



Highlights of [GAO-07-515](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

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

What GAO Recommends

Particularly given the threat of pandemic influenza, GAO recommends that the Director of OPM discuss with FEMA and other stakeholders the feasibility of integrating FEBs in national emergency plans. In completing the FEB strategic plan, OPM should also establish accountability for the boards' emergency support activities and develop a proposal to address the uncertainty of funding sources for the boards. While not commenting specifically on the recommendations, OPM said it is building a business case through which to address the resources FEBs need to continue operations and that institutionalized relationships with partners such as FEMA can help address funding issues. FEMA said that it welcomed the opportunity to work with OPM to formally define the FEB role in emergency planning and response.

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

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

THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

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

What GAO Found

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

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

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

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