

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105663](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

FEMA manages and coordinates the federal response and recovery efforts to disasters and other emergencies. In 2022, FEMA awarded \$1.7 billion in disaster grants to survivors. Additionally, FEMA has been tasked with new responsibilities, including a key role in the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, GAO has reported on workforce management challenges, such as staffing shortages, within FEMA.

GAO was asked to review FEMA's hiring process and staffing gaps. This report assesses 1) FEMA's authorities and processes for hiring and related challenges, and 2) FEMA's disaster workforce staffing gaps and the extent to which FEMA is monitoring and evaluating its efforts to fill these gaps through hiring.

GAO reviewed FEMA documentation on hiring processes and efforts, and interviewed officials from FEMA on efforts to increase staff and challenges with the hiring process. GAO also analyzed data from fiscal years 2019 through 2022 on FEMA staffing gaps and time frames for hiring.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FEMA (1) document clear and consistent procedures to collect and calculate time-to-hire information; (2) document plans to monitor and evaluate the agency's progress on hiring efforts to address staffing gaps; and (3) develop performance measures that monitor and evaluate progress towards goals, including net growth targets for cadres to achieve FEMA's long-term disaster workforce staffing goal. FEMA concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105663](#). For more information, contact Chris Currie at (404) 679-1875 or CurrieC@gao.gov

May 2023

FEMA DISASTER WORKFORCE

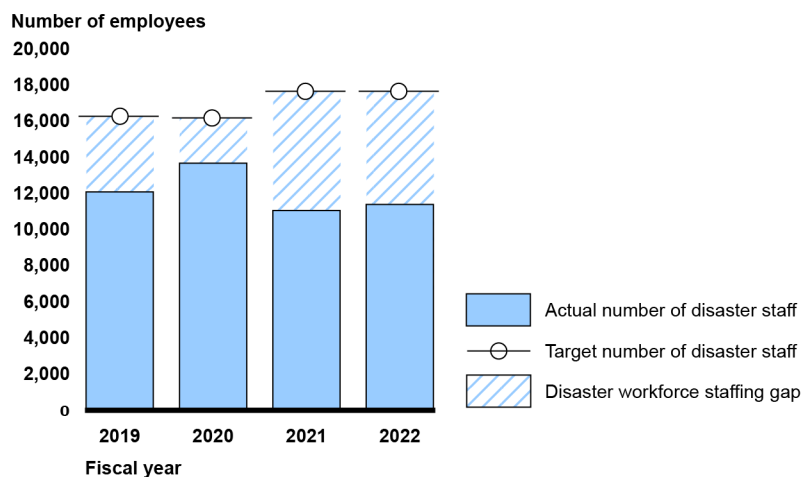
Actions Needed to Improve Hiring Data and Address Staffing Gaps

What GAO Found

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) uses different processes under various statutory authorities to hire employees by type, such as permanent full-time employees and temporary reservists. Additionally, FEMA uses hiring flexibilities to hire employees for critical positions and augments its workforce if a disaster or emergency exceeds FEMA's capacity, such as with local hires and contractors, among others. FEMA also reports its time frames for hiring employees, known as time-to-hire, on a quarterly basis to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). However, GAO found FEMA has challenges calculating and reporting consistent and accurate timeframes for hiring to DHS. Documenting consistent methods would help FEMA accurately calculate its timeframes for hiring and use more reliable information to determine potential workforce changes needed to better prepare for future emergencies.

As of the beginning of fiscal year 2022, FEMA had approximately 11,400 disaster employees on board and a staffing goal of 17,670, creating an overall staffing gap of approximately 6,200 staff (35 percent) across different positions. FEMA officials attributed recent staffing gaps to multiple factors. These included additional responsibilities due to COVID-19 and managing the rising disaster activity during the year, which increased burnout and employee attrition.

Staffing Gaps for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Disaster Workforce, Fiscal Years 2019 through 2022



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data. | [GAO-23-105663](#)

Starting in 2019, FEMA initiated several efforts, including hiring events and use of contractors, to increase its disaster workforce and reduce these gaps. While FEMA is taking steps to address staffing gaps, GAO found that it is unclear if these efforts are effective. FEMA lacks documented plans and performance measures to monitor and evaluate its hiring progress within cadres (workforce groups) toward the larger disaster workforce goal. Without documented plans and measures, such as cadre net growth targets, it is difficult for FEMA to determine how effective hiring efforts are at closing staffing gaps and prioritizing hiring efforts within the disaster workforce accordingly.