0	
2012	Amount Awarded[b]	$217,603,221	$83,208,160	$11,873,057	$11,698,368	0	**$324,382,806**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	67	26	4	4	0	
2013	Amount Awarded[b]	$220,505,840	$76,653,362	$9,224,578	$10,139,167	0	**$316,522,947**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	70	24	3	3	0	
2014	Amount Awarded[b]	$226,640,925	$91,462,384	$13,531,584	$8,340,509	0	**$339,975,402**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	67	27	4	2	0	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]A fire department/fire district is typically a county fire system, that is divided by districts or is a department that is independent of a city or town.

[b]The sum of the dollars awarded by department type may not equal the total amount due to rounding.

[c]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 7 shows the distribution of Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) awards from fiscal years 2009 through 2014 by department types (i.e.,

career, combination, volunteer, paid on call, interest organization, or state/local volunteer interest organizations). In addition, this table corresponds to information in GAO-10-64, appendix VI.

Table 7: Distribution of Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Awards by Department Type for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

Fiscal Years/ FP&S Awards		Career	Combination	Volunteer	Paid on call/stipend	Interest Organizations	State/Local Volunteer Interest Organizations	Total
2009	Amount Awarded[a]	$2,843,747	$1,699,137	$590,253	$63,155	$31,698,238	0	**$36,894,530**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	8	5	2	0	86	0	
2010	Amount Awarded[a]	$3,910,601	$1,484,189	$416,367	$294,045	$27,047,916	0	**$33,153,118**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	12	4	1	1	82	0	
2011	Amount Awarded[a]	$5,263,857	$1,607,285	$879,459	$164,460	$25,473,766	0	**$33,388,826**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	16	5	3	0	76	0	
2012	Amount Awarded[a]	$24,111,681	$3,510,200	$2,079,339	0	0	$4,914,406	**$34,615,626**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	70	10	6	0	0	14	
2013	Amount Awarded[a]	$2,799,137	$751,888	$329,578	0	$28,211,405	0	**$32,092,008**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	9	2	1	0	88	0	
2014	Amount Awarded[a]	$4,066,336	$741,262	$235,651	0	$28,907,939	0	**$33,951,188**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	12	2	1	0	85	0	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]The sum of the dollars awarded by department type may not equal the total amount due to rounding.

[b]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 8 shows the distribution of AFG awards from fiscal years 2009 through 2014 by community service areas (i.e., rural, suburban, urban, and state fire training academies). For fiscal years 2009 through 2014, rural departments received the most funding of any community service type each year. In addition, this table corresponds to information in GAO-10-64, appendix VII.

Table 8: Distribution of Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Awards by Community Service Area for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

Fiscal Years/ AFG Awards		Urban	Suburban	Rural	State Fire Training Academies[a]	Total
			Community Service Area			
2009	Amount Awarded[b]	$94,261,298	$96,394,269	$313,780,571	0	**$504,436,138**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	19	19	62	0	
2010	Amount Awarded[b]	$63,061,522	$78,787,072	$193,008,121	0	**$334,856,715**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	19	24	58	0	
2011	Amount Awarded[b]	$104,342,715	$87,563,998	$149,102,555	0	**$341,009,268**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	31	26	44	0	
2012	Amount Awarded[b]	$67,026,935	$74,727,854	$139,090,281	0	**$280,845,071**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	24	27	50	0	
2013	Amount Awarded[b]	$66,532,190	$59,829,392	$152,680,330	$9,254,742	**$288,296,654**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	23	21	53	3	
2014	Amount Awarded[b]	$64,517,796	$66,040,143	$164,833,790	$9,355,023	**$304,746,752**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	21	22	54	3	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]State fire training academies must be designated as their state's primary state fire training institution to qualify for AFG grants.

[b]The sum of the dollars awarded by department type may not equal the total amount due to rounding.

[c]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 9 shows the distribution of SAFER awards from fiscal years 2009 through 2014 by community service areas (i. e., rural, suburban, urban, and interest organizations). For fiscal years 2009 through 2014, urban departments received a majority of the grant funding. In addition, this table corresponds to information in GAO-10-64, appendix VII.

