Insights From P3 on Partnerships Supporting Local Evaluations

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Insights From Federal Evaluation Technical Assistance Liaisons on the Partnerships Supporting Local Evaluations

This brief provides reflections from four evaluation technical assistance (TA) liaisons based on their experiences in working with grantees awarded as part of a Federal interagency initiative, the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3). In this brief, we (1) describe the P3 program's TA supports, (2) review the roles and responsibilities of different types of P3 partners, and (3) describe the hurdles faced when working with partners and strategies to mitigate those hurdles. While this paper focuses on challenges, it should be noted that the partnerships of the grantees included strengths as well. Some of the mitigation strategies discussed were identified by reflecting on the differences between partnerships that did and did not encounter a specific hurdle.

This paper is based on lessons learned about effective partnerships while providing evaluation TA for the local evaluations of nine initial P3 pilots that were awarded in 2015, as authorized under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (see the box at the end of this brief for more information about P3 and the national evaluation). Our data sources included communication with the pilots, summaries of monthly calls with the pilots, and reviews of pilots' documents from 2016 through 2018. The four Mathematica staff who served as evaluation TA liaisons were: M. C. (Cay) Bradley, Lindsay Cattell, Elias Hanno, and Robert Santillano. All four liaisons had experience in providing evaluation TA to grantees of other federal projects. Their reflections from their experiences with the P3 pilots were similar to those from their other experiences as well.

Defining *partners*

In this paper, we use *partners* to mean the staff of the different organizations involved in P3, including the primary organization, organizations with formal or informal relationships with the pilot (service partners), staff at all levels of government, funders, evaluators, experts on programs, and experts on evaluation.

In addition, the P3 pilot partnerships were similar to the partnerships that the liaisons have seen in other evaluation-related efforts. However, other efforts might not include all the P3 pilot partners or might include additional partners that were not part of the P3 pilot partnerships. For example, an evaluation-related effort might include the primary organization, a local evaluator, a single funder, and an evaluation TA team, while another might include the involvement of local or national stakeholders. The information shared in this brief can inform any evaluation-related effort that includes partnerships, regardless of the number and type of partners.

Context for focus on local evaluation partnerships

Prior experiences providing evaluation TA to awardees of federal grant programs informed the evaluation TA provided as part of the P3 evaluation. In particular, experiences on two such federal projects were funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

funded grants to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults with child welfare histories, which included evaluation-related activities,[1] while the Office of Population Affairs (OPA) funded teen pregnancy programs, which included independent local evaluations and federal support in the form of evaluation TA.[2] These grants, similar to P3 involved staff from different agencies or organizations working together to design and implement evaluations of their grants' interventions.

In an effort to effectively design and implement their local evaluations, the P3 pilots partnered with organizations and individuals with complementary skills. The organizations that offered services did not necessarily have evaluation expertise and would not be impartial third-party evaluators if they did; therefore, hiring a partner for this role was viewed as the most efficient use of resources. The grant may require or recommend a local evaluation team that is a third-party or independent evaluator to maintain objectivity in the evaluation. Bringing in the evaluation team as a partner helps the entire partnership gain this new expertise.

However, the liaisons observed that simply bringing in new partners to conduct the evaluation was not sufficient. Based on experiences with the P3 pilots, all partners needed to develop strong relationships with one another to conduct the best possible evaluation. From the liaisons' perspective, in strong partnerships, partners leverage each other's expertise to identify and implement the strongest intervention and evaluation possible. However, the liaisons noticed that developing and maintaining strong partnerships was a difficult task at times for all of the P3 pilots.

P3 technical assistance

The P3 pilots received programmatic and evaluation TA. The goal of the programmatic TA was to support the implementation of the pilots. The programmatic TA team worked closely with each pilot. To support them, the programmatic TA team held regular calls, disseminated relevant resources, convened meetings with pilots, and visited them as needed. The evaluation TA sought to strengthen the planned local evaluations. For each pilot, the evaluation TA team worked with the pilot and the pilot's third-party local evaluator. The evaluation TA team supported the pilots and their local evaluators through five specific activities: (1) regular calls, (2) ad hoc visits, (3) webinars, (4) review of local evaluation plans, and (5) review of local evaluation reports.

