

**Recent GAO Work on Disaster Recovery:
FEMA's Long-term Assistance Was Helpful to State
and Local Governments but Had Some Limitations**

**Presentation to the 13th Annual FEMA
Emergency Management Higher Education Conference**

June 9, 2010

Objectives of Our Review

The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and its Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery requested that we assess and report on:

1. The roles that FEMA's Long-Term Community Recovery Branch's (LTCR) played in recent disasters
2. Challenges that limited assistance for long-term recovery and practices that facilitated long-term recovery

Scope and Methodology

To conduct our review:

- We reviewed FEMA regulations and policies, as well as national policy on disaster recovery.
- We interviewed and obtained documentation on LTCR's role and specific coordination and recovery planning practices utilized.

We evaluated LTCR's disaster assistance after three recent major disasters

- the tornado that affected Greensburg, Kansas (2007);
- the Midwest floods in Iowa (2008); and
- and Hurricane Ike in Texas (2008).

Brief Background on Three Disasters Included in Our Review

2007 Tornado in Greensburg, Kansas



Source: City of Greensburg, Kansas

2008 Midwest floods in Iowa



Source: Cedar Rapids, Iowa

2008 Hurricane Ike in Texas



Source: Time Magazine

Emergency Support Function 14: Long-Term Community Recovery

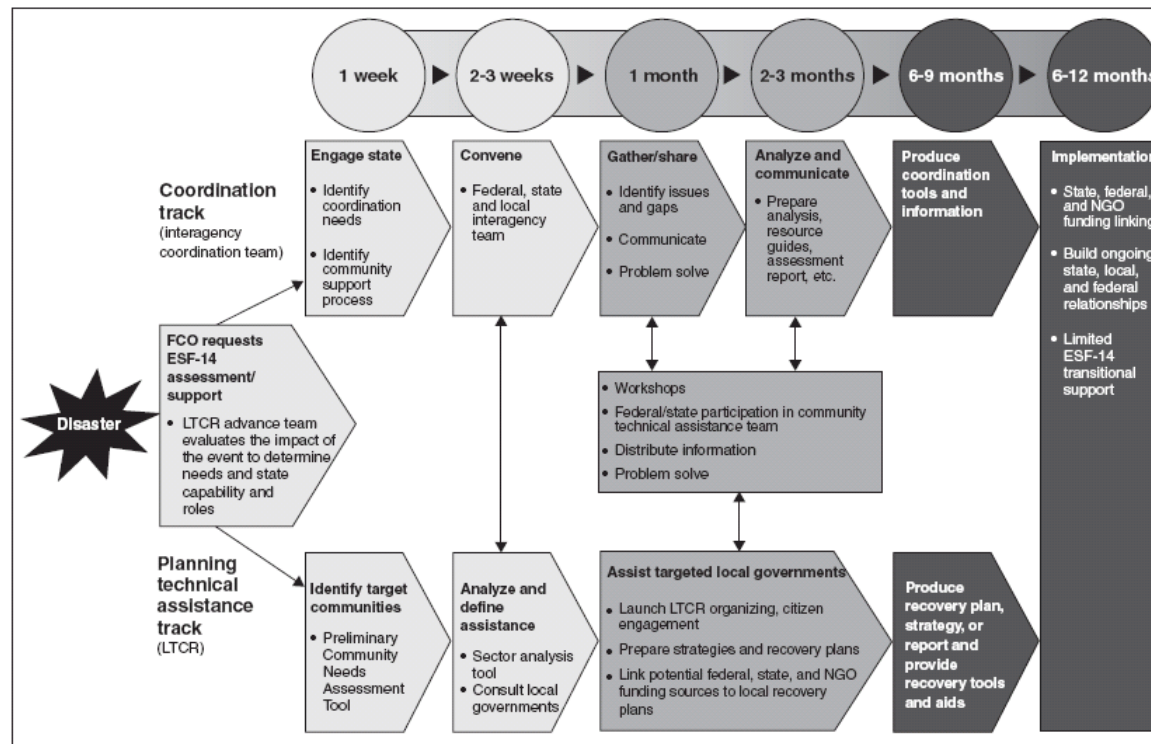
ESF coordinator	Support agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Homeland Security/ Federal Emergency Management Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Commerce• Department of Defense• Department of Energy• Department of Health and Human Services• Department of the Interior• Department of Labor• Department of Transportation• Department of the Treasury• Environmental Protection Agency• Corporation for National and Community Service• Delta Regional Authority• American Red Cross• National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters
Primary agencies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Agriculture• Department of Homeland Security• Department of Housing and Urban Development• Small Business Administration	

Source: The National Response Framework.