Table 9: Distribution of Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Awards by Community Service Area for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

Fiscal Years/ SAFER Awards		Community Service Area				
		Urban	Suburban	Rural	Interest Organizations[a]	Total
2009	Amount Awarded[b]	$114,553,055	$61,368,301	$37,737,277	$10,428,604	**$224,087,237**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	51	27	17	5	
2010	Amount Awarded[b]	$232,782,872	$120,122,741	$46,352,663	$21,502,415	**$420,760,691**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	55	29	11	5	
2011	Amount Awarded[b]	$216,191,415	$96,118,264	$49,431,698	$12,745,384	**$374,486,761**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	58	26	13	3	
2012	Amount Awarded[b]	$208,124,891	$65,737,746	$40,017,201	$10,502,968	**$324,382,806**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	64	20	12	3	
2013	Amount Awarded[b]	$198,927,772	$71,826,152	$35,629,856	$10,139,167	**$316,522,947**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	63	23	11	3	
2014	Amount Awarded[b]	$210,871,035	$73,353,388	$47,410,470	$8,340,509	**$339,975,402**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	62	22	14	2	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]"Interest Organizations" represent other eligible organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as local, regional, or statewide organizations.

[b]The sum of the dollars awarded by department type may not equal the total amount due to rounding

[c]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 10 shows the distribution of FP&S awards from fiscal years 2009 through 2014 by community service areas (i.e., rural, suburban, urban, and interest organizations). For fiscal years 2009 through 2014, interest organizations received a majority of the grant funding. In addition, this table corresponds to information in GAO-10-64, appendix VII.

Table 10: Distribution of Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Awards by Community Service Area for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

		Community Service Area				
Fiscal Years/ FP&S Awards		**Urban**	**Suburban**	**Rural**	**Interest Organizations**[a]	**Total**
2009	Amount Awarded[b]	$5,720,165	$3,115,660	$2,456,102	$25,602,603	**$36,894,530**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	16	8	7	69	
2010	Amount Awarded[b]	$5,977,953	$3,981,944	$3,583,050	$19,610,171	**$33,153,118**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	18	12	11	59	
2011	Amount Awarded[b]	$7,148,945	$2,388,977	$4,916,363	$18,934,541	**$33,388,826**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	21	7	15	57	
2012	Amount Awarded[b]	$8,728,438	$2,387,046	$3,764,818	$19,735,324	**$34,615,626**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	25	7	11	57	
2013	Amount Awarded[b]	$6,635,747	$1,062,145	$1,141,815	$23,252,301	**$32,092,008**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	21	3	4	72	
2014	Amount Awarded[b]	$4,500,110	$1,170,127	$1,174,776	$27,106,175	**$33,951,188**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[c]	13	3	3	80	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]"Interest Organizations" represent other eligible organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as local, regional, or statewide organizations.

[b]The sum of the dollars awarded by department type may not equal the total amount due to rounding.

[c]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 11 shows the distribution of AFG awards from fiscal years 2009 through 2014 by activity (i.e., operations and safety, vehicle acquisition, regional, and state fire training academies). The amount of funding provided for operations and safety activities is consistently higher than that awarded on each of regional activities, vehicle acquisition, and state fire training academies. Fiscal year 2014 awards for operations and safety grants amounted to $194.9 million out of a total of $304.7 million in grant awards. Grant funding for vehicle acquisition, regional applications, and state fire training academies was $62.4 million, $38 million, and $9.4 million, respectively. In addition, this table corresponds to information in GAO-10-64, appendix VIII.

