

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105956](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Public transit systems' open design expedites the movement of large numbers of people but also makes them attractive targets for attack and difficult to secure for public transit agencies. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 includes a provision for GAO to review FEMA's management of the Transit Security Grant Program and assess how grant-funded projects improve public transit security.

This report: (1) describes the types of transit security projects for which FEMA awarded grants from fiscal years 2015 through 2021, (2) evaluates the extent to which FEMA's process for awarding grants is consistent with relevant federal grant requirements, and (3) evaluates how FEMA assesses risk to transit agencies' security when awarding grants. GAO analyzed FEMA's grant and scoring data from fiscal years 2015 through 2021, reviewed program documents, and interviewed all fiscal year 2021 grantees, which was the most recently completed award cycle when GAO began its review.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to the Secretary of Homeland Security to ensure that FEMA (1) accurately describe all the criteria it uses to score applications in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, (2) select applications for award in accordance with its publically disclosed merit review process, (3) incorporate cyber threats into its risk assessment, and (4) document the underlying assumptions and justifications for its risk assessment. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105956](#). For more information, contact Tina Won Sherman, 202-512-8461, ShermanT@gao.gov

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TRANSIT SECURITY

FEMA Should Improve Transparency of Grant Decisions

What GAO Found

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) manages the Transit Security Grant Program, a discretionary grant program that provides grants to public transit agencies to protect critical transportation infrastructure and the traveling public from terrorism. FEMA awarded nearly three-quarters of grants (\$614 million) to public transit agencies for law enforcement activities (\$245.2 million) and equipment (\$211.5 million) from fiscal years 2015 through 2021. FEMA awarded remaining grants for infrastructure projects, training and exercises, public awareness campaigns, and planning.

Security Camera Funded by the Transit Security Grant Program



Source: GAO. | GAO-23-105956

While FEMA's award process was consistent with some relevant federal grant requirements, it did not meet other requirements for transparency of award decisions. Specifically, FEMA did not accurately describe its grant scoring criteria in the program's fiscal year 2021 Notice of Funding Opportunity, as required. By accurately describing the criteria it uses to score grant applications, FEMA would improve transparency and help ensure applicants make informed decisions when applying. Further, FEMA described the merit review process to competitively score applications in its Notice of Funding Opportunity, but did not use the results of its process as the sole basis for award decisions. For example, FEMA awarded grants to lower-scoring applications between fiscal years 2015 and 2021. By not selecting applications to recommend for award in accordance with its publicly disclosed merit review process, FEMA risked affecting the objectivity, fairness, and transparency of the process and could face questions about the integrity of the decisions.

In fiscal year 2021, FEMA assessed physical terrorist threats to transit agencies, as well as their vulnerabilities to, and the estimated consequences of, an attack, but did not consider cyber threats in its risk model. FEMA could better reflect the nature of current threats to transit agencies if it included cyber threats in the assessment. In addition, FEMA did not document the assessment's underlying assumptions and justifications. Improved documentation would allow officials to assess whether the assumptions remain true in a changing risk environment.