We Identified Four Key Findings

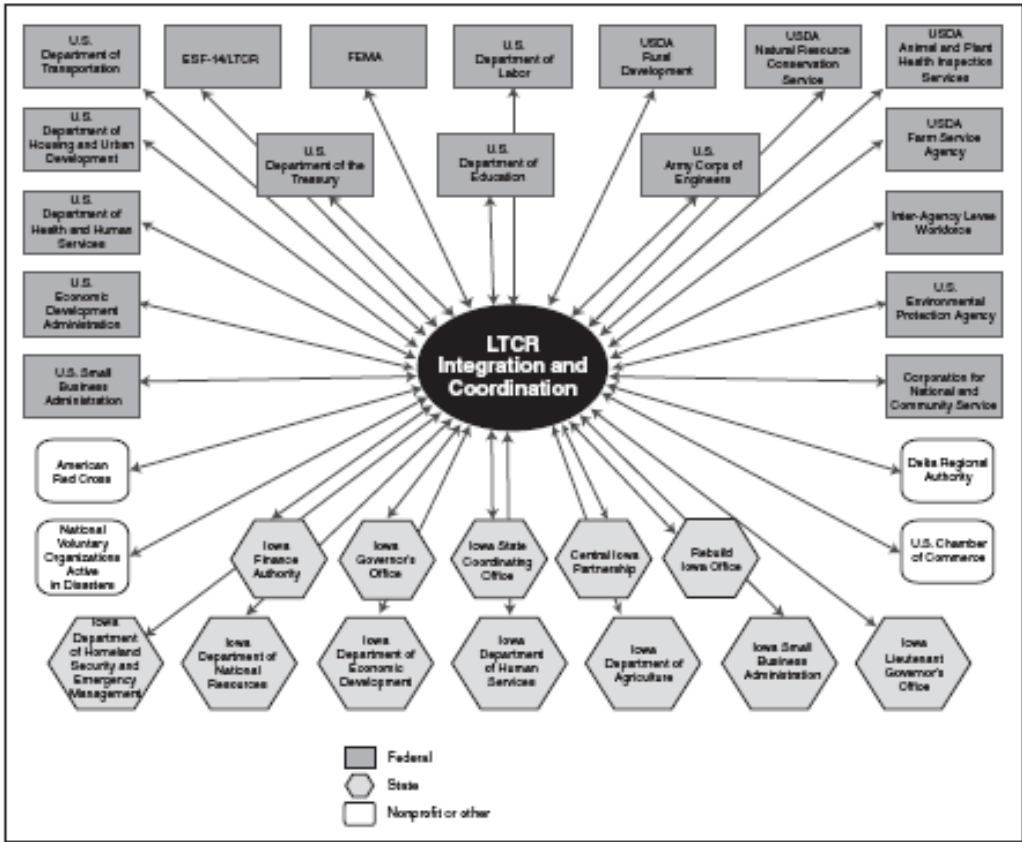
1. LTCR played two primary roles in disaster recovery: (a) facilitating coordination and (b) assisting the development of long-term community recovery plans
2. The lack of clear criteria and the timing of LTCR assistance presented challenges to recovery partners
3. LTCR's assistance with disaster recovery coordination was considered very valuable, but had some challenges that limited its effectiveness
4. LTCR's recovery planning assistance benefited states and localities, but a few LTCR practices limited more effective implementation of recovery plans

LTCR Played Two Roles: Facilitating Coordination of Recovery Assistance and Supporting Long-term Planning



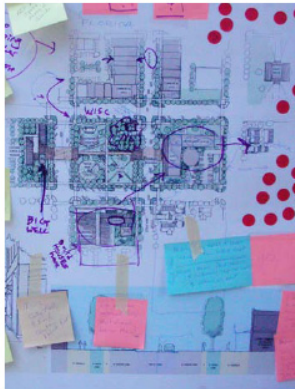
Source: GAO presentation of LTCR process chart.