Table 11: Distribution of Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Awards by Activity for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

		Activity				
Fiscal Years/ AFG Awards		**Operation and Safety**	**Vehicle Acquisition**	**Regional**	**State Fire Training Academies**	**Total**
2009	Amount Awarded[a]	$311,311,848	$128,368,997	$64,755,293	0	**$504,436,138**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	62	25	13	0	
2010	Amount Awarded[a]	$192,009,730	$91,974,433	$50,872,552	0	**$334,856,715**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	57	27	15	0	
2011	Amount Awarded[a]	$141,071,449	$83,429,547	$116,508,272	0	**$341,009,268**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	41	24	34	0	
2012	Amount Awardeda	$200,932,311	$31,075,129	$48,837,630	0	**$280,845,071**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	72	11	17	0	
2013	Amount Awarded[a]	$170,879,369	$54,713,211	$53,449,332	$9,254,742	**$288,296,654**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	59	19	19	3	
2014	Amount Awarded[a]	$194,921,493	$62,427,766	$38,042,470	$9,355,023	**$304,746,752**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	64	20	12	3	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]The sum of the dollars awarded by department type may not equal the total amount due to rounding.

[b]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 12 shows the distribution of SAFER awards from fiscal years 2009 through 2014 by activity (i.e. hiring and recruitment and retention). The amount of funding awarded for hiring is consistently higher than the amount awarded for recruitment and retention activities. Fiscal year 2014 funding for hiring amounted to $305.3 million out of a total of $340 million grant awards. Grant funding for recruitment and retention was $34.7 million.

Table 12: Distribution of Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Awards by Activity for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

| Fiscal Years/ SAFER Awards | | Activity | | |
		Hiring	Recruitment and Retention	Total
2009	Amount Awarded[a]	$202,345,542	$21,741,695	**$224,087,237**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	90	10	
2010	Amount Awarded[a]	$354,585,678	$66,175,012	**$420,760,691**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	84	16	
2011	Amount Awarded[a]	$336,132,726	$38,354,035	**$374,486,761**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	90	10	
2012	Amount Awarded[a]	$292,191,203	$32,191,603	**$324,382,806**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	90	10	
2013	Amount Awarded[a]	$284,529,865	$31,993,082	**$316,522,947**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	90	10	
2014	Amount Awarded[a]	$305,280,912	$34,694,490	**$339,975,402**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	90	10	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]The sum of the dollars awarded by department type may not equal the total amount due to rounding.
[b]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 13 shows the distribution of FP&S awards from fiscal years 2009 through 2014 by activity (i.e. fire prevention, research and research and prevention). The amount of funding provided for fire prevention awards is consistently higher than that awarded on research and development and research and prevention. Fiscal year 2014 funding for fire prevention amounted to $25.2 million out of a total of $34 million grant awards. Grant funding for research activity and research and prevention was $7.5 million and $1.2 million, respectively.

Table 13: Distribution of Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Awards by Activity for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2014

		Activity			
Fiscal Years/ AFG Awards		**Fire Prevention**	**Research and Development**	**Research and Prevention[c]**	**Total**
2009	Amount Awarded[a]	$27,343,111	$8,850,902	$700,517	**$36,894,530**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	74	24	2	
2010	Amount Awarded[a]	$22,470,336	$6,885,555	$3,797,227	**$33,153,118**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	68	21	11	
2011	Amount Awarded[a]	$28,494,018	$4,894,808	$0	**$33,388,826**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	85	15	0	
2012	Amount Awarded[a]	$30,550,374	$4,065,252	$0	**$34,615,626**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	88	12	0	
2013	Amount Awarded[a]	$23,622,804	$8,469,204	$0	**$32,092,008**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	74	26	0	
2014	Amount Awarded[a]	$25,248,614	$7,497,200	$1,205,374	**$33,951,188**
	Percent of Total Amount Awarded[b]	74	22	4	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]The sum of the dollars awarded by department type may not equal the total amount due to rounding.

[b]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

[c]Research and prevention applications are those of applicants that submitted requests for both fire prevention and research and development activities in a single application.

Tables 14, 15, and 16 show the distribution of AFG, SAFER, and FP&S awards and funding, respectively, by department type for fiscal year 2014. In addition, these tables correspond to information in GAO-10-64, appendix IX.