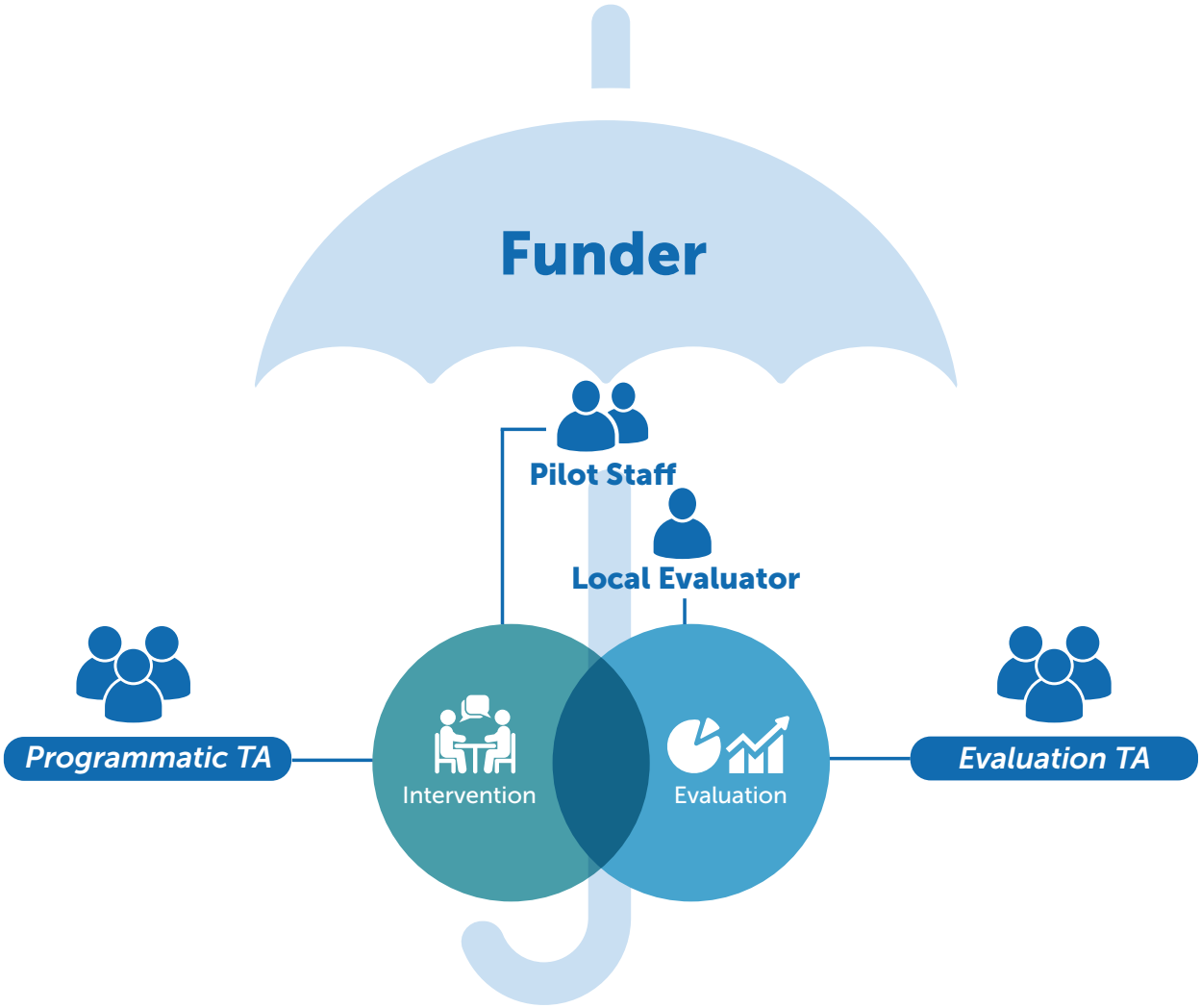
***Strong partnerships* have:**

- Clear roles and responsibilities for each partner
- Common terminology and language
- Tools to strengthen communication between partners
- Shared goals and priorities
- Respect for partner-specific goals and priorities
- Shared vision
- Regular communication between partners
- Plans to address staff changes ◢