Example of LTCR's Coordination Assistance After the 2008 Midwest Floods in Iowa



Source: GAO presentation based on information provided by LTCR and Iowa state officials.

Examples of LTCR's Recovery Planning and Technical Assistance



← Planning Meetings in Kansas



Technical Assistance in all 3 states →



Unclear Criteria Regarding ESF-14 Involvement Led to a Lack of Understanding and Agreement about Deployment

- The NRF and FEMA guidance on factors that warrant ESF-14 involvement in a specific disaster are broad enough to be interpreted differently by various recovery partners, and has resulted in lack of agreement about whether criteria were met.

➤ *The NRF states that ESF-14 will be deployed “when the incident is likely to require significant federal long-term community recovery assistance.”*

➤ *Other FEMA guidance says that deployment should be considered “when routine federal, state, local, and tribal disaster assistance mechanisms are insufficient to meet the extraordinary challenges of affected jurisdictions.”*

The Timing of LTCR's Assistance Presented Challenges to Some State and Local Governments

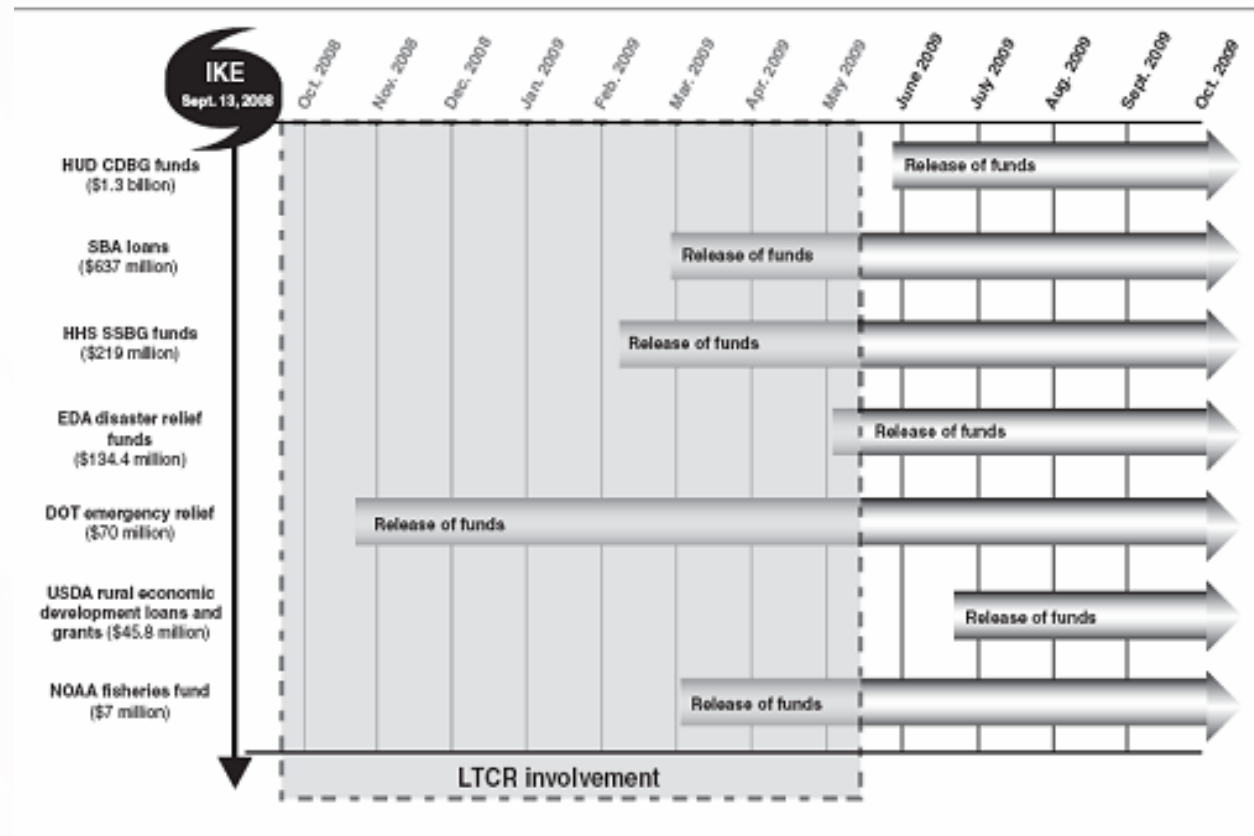
Early actions are important to recovery, therefore the level and focus of long-term recovery assistance need to be appropriately aligned with the:

- capacity of the state and local governments to effectively engage
- ripeness of recovery issues.