Table 14: Distribution of Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Awards and Funding by Department Type for Fiscal Year 2014

Department type	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Percentage of total applications[a]	Percentage of total awards[a]
Career	1,791	459	$105,840,645	18	21
Combination	2,907	595	$94,385,889	29	27
Volunteer	4,609	1,087	$94,384,787	46	49
Paid on call/Stipend	692	100	$10,135,431	7	5
Total	**9,999**	**2,241**	**$304,746,752**		

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 15: Distribution of Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Awards and Funding by Department Type for Fiscal Year 2014

Department type	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Percentage of total applications[a]	Percentage of total awards[a]
Career	358	82	$226,640,925	27	32
Combination (Majority Paid/Career)	181	39	$47,425,736	14	15
Combination (Majority Volunteer)	499	81	$44,036,648	37	32
Volunteer	264	43	$13,531,584	20	17
Interest Organizations	33	9	$8,340,509	3	4
Total	**1,335**	**254**	**$339,975,402**		

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 16: Distribution of Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Awards and Funding by Department Type for Fiscal Year 2014

Department Type	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Percentage of total applications[a]	Percentage of total awards[a]
Career	321	37	$4,066,336	33	41
Combination (Majority Paid/Career)	105	2	$317,668	11	2
Combination (Majority Volunteer)	166	6	$423,594	17	8
Volunteer	157	8	$235,651	16	9
Non Profit or Educational Institutions	238	37	$28,907,939	24	41
Total	**987**	**90**	**$33,951,188**		

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Tables 17, 18, and 19 show the distribution of AFG, SAFER, and FP&S awards and funding, respectively, by community service area for fiscal year 2014. In addition, these tables correspond to information in GAO-10-64, appendix X.

Table 17: Distribution of Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Awards and Funding by Community Service Area for Fiscal Year 2014

Service Areas	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Percentage of total applications[a]	Percentage of total awards[a]
Urban	1,019	217	$64,517,796	10.2	9.7
Suburban	2,095	454	$66,040,143	21.0	20.3
Rural	6,845	1,536	$164,833,790	68.5	68.5
State Fire Training Academies[b]	40	34	$9,355,023	0.4	1.5
Total	**9,999**	**2,241**	**$304,746,752**		

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

[b]State Fire Training Academies are not categorized as urban, suburban, or rural since they encompass an entire state.

Table 18: Distribution of Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Awards and Funding by Community Service Area for Fiscal Year 2014

Service Areas	Number of applications submitted	Number of Awards	Amount Awarded	Percentage of total applications[a]	Percentage of total awards[a]
Urban	269	75	$210,871,035	20.1	29.5
Suburban	449	75	$73,353,388	33.6	29.5
Rural	584	95	$47,410,470	43.7	37.4
Interest Organizations[b]	33	9	$8,340,509	2.5	3/5
Total	**1,335**	**254**	**$339,975,402**		

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

[a]Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

[b]"Interest Organizations" represent other eligible organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as local, regional, or statewide organizations.

Table 19: Distribution of Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Awards and Funding by Community Service Area for Fiscal Year 2014

Service Areas	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Percentage of total applications[a]	Percentage of total awards[a]
Urban	271	38	$4,500,110	27.5	42.2
Suburban	283	11	$1,170,127	28.7	12.2
Rural	317	14	$1,174,776	32.1	15.6
Interest Organizations[b]	116	27	$27,106,175	11.6	30.0
Total	**987**	**90**	**$33,951,188**		

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

^b"Interest Organizations" represent other eligible organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as local, regional, or statewide organizations.

Table 20 shows the spending on FP&S grants as a percentage of AFG and FP&S appropriations for fiscal years 2009 through 2014. FEMA funds AFG and FP&S from the same appropriation.