The different P3 partners and their roles

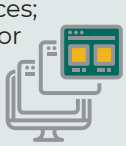
The P3 pilots had five distinct types of partners: (1) the pilot staff and service partners, (2) the local evaluator, (3) the grant funder (the P3 federal agencies), (4) the programmatic TA provider and (5) the evaluation TA provider. The description of the partners is based on the liaisons' perception of the P3 pilots, but similar partnerships exist in other federal grant programs, such as those funded by ACF or OPA.[3] Figure 1 shows how the different partners relate to one another. Pilot staff implemented the intervention and informed the evaluation, so the figure shows them as overlapping both the intervention and the evaluation in the figure. The local evaluator conducted the evaluation and coordinated with the pilot staff as needed. The funder supported and often funded the work of all the partners.

Figure 1. How the P3 partners fit together



In this ecosystem, each partner plays a role and has its own set of responsibilities. Table 1 describes a breakdown of each partner's roles and responsibilities. The roles and responsibilities presented here are merely a generalization. In reality, each unique group of partners tweaked these roles and responsibilities based on each partner's areas of expertise.

Table 1. The roles and responsibilities of the P3 partners

	Role	Responsibilities
Pilot staff and service partners design and implement the pilot 	• Control over pilot design and implementation • Coordinate work across service partners	• Comply with grant or funding requirements • Provide information and data to the evaluator • Hire and oversee the evaluator (but allow them to work independently) • Work to implement the strongest pilot possible
The **local evaluator** conducts the evaluation of the pilot 	• Control over most evaluation-specific decisions • Should operate as an outside, objective partner, but work within the context of the existing pilot as administered by staff	• Be responsive to the pilot staff • Answer evaluation questions that are important to the pilot staff (and the funders if there is a grant or funding requirement) • Implement the best possible evaluation • Alert pilot leadership if programmatic changes will affect the integrity of the evaluation
Funders provide the financial and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate the pilot; fund the programmatic and evaluation TA 	• Complete control over grant or funding requirements, including setting expectations for TA providers and articulating standards for evaluations • Monitor pilot activities and performance; ask questions about the design, implementation, and evaluation of the pilot	• Provide financial and other support during the duration of the grant • Ensure the pilot meets grant requirements
Programmatic TA supports pilot staff to improve the design and implementation of the pilot under the circumstances; not a monitor of pilot activities 	• To ask questions about the pilot and evaluation to support implementation of the pilot in a manner conducive to the evaluation • Identify challenges • Suggest possible solutions or modifications to improve the pilot design or implementation	• Act as a critical friend[a] to pilot and evaluation teams • Help pilot meet any funder requirements • As needed, review and comment on pilot materials • Point pilot staff to helpful resources
Evaluation TA supports local evaluators to improve the design and implementation of the evaluation under the circumstances; not a monitor of pilot or evaluator activities 	• To ask questions about the pilot and evaluation (with the goal of fully understanding) • Support the strongest evaluation possible • Identify challenges to the evaluation design • Suggest possible solutions or modifications to strengthen the evaluation	• Act as a critical friend[a] to pilot and evaluation teams • Help evaluator meet any funder requirements • Review and comment on evaluation plans and reports • Point local evaluation team to helpful resources • Share knowledge of data collection and data analysis • Share knowledge of rigorous methods and federal evidence reviews

[a] We use the term "critical friend" to represent the relationships between the TA providers and grantees. The programmatic and evaluation TA liaisons provided support to the grantee as a "friend," but offered critical and expert views on program implementation and the local evaluation, respectively.