The timing and focus of LTCR activities was appropriate and beneficial for certain types of important recovery needs (e.g. early long-term recovery impact assessments), but not for others (e.g. substantive long-term recovery activities while state and locals were still in the midst of addressing immediate emergency response).

- Experiences in Texas and Iowa versus Kansas

Comparison of the Timing of LTRC Involvement and the Availability of Selected Federal Recovery Funds Following Hurricane Ike



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA and other federal agency documents.

LTCR Officials Recognized the Timing of Assistance is a Challenge but Attributed this to Two Reasons

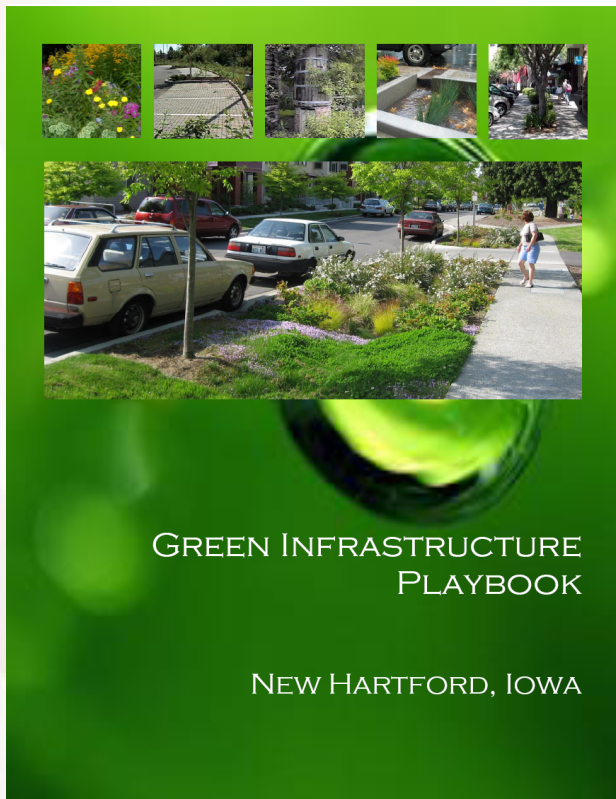
- LTCR officials acknowledged that they sometimes wrap up their assistance before the three conditions for concluding ESF-14 assistance identified in FEMA interim guidance are met.
- Officials attribute the early conclusion of ESF-14 assistance to two reasons:
 1. the closing of JFO operations and lack of protocol to continue providing assistance after the JFO closes
 2. different interpretations of FEMA's mission and authorities as well as varying interpretations of LTCR's mission by the FCOs

LTCR's Interagency Coordination Meetings and Direct Coordination with Partners Improved Recovery Progress

- LTCR's coordination assistance helped to:
 - identify and leverage federal and state resources that could be used to support disaster recovery projects
 - identify potential coordination challenges, such as gaps in funding or other long-term recovery concerns.

Examples of Identifying and Leveraging Resources in Iowa and Kansas

Smart Growth in Iowa



Source: Rebuild Iowa Office

Water Tower in Kansas



Source: City of Greensburg, Kansas

LTCR's Coordination was More Effective in States with an Established Coordination Officer or Office

- **Iowa** - Rebuild Iowa Office (RIO)
- **Kansas** -the Governor appointed senior state official to coordinate long-term recovery effort.
- **Texas** - No similar coordinating entity for long-term recovery

Challenges Bringing Together the Right Agencies and Staff Sometimes Limited LTCR's Effectiveness