Table 20: Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Appropriations and FP&S Grant Spending Levels Fiscal Years 2009 to 2014

Fiscal Year	AFG and FP&S Appropriations	FP&S Spending	Percent of AFG and FP&S Appropriations
2009	$565,000,000	$36,894,530	6.5
2010	$390,000,000	$33,153,118	8.5
2011	$405,000,000	$33,388,826	8.2
2012	$337,500,000	$34,615,626	10.3
2013	$337,500,000	$32,092,008	9.5
2014	$340,000,000	$33,951,188	10
Total	**$2,375,000,000**	**$204,095,296**	**8.6**

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data | GAO-16-744

Appendix IV: Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Performance Assessment System Measures for Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) programs

In 2014, FEMA created a performance assessment system for its fire grants programs in response to a Fire Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012 (FGRA) requirement that FEMA establish a system to track program progress and report to Congress on the effectiveness of these grants. FEMA has submitted annual reports to Congress on the AFG and SAFER programs in November 2014, along with a second annual report to Congress on the AFG program in October 2015. FEMA organized these congressional reports to (1) describe the methodology behind FEMA's fire grants' performance evaluation system and programmatic effectiveness measures, many based on applicable safety standards, and (2) report data by each measures, based on most recently available data to assess the effectiveness of the AFG and SAFER programs, and develop performance measures to continually track progress and implementation.

The data reported in these measures are based on most recent FEMA grants data available that includes both information included in awardees' grant applications and their corresponding closeout reports, according to FEMA. FEMA also included case studies for related measures to further illustrate FEMA's findings and describe examples of awardees' best practices. For example, FEMA provided a case study in its 2015 report on how one nonprofit organization in Oklahoma used its Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) award to install visual and tactile alarms and alert devices in 125 homes with hearing-impaired occupants, 58 percent of which previously had no working smoke alarm.

However, FEMA did not develop FP&S program measures. According to FEMA officials, the relatively smaller available funding amount of the FP&S program, along with the numerous eligible categories of prevention projects available, posed a challenge to identifying a reportable performance measure with a statistically-valid sample size.

Specifically, FEMA's performance assessment system identifies a total of 21 measures for the AFG and SAFER programs, as shown in tables 21 and 22, below. According to FEMA, each measure is aligned with the achievement of fire grants' program goals and objectives, and many are based on fire service standards established by the National Fire Protection Association, Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration, as well as relevant state, and local governments

Appendix IV: Federal Emergency Management
Agency's (FEMA) Performance Assessment
System Measures for Assistance to
Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Staffing for
Adequate Fire and Emergency Response
(SAFER) programs

and regulatory agencies.[1] According to FEMA, such standards help fire departments minimize the possibility of fire-related injuries, property damage, and other effects.

Table 21: FEMA's Performance Assessment System: Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Measures

Program Effectiveness

1. Average percent of on-duty members from AFG Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) recipient departments who received PPE in compliance with applicable National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards

2. Percent of AFG PPE recipients who equipped 100 percent of on-duty active members with PPE in compliance with applicable NFPA and OSHA standards

3. Percent of AFG vehicle recipients requesting funding to replace a sub-standard vehicle who then permanently removed the sub-standard vehicle from service

4. Vehicles - Percent of fire vehicles 15 years old or older that were replaced using AFG funding

5. Vehicles - Percent of fire vehicles 25 years old or older that were replaced using AFG funding

6. Percent of AFG equipment recipients who reported that their AFG-funded equipment primarily provided a health and safety benefit to members of the organization

7. Percent of AFG equipment recipients who reported that the AFG grant brought them into compliance with state, local, NFPA, or OSHA standards

Programmatic Priority

8. Percent of AFG PPE recipients responsible for protecting critical infrastructure

9. Percent of AFG-funded vehicles supporting either automatic or mutual aid

10. Percent of AFG-funded vehicles supporting both automatic and mutual aid

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA Performance Assessment System | GAO-16-744

Note: FEMA reported on the following metric only in their fiscal year 2014 report: "Percent of AFG-funded equipment purchases that benefit and/or are available for use by other organizations." According to FEMA officials, they discontinued measuring this in 2015, as this question was only asked of state fire training academies in fiscal year 2013, a very small subset of the total number of applicants.

[1]The NFPA is an international nonprofit organization of subject-matter experts that develops codes and standards for the fire, electrical, and construction trades with the goal of reducing the worldwide burden of fire—including fire-related injuries, property damage, and other effects. According to FEMA officials, increased departmental compliance with NFPA standards demonstrates progress in advancing firefighter and public safety.