Hurdles faced when working with partners

The hurdles discussed in this section were identified by the four evaluation TA liaisons as occurring in more than one P3 pilot. One or more of these hurdles could affect the functioning of the partnership, which could in turn affect programming and the evaluation. Evaluations could end up being poorly designed or executed depending on the specific hurdle, leading to a less rigorous evaluation. If either programming or the evaluation is affected, then the ability to recognize the impact of the program is likely compromised. Additionally, the hurdles were consistent with the liaisons' experience in providing evaluation TA to HHS-funded grantees. The mitigation strategies were either tried in the course of providing evaluation TA to the P3 pilots or, in retrospect, were strategies that could have been tried based on the liaisons' experience.

The liaisons' experiences suggest that rigorous local evaluations require strong partnerships. Developing strong partnerships and working with multiple organizations and multiple staff members may present several hurdles. Based on the liaisons' experiences as evaluation TA provider, one of the five partner types working with the P3 pilots, we describe the common hurdles and present possible strategies to overcome them. Different strategies could be implemented by different partners based on how a particular partnership functions and the individual strengths represented in the partnership.

In the liaisons' experience, all partners share the responsibility of proactively working to anticipate and overcome any hurdles. For example, say the pilot staff indicated that they collect administrative data on two groups: A (the youth offered the intervention) and B (the youth not offered the intervention). But in reality, they collected administrative data only for group A, which in turn means the evaluation will not be able to examine differences based on outcomes in the administrative data. Every partner type was responsible for this oversight. The local evaluator could have clearly described the data that the partner had to collect and could have confirmed that the partner actually collected the data. The pilot staff could have checked that frontline staff collected the data. The funder and the programmatic and evaluation TA providers could have inquired about the data collection procedure and encouraged the pilot and local evaluator to verify the data collection. In the following section we use *partners* or *partnerships* to mean all five partner types supporting each pilot: (1) the pilot staff and service partners, (2) the local evaluator, (3) the programmatic TA provider, (4) the evaluation TA provider, and (5) the funder.

Hurdle 1: Confusion about the roles and responsibilities of different partners

Confusion about partners' roles and responsibilities often means that the partnership does not fully leverage the expertise of all partners. For example, in one partnership, the role of the evaluation TA provider was not initially clear to the local evaluator. Once the local evaluator understood the evaluation TA team's role was to be a resource, the TA team helped the local evaluator consider options for creating matched groups between P3 youth and comparison youth for the evaluation. In another partnership, the pilot expressed reluctance to share information with the TA providers because the pilot viewed them as monitors of the grant. This limited the usefulness of the TA providers to the pilot and its evaluation.

Mitigation strategies

The liaisons used the following strategies at the beginning of their work with the P3 pilots. If people joined the partnership, the liaisons provided them with an overview.

- **Openly discuss roles, responsibilities, and expertise.** At the beginning of the partnership, partners should collectively discuss their expertise and then collectively decide on roles and responsibilities. Table 1 is a good starting point for this discussion. The information contained in the table helps partners clarify what they will (and will not)

work on, how they can support the pilot and evaluation, and which other partners to reach out to about certain topics. Consider writing down each partner's role, responsibility, and expertise and sharing this information with the entire team. This will enable partners to reference information about roles, responsibilities, and expertise as needed in the future.

- **Set common expectations about what information is needed and who will provide it.** For partners to fulfill their day-to-day roles and overall reporting requirements, they might need information from other members of the team. The partnerships should discuss the types of information each partner will need and develop a written plan for who will share the information and how it will be shared. Information sharing could happen during regular team meetings, during one-on-one calls, via email or through another method. Sharing this information ensures each partner can fulfill its role and sets up the pilot for effectively leveraging the expertise of all the partners.
- **Understand and respect roles, responsibilities, and expertise through the duration of the partnership.** Throughout the implementation of the pilot and evaluation, refer back to the documents describing information sharing, roles, responsibilities, and expertise. The partnership can work to execute the information-sharing plan and respect the roles of the different partners. If new staff join the partnership, ensure the new staff review the documents discussing these topics.