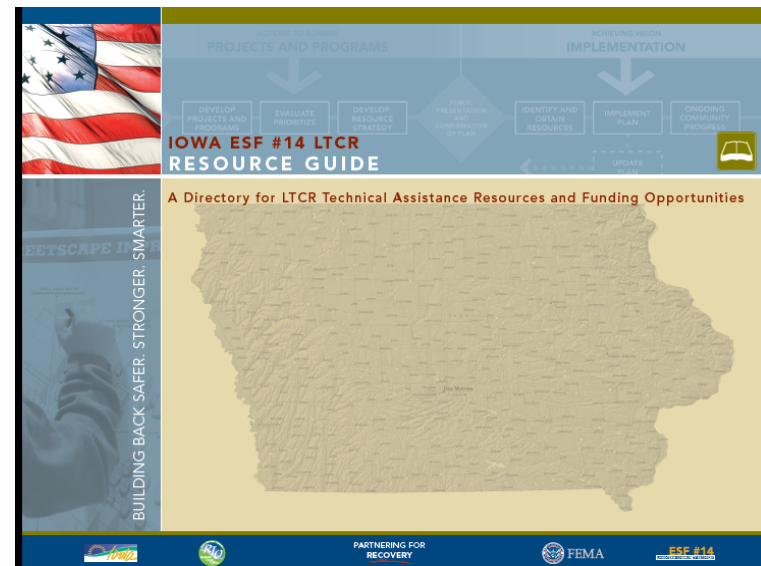
- LTCR is responsible for coordinating assistance by convening interagency recovery expertise and coordinating the resolution of problems.
- However, LTCR experienced challenges getting and keeping some agencies engaged in coordination activities and other ESF-14 operations for various reasons.
- When LTCR did have the right agencies at the table, their efforts were limited by not having the right staff to resolve policy and program challenges

LTCR Provided Planning Assistance that was Beneficial to Helping Communities Achieve their Recovery Goals

- LTCR's facilitated community planning meetings assisted communities in identifying recovery goals and related recovery projects
- LTCR's planning tools helped communities organize and communicate their recovery goals to key stakeholders
- LTCR's assistance linking potential funding resources to recovery plans provided a road-map

Examples of Planning Tools Developed for Iowa

- *ESF-14 LTRC Communication Mapping Tool*
- *ESF-14 Decision Making Tool*
- *ESF-14 LTRC Resource Guide*
- *ESF-14 Project + Program Development Tool*



Source: FEMA

Example of Benefits of LTCR Assistance Linking Funding to Local Recovery Plans

Iowa City: LTCR's involvement in targeting potential funding sources gave creditability to the projects.

- LTCR helped the city to ensure that recover plan projects included elements that the federal funding agencies would be looking for, thereby improving the projects' chances of getting approval.
- City officials are securing \$25 million in federal funding for the top two projects in the plan that LTCR helped develop.

LTCR's Planning Assistance Sometimes Created Unrealistic Expectations within Communities

- Community members sometimes had unrealistic expectations about what would be funded and built in local communities because of aspects of LTCR's planning assistance.
- LTCR's use of a Long-Term Community Recovery Value Tool to prioritize projects in local recovery plans contributed to confusion about expectations
 - The City of Galveston, Texas experienced challenges with the use of this tool on its recovery plan
- Challenges with LTCR's assistance setting unrealistic expectations in local communities were not unique to Texas.

LTCR's Planning Tools Were Not Always Effectively Transmitted to Communities

- Following Hurricane Ike, LTCR did not effectively transmit planning tools to state and local officials before concluding assistance to the state
 - *Texas Recovery Resource Guide*
 - *Texas Strategic Recovery Timeline*
- LTCR officials reported providing copies of planning tools to communities, but acknowledged that the transfer of the information - including an explanation of the materials and follow-up - may not have been effective for several reasons.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Develop clear and consistent criteria for determining whether and how to coordinate long-term recovery
 2. Establish a long-term recovery structure that more effectively aligns the timing and level of federal involvement with the capacity and needs of of state and local governments
 3. Evaluate, what would be an appropriate level of authority for coordinating long-term recovery
 4. Communicate more clearly the objectives and processes used when assessing the value of specific recovery projects
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Contacts

Peter Del Toro

Assistant Director, Strategic Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office
deltorop@gao.gov

Latesha Love

Senior Policy Analyst, Strategic Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office
lovel@gao.gov

To review the full report, see www.gao.gov/new.items/d10404.pdf