Table 22: FEMA's Performance Assessment System: Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Measures

Effectiveness

1. Percent of "mostly-career" SAFER grantees' structural fire responses that complied with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 structural response standards

2. Percent of "mostly-volunteer" SAFER grantees' structural fire responses that complied with NFPA 1720 structural response standards

3. Percent of SAFER grantees who demonstrated increased average compliance or maintained 100 percent compliance with NFPA 1710 or 1720 structural response standards

4. Percent of SAFER hiring grantees who reported that the grant funding increased compliance with NFPA 1710 or 1720 assembly and deployment standards

Administrative

5. Percent of grantees with automatic or mutual aid agreements in place

6. Percent of grantees with both automatic and mutual aid agreements in place

7. Percent of grantees responsible for protecting critical infrastructure

8. Percent of grantees with hiring requests based on risk or staffing needs analysis

9. Percent of grantees who used SAFER funding to hire veterans

10. Number of veterans hired for SAFER-funded positions

11. Percent of SAFER funding awarded to "mostly volunteer" fire departments

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA Performance Assessment System | GAO-16-744

FEMA officials said that they recognized that the quality of the fire management and suppression component of states' Threat and Hazard Identification Risk Assessments (THIRA) and State Preparedness Reports (SPR) depends on the full integration and participation of different groups as part of the "whole community" effort. FEMA officials noted that they obtain information on participation of different groups of the whole community in the THIRA and SPR processes.[1] FEMA provides states, territories, tribes, and urban areas to use FEMA's Unified Reporting Tool (URT) to complete their THIRA and SPR assessments. As part of each assessment, jurisdictions are required to indicate the types and number of governmental departments and agencies participating in their process as well as the type and number of participating non-governmental organizations. See table 23 below for nationwide participation rates for whole community stakeholders in their jurisdiction's THIRA and SPR processes as reported by FEMA.

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[1]The National Preparedness System defines "whole community" as individuals and communities, the private and nonprofit sectors, faith-based organizations, schools and academia, media outlets, and all governments (e.g.: local, regional/metropolitan, state, tribal, territorial, insular areas, and federal). The phrase whole community appears across FEMA preparedness materials, as it is one of the guiding principles, with the goals of involving people in the development of the national preparedness documents, and ensuring their roles and responsibilities are reflected in the content of the materials, according to FEMA.

Table 23: Whole Community Participation in the Threat and Hazard Identification Risk Assessments (THIRA) and State Preparedness Reports (SPR) Nationwide by Department/Agency Type: 2013 through 2015

Department / Agency type	THIRA Participation: 2013-2015		SPR Participation: 2013-2015	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Emergency Management /Homeland Security	4232	30%	4222	31%
Fusion Center	279	2%	380	3%
Law Enforcement / Public Safety	1584	11%	1409	10%
Fire / Emergency Medical Services	1254	9%	1079	8%
Public Health	1052	7%	948	7%
Historic / Cultural Resources	154	1%	154	1%
Environment	398	3%	396	3%
Transportation	517	4%	512	4%
Agriculture	278	2%	286	2%
Executive Branch	493	3%	509	4%
Other	2173	15%	2171	16%
Non-Governmental Organizations	1737	12%	1613	12%
Totals	**14151**	**100%**	**13679**	**100%**

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA's Whole Community Participation in the THIRA and SPR, 2013 through 2015 | GAO-16-744

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

Appendix VI: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Homeland Security

August 25, 2016

Mr. Christopher Currie
Director, Homeland Security and Justice Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management's Response to GAO Draft Report GAO-16-744, "FIRE GRANTS:
FEMA Could Enhance Program Administration and Performance Assessment"

Dear Mr. Currie:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S.
Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability
Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

The Department is pleased to note GAO's positive recognition of Federal Emergency
Management Agency (FEMA) past and ongoing actions to incorporate provisions of the Fire
Grants Reauthorization Act of 2012 into our various fire and emergency response-related
grant programs. FEMA has awarded nearly $5.8 billion in these grants during the last eight
years and remains committed to further strengthening our nation's paid and volunteer
firefighting and first responder capacity by helping ensure the availability of critically
needed equipment, training, staffing, research and other needs to protect the public and
emergency personnel from fire and related hazards.