Hurdle 2: Use of different terminology and language

Miscommunications are common when different partners use different terminology and language. For example, in one partnership there was a misunderstanding about which youth to count in the pilot's two cohorts of participants. Some youth received services with the first cohort and then continued receiving services along with the second cohort. Pilot staff considered these first cohort participants as part of the second cohort, whereas the local evaluator considered these youth to be first cohort participants. Although this seems like a small misunderstanding, it had significant implications for the rigor of the evaluation and could cause inefficiencies that cost time and money. After discovering this misunderstanding, the partners could identify a solution.

Mitigation strategies

The liaisons used the following strategies in their work with the P3 pilots as well as with HHS-funded grantees.

- **Define frequently used terms so that everyone understands their meaning.** Partners may enter partnerships with preconceived ideas of key concepts and terms. Partners often also come from different fields that use different terms or where terms might mean different things. This can be especially true when discussing the evaluation, which can use technical terms that are not familiar to staff offering services. At the beginning of the partnership, it is useful to collectively define terms so that everyone is clear about their meaning.
- **Be intentional with the language used to describe the pilot and evaluation, and the language used between partners.** For the duration of the partnership, focus on using previously defined terms and other clear language to describe the pilot and evaluation. Avoid jargon and instead explain concepts in plain language. Effective communication ensures all partners understand the basics of the pilot and evaluation.

Hurdle 3: Different priorities among the partners

Often, distinct partners have both common and different goals or priorities for the partnership. In one partnership, the local evaluator was more interested in a supplemental analysis, whereas the pilot, the funder, and the evaluation TA team focused more on the impact analysis. In another partnership, the pilot staff wanted to provide services as soon as possible and so began services before consulting other partners. This decision meant the pilot had to abandon the original evaluation plan and implement a new, less rigorous, evaluation instead.

Mitigation strategies

The liaisons identified and utilized the following strategies in their work with the P3 pilots.

- **Openly discuss each partner's goals and priorities.** In the beginning of the partnership, each partner should share its goals and priorities. It is alright if partners' goals or priorities differ. Although the grant requirements should be clear and prioritized by the pilot, it is often possible to achieve other goals. The partnership can accomplish, and should, understand both grant requirements and each other's goals.
- **Collectively identify common goals and priorities for the pilot and evaluation.** As noted, the pilot should share the grant requirements and that work should be prioritized. In addition, the team can and should identify and prioritize other collective goals and priorities. Discuss these goals in the beginning of the partnership and develop plans for who will work on these goals and how the goals will be achieved.
- **Remember roles and responsibilities when considering comments and feedback from TA providers.** Funders have ultimate decision-making authority and will be interested in holding pilots to funding requirements. TA providers are there to help, not monitor or approve changes to the original plan. TA providers have unique expertise in designing and implementing pilots and evaluations. Throughout the design and implementation of the pilot and evaluation, TA providers can offer comments or feedback on a variety of topics and issues. Although the funders might pay the TA providers, in many cases the comments and feedback from the TA providers are merely suggestions for the other partners to consider. The funder should be the primary entity describing any grant or funding requirements, though TA providers can remind pilots of grant requirements or otherwise work to help the pilot fulfill the grant requirements. If pilots are unsure about the grant requirements, the pilot should follow up with the funders and TA providers to clarify their understanding.

Hurdle 4: Lack of common vision

When partners are not on the same page or do not share the same vision, the partnership will likely not operate to its fullest potential. For example, in one partnership the local evaluator was told data would be available for only a certain number of youth; however, the pilot actually served many more youth. The pilot team did not share data on these additional youth, which ultimately limited the evaluation because of the small sample size. In another pilot partnership, the pilot staff said that youth in the intervention were offered a wide variety of services offered by the partners over time. However, many of these services might likely have been offered to youth even in the absence of P3. Therefore, it became difficult to identify the unique intervention the pilot brought to the community.

Mitigation strategies

The liaisons identified the following strategies during their work with the P3 pilots when they encountered a lack of common vision or shared understanding.

- **Write down key information and activities.** Communicating with a large and diverse group of partners can be challenging. Putting key information in writing can help make sure all partners are on the same page. The goal is for all partners to have a working knowledge of the pilot and issues.
- **Share key files with the entire team.** The partnership should make sure all partners have access to key files, such as case flows, conceptual frameworks, theories of change, logic models, and evaluation plans. Partners should share data, information, or notes from the pilot planning stage that will help partners understand why the pilot was designed the way it was. In some cases, these files will have to be updated as the pilot and evaluation evolve. To ensure all partners are up to date on this information, consider creating a shared folder with all the key files or sending key files to partners every few months. As always, partners need to assure appropriate controls over all sensitive data about participants.

- **Focus work and conversations on shared goals and priorities.** Partners should review collective goals and priorities on a regular basis and focus meetings on topics related to achieving these goals and priorities. As needed, the partners should remind one another of the shared goals and priorities.

Hurdle 5: Coordinating across multiple organizations and busy leadership teams

Eight of the nine P3 pilots' partnerships included multiple local service organizations in addition to the TA providers, the local evaluator, and the funder. This creates challenges related to coordinating across local organizations and the staff providing services, which can affect the evaluation. Namely, it can be difficult to ensure that partners implement the pilot and evaluation as intended. In one partnership, some of the organizations serving youth did not enter data about youth into the shared database. The local evaluator and the leadership team had made plans for the data collection, but information about what data to enter and why did not make it to all the direct service organizations. Ultimately, the local evaluator had to drop participants with missing data from the analysis. Another partnership with many local partner organizations found it difficult to identify days or times for important meetings and, thus, some local partners were unable to attend and missed learning about new pilot developments.

Mitigation strategies

The liaisons identified the following mitigation strategies by reflecting on the differences in practice among the eight P3 Cohort 1 pilots.

- **Maintain regular and varied contact with local partners.** The partnership should consider holding standing meetings with all local partners, especially during the early stages of planning and implementation. A member of the partnership should be responsible for sharing key information from the meeting with people who could not attend.
- **Develop and implement a communication strategy.** To make regular meetings efficient and ensure information is shared, it can help to develop a communication strategy. The communication strategy can include plans for who will develop an agenda and when they will develop it, circulating the agenda, taking and sharing notes, and facilitation. Setting up these plans in the beginning means that all team members know what is expected of them and know to get information.
- **Identify a sponsor at each local partner organization.** This individual serves as the primary contact at the organization related to the grant. In addition, this individual takes responsibility for promoting the grant work at the organization and communicating key information to other staff at the organization.
- **Review materials and resources sent by partners.** All partners should review all materials and resources sent by other partners. This does not mean that the partners have to adopt suggestions included in materials and resources.
- **Be responsive to requests for information and clarification from all partners.** To adequately fulfill their roles, all partners might need additional information or clarification. These requests should be fulfilled in a timely manner. The additional information will help partners improve the pilot or evaluation.

Hurdle 6: Poor communication of important aspects or changes in the pilot or evaluation

Five P3 pilots and their evaluations evolved over time, but these changes were not always communicated to all the partners. In one pilot, the staff offered all youth (those in the intervention and the comparison groups) a version of the intervention without informing the other partners. As noted by the local evaluator and the evaluation TA team, this compromised the validity of the evaluation. In another pilot, it became clear over time that the staff referred the youth with the most promise to the pilot. The pilot staff simply said that the frontline staff used a qualitative

assessment to determine which youth to refer to the intervention. It took multiple, long conversations with the pilot team for the local evaluator to realize that the frontline staff offered the pilot only to the youth with the most promise. This approach had significant implications for the evaluation and if the pilot team had been more upfront about the criteria, the evaluator and evaluation TA team could have pointed out the challenges this created for the evaluation.