The draft report contained four recommendations with which the Department concurs.
Attached find our detailed response to each recommendation.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Technical
comments were previously provided under separate cover. Please feel free to contact me if
you have any questions. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

JIM H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

**Attachment: DHS Management Response to Recommendations
Contained in GAO-16-744**

GAO recommended that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct the FEMA
Administrator to:

Recommendation 1: Establish measurable targets linked to AFG [Asssitance to Firefighter
Grant] and SAFER [Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response] program goals,
such as the desired percentage of awardees who used grants to achieve compliance with
equipment standards.

Response: Concur. FEMA's Grant Program Directorate (GPD) is reviewing all metrics to
determine the feasibility for targets on the current set of metrics. FEMA will include
approved targets in the annual report to Congress that will be issued by the end of fiscal year
(FY) 2016. Estimated Completion Date (ECD): September 30, 2016.

Recommendation 2: Use the National Preparedness Goal's definition of critical
infrastructure as the basis of collecting information from applicants and using the National
Critical Infrastructure Prioritization Program list to measure fire grant programs'
performance in addressing national priorities.

Response: Concur. FEMA's GPD will incorporate the National Preparedness Goal's
definition of national critical infrastructure into the fire grant performance measures. FEMA
will conduct an assessment of data from AFG program application and awards in order to
verify recipients are reporting infrastructure that aligns with the National Preparedness Goal
definition of critical infrastructure. FEMA will meet as needed with the National Programs
and Protection Directorate's Office of Critical Infrastructure Analysis in order to determine
how the Critical Infrastructure Prioritization Program list can be utilized in the application
process.

The assessment will be completed by the end of calendar year 2016 and FEMA will report
the measures in the FY 2017 Annual Report to Congress. ECD: December 30, 2017.

Recommendation 3: Develop a project management plan for identifying relevant data
elements in the NFORS [National Fire Operations Reporting System] and FireCARES (Fire-
Community Assessment Response Evaluation System] and determining how they can be
used to improve fire grant applications and awards processes and the performance
assessment system.

Response: Concur. During the last few years, there have been several reports developed by
the fire service that point to the need for additional data, including the National Fire Service
Data Summit, which took place in January 2011 and was funded by a Fire Prevention and

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Safety Grant, and another data summit held by the National Fire Protection Association
which examined survey distribution methods and response rates for the "Needs Assessment
of the U.S. Fire Service." The two data projects named in this recommendation, NFORS
and FireCARES, are a result of the aforementioned summits and will help fill some of the
gaps in current data available. These projects are both in development with expected
completion and rollout to the fire service in late 2017.

In parallel, FEMA's GPD will develop a plan to assess the data collected to determine
feasibility for integration in to the AFG programs. This plan will incorporate ways to
improve the applications, awards processes, and tracking of performance. The plan should
be completed by March 31, 2017.

ECD: September 30, 2017.

Recommendation 4: Define and document the roles and responsibilities of USFA [U.S.
Fire Administration] in administering the fire grant programs.

Response: Concur. FEMA's GPD will prepare a formal memorandum of understanding
(MOU) between USFA and GPD to assign roles and responsibilities for coordination of
their separately legislated responsibilities to (a) maximize FEMA's service to the Fire and
Fire Based Emergency Management Services, and (b) prevent programmatic inconsistencies
and conflicts. The MOU will guide programmatic optimization for management of the AFG
suite of programs with special emphasis on the Fire Prevention and Safety Grants where the
greatest opportunities exist for enhanced coordination. ECD: October 31, 2016.

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Appendix VII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Chris Currie, (202) 512-8777, CurrieC@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Chris Keisling (Assistant Director), John Vocino (Analyst-in-Charge), David Beardwood, Dominick Dale, Lorraine Ettaro, Eric Hauswirth, Thomas James, Tracey King, John Mingus, Keith O'Brien, and Katherine Pfeiffer made key contributions to this report.