Mitigation strategies

The liaisons' experience with P3 pilots and reflection on what could have been done differently yielded this list of mitigation strategies.

- **Develop a logic model and use it to inform the partners and the local evaluation.** The logic model is a useful programmatic tool clearly describing how and why the pilot services will change their intended outputs and outcomes, and can be a key communication tool between partners. The logic model shows the key services and the key outputs and outcomes of the pilot. Furthermore, the logic model can inform the design of the local evaluation. Namely, the evaluation should aim to measure the outputs and outcomes.
- **Maintain regular and varied contact with partners.** Varied communications can fulfill different purposes. For example, it might make sense to have a one-on-one call with a partner about a very specific issue (such as how to present data) that does not affect other partners. It might make more sense to cover broad topics or issues, and major changes to implementation, during meetings with the entire team. Experiment with other communication methods (such as video calls) and determine what works best for the team.
- **Be transparent with partners and proactively share information.** The partners are a team working together to design and implement the best pilot and evaluation possible. However, partners cannot help if they do not know what is happening. Always share plans for the pilot and evaluation with the partners, and proactively share information about the changes as the plans evolve over time.
- **Bring challenges and questions to partners.** As a group, partnerships should talk about any challenges and proactively seek their guidance. The partnership should update funders and TA providers on any changes or challenges. Partners should ask questions about anything that is not clear. Bringing challenges and questions to partners will ensure you get the most out of their expertise.
- **Engage TA providers early in the planning process.** As soon as possible, begin talking and working with TA providers. They often can point out possible future challenges and ways to design or implement a pilot or evaluation to avoid these challenges. The expertise of TA providers is often the most useful in the early stages when plans can still be easily changed.

Hurdle 7: Staff turnover among program or evaluation staff

Staff turnover at partner organizations can cause misunderstandings and ultimately disrupt progress on the evaluation. In one partnership, significant pilot staff turnover at two points disrupted implementation of pilot services and the evaluation. First, several lead staff left between the grant application and when the pilot started. Then staff turnover occurred in the middle of the grant period. The change in staff corresponded with changes in the priorities for the pilot. For example, the original plan called for a broad recruiting effort targeting in-school and out-of-school youth of both genders, but the initial implementation team decided to recruit primarily out-of-school males ages 18 and older. Then, staff turnover in the middle of the grant period brought in new staff who reverted to the original plan and enrolled more females and in-school youth. Each major shift in staffing temporarily curtailed recruiting for and implementing the pilot, hurting enrollment numbers and preventing consistent engagement with youth enrolled in the pilot. Pilot staff reported struggling to reestablish contact and trust with youth and families enrolled by the previous team. Another pilot changed both the lead evaluator and the lead pilot person in the course of the pilot. These changes disrupted the flow of information and slowed down progress.

Mitigation strategies

The liaisons identified and used the following mitigation strategy based on their experience with the P3 pilots.

- **Orient new staff and be sure they review any common expectations and agreements.** Evaluations, whether connected to a grant effort or not, are typically likely to be multi-year efforts. Some staff turnover is inevitable, but the transition can be smooth if the new staff member can get up to speed quickly. An orientation can help the new staff member understand the background and the current status of the project. The new staff member should also review all materials created by the partnership, especially materials that discuss roles, responsibilities, goals, and expectations.

Conclusion

This brief described some common hurdles seen among the P3 pilots that formed partnerships to conduct a local evaluation. The brief included information about a number of strategies to address the hurdles based on the experiences of the evaluation TA liaisons. Clear and effective communication was one theme among the strategies listed. However, the liaisons view these strategies as a starting point for partnerships. Each unique group of partners will have to collectively identify challenges and negotiate and implement their own strategies for working together. In addition, conversations and negotiations will likely be ongoing. Over time, as partnerships mature and grow, new hurdles may emerge and new strategies will be needed to address them.

Endnotes

[1] For more information on this grant program, see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/building-capacity-to-evaluate-interventions-for-youth-with-child-welfare-involvement-at-risk-of-homelessness

[2] For more information on the OPA teen pregnancy prevention programs, see https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/grant-programs/teen-pregnancy-prevention-program-tpp/index.html

[3] ACF-funded Youth At-Risk of Homelessness project is one example. See https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/building-capacity-to-evaluate-interventions-for-youth-with-child-welfare-involvement-at-risk-of-homelessness for more information. Included on the website is a brief that discusses efforts to strengthen the capacity of YARH grantees to conduct evaluations (see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/strengthgranteecapacityevalta_508.pdf). The OPA-funded Teen Pregnancy Prevention program is a second example. See https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/grant-programs/teen-pregnancy-prevention-program-tpp/index.html for more details on this project.

About P3 and the national evaluation

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First authorized by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014, Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3) awards pilots, led by state, local, and tribal community grantees, the flexibility to blend and braid funds across federal discretionary youth programs to test innovative, cost-effective, and evidence-based strategies to improve outcomes of disconnected youth. As specified in the Act, a pilot involves two or more Federal programs that are administered by one or more Federal agencies and have related policy goals. The Act authorized the inclusion of discretionary programs from the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services; the Corporation for National and Community Service; and the Institute for Museum and Library Services. Under P3, disconnected youth are individuals ages 14 to 24 who are low income and either homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, unemployed, or not enrolled in or at risk of dropping out of an educational institution. P3 grantees are called "pilots" and typically are groups of local partner organizations, led by a single organizational grantee. These pilots had the flexibility to provide services to disconnected youth in their communities. In October 2015, the federal agencies announced the nine pilots awarded grants under the first P3 grant competition (Cohort 1). An additional group of pilots (as authorized by subsequent acts) received grants in 2016 (Cohorts 2 and 3).

At the systems level, P3 encourages pilots to establish partnerships and work on goals such as integrating data systems and procedures for seeking approaches with more established evidence of effectiveness. Ideally, as envisioned by the designers of P3, these activities will promote effective collaboration and produce cost efficiencies, among other outputs—or achieve the collective impact model of broad participation and intensive focus of resources—leading to better system coordination and alignment, more integrated data systems, fewer barriers to effective supports for disconnected youth, and greater knowledge of what works to improve youth outcomes. At the pilot level, pilots may implement or expand programs or services for youth, recruit participants, and engage and retain youth in services. The goal of these activities and outputs are improved outcomes for youth, such as employment, engagement or retention in education, and well-being.

Mathematica and its subcontractor Social Policy Research Associates are conducting an implementation study of P3. The Mathematica team published a number of papers to date including a description of early implementation of Cohort 1 pilots and a synthesis of Cohort 1 impact evaluation findings. See https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/currentstudies/Performance_Partnership_Pilots_for_Disconnected_Youth_National_Evaluation. Publications will be hosted on https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/completedstudies.

This paper discusses hurdles P3 pilots faced in partnering to implement strong local evaluations of their youth-focused interventions and suggests mitigation strategies. The first nine grantees (Cohort 1 pilots) that are basis for this paper indicated in their proposal they intended to conduct a randomized control trial (RCT) or quasi-experimental design study (QED). Among the six Cohort 2 and 3 pilots, two conducted implementation evaluations, one conducted an RCT, two did not plan for evaluations, and one voluntarily terminated their grant. The lessons learned with the Cohort 1 pilots related to partnerships were reinforced by experiences with the three Cohort 2 and 3 pilots that received evaluation TA.

For more information on P3, please see https://youth.gov/youth-topics/reconnecting-youth/performance-partnership-pilots