



# Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3): Four Years After Initial Authorization

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## Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Abstract.....  | ix  |
| Introduction .....   | 1   |
| The Federal agencies created the interagency systems necessary to award and manage the pilots, but Federal respondents did not anticipate these efforts to last beyond P3.....           | 4   |
| Cohort 1 pilots reported that there were benefits to the approved waivers, specifically in reducing administrative burden and expanding youth eligibility for the services provided..... | 6   |
| The primary service strategy among the Cohort 1 pilots was case management, and youth participating in focus groups generally reported positive experiences.....                         | 10  |
| Two Cohort 1 pilots sought to change their systems serving youth, while other pilots built or enhanced partnerships. ....  | 12  |
| A lack of understanding about how to identify and use waivers appeared to limit Cohort 1 pilots' use of P3 flexibilities.....  | 14  |
| The provision of start-up funds led some pilots to view P3 as a typical grant program. ....  | 15  |
| Reflections and next steps .....   | 16  |
| References .....   | 19  |
| Appendix A: Key P3 terms defined.....  | A.1 |

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## **Table**

Table 1. Brief description of Cohort 1 pilots .....6

## **Figure**

Figure 1. Overview of the characteristics of youth served .....8

## **Boxes**

Box 1. Federal agencies participating in P3 .....1

Box 2. The implementation study and other components of the National Evaluation of P3.....3

Box 3. Federal statutory waivers received by Cohort 1 P3 pilots .....9

Box 4. Favorable findings reported in the Cohort 1 local evaluation reports .....10

Box 5. System change to overcome barriers to serve disconnected youth .....12

Box 6. The types of organizations and agencies involved in P3 pilots' partnerships .....13

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## Abstract

To help state, local, and tribal communities provide services to disconnected youth more efficiently across multiple federal funding streams, the U.S. Congress (2014) authorized the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3) in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (the Act). The Act allowed for up to 10 pilots in which state, local, or tribal government entities and their partners could pool funds from across the discretionary programs of five Federal agencies to provide innovative evidence-based interventions to youth. Applicants could request and receive waivers from these programs' eligibility, reporting, and other requirements to better serve their youth in exchange for accountability for achieving previously negotiated performance goals (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2017).

The Federal agencies designated in the Act worked to implement this authority with the goal of reducing barriers to providing effective services, changing service delivery systems, and improving outcomes for youth ages 14 to 24 (U.S. Department of Education 2014). In 2015, the Federal agencies participating in P3 awarded nine pilots under the Act. As of June 2020, they awarded six additional pilots under subsequent appropriations acts.

This paper is one in a series of implementation study papers of the National Evaluation of P3, which was contracted by the Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office on behalf of the Federal partners supporting P3. It assesses P3 four years after its initial authorization, and is based on data collected from interviews with Federal agency staff and two rounds of site visits to the nine original (Cohort 1) pilots, conducted between 2016 and 2018.

This paper presents reflections and next steps after discussing each of the following findings:

1. The Federal agencies created the interagency systems necessary to award and manage the pilots, but Federal respondents did not anticipate these efforts to last beyond P3.
2. Cohort 1 pilots reported that there were benefits to the approved waivers, specifically in reducing administrative burden and expanding the youth eligibility for the services provided.
3. The primary service strategy among the Cohort 1 pilots was case management, and youth participating in focus groups generally reported positive experiences.
4. Two Cohort 1 pilots sought to change their systems serving youth, while other pilots built or enhanced partnerships.
5. A lack of understanding about how to identify and use waivers appeared to limit Cohort 1 pilots' use of P3 flexibilities.
6. The provision of start-up funds led some pilots to view P3 as a typical grant program.

Future papers from the national evaluation will explore the nine Cohort 1 pilots' efforts and successes in sustaining elements of their P3 pilots, as well as the experiences of subsequently awarded pilots.

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## Introduction

To help state, local, and tribal communities provide services to disconnected youth more efficiently across multiple federal funding streams, the U.S. Congress (2014) authorized the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3) in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (the Act). As defined by the Act, disconnected youth are ages 14 to 24 and either homeless, in foster care, pregnant, parenting, justice involved, unemployed, or at risk of dropping out of school. The Act allowed for up to 10 pilots in which state, local, or tribal government entities and their partners could pool funds from across the discretionary programs of five Federal agencies to provide innovative evidence-based interventions to youth. Applicants could request and receive waivers from these programs' eligibility, reporting, and other requirements to better serve their youth in exchange for accountability for achieving previously negotiated performance goals (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2017).

The multiple Federal agencies designated in the Act worked to implement this authority with the goal of reducing barriers to providing effective services, changing service delivery systems, and improving outcomes for youth ages 14 to 24 (U.S. Department of Education 2014). The Federal agencies participating in P3 awarded nine pilots in 2015 with a period of performance through September 30, 2018 (henceforth the Cohort 1 pilots). The period of performance for three pilots was extended by one year, though one pilot chose not to use the extension. See Appendix A for a list of P3 terms used throughout this paper.

Congress has reauthorized P3 in appropriation acts of each subsequent year, expanding P3 to include additional Federal partners and allowing additional pilots. Box 1 lists the Federal agencies participating in P3. In addition to the nine pilots awarded in 2015, the Federal partners awarded six more pilots under the 2015 and 2016 Acts (the Cohort 2 and 3 pilots), for a total of 15. Though Federal partners published a notice inviting applications for fiscal years 2018 and 2019, as of the writing of this paper no new pilots have been awarded.

This paper is one in a series of implementation study papers of the National Evaluation of P3, which was contracted by the Chief Evaluation Office at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) on behalf of the Federal agencies participating in P3. (Box 2 provides more information on the evaluation.) The paper assesses P3 four years after its initial authorization. Specifically, this paper focuses on four research questions:

### Box 1. Federal agencies participating in P3

#### Convener role:

- Office of Management and Budget

#### Agencies with discretionary programs authorized as of the:

##### 2014 Act

- U.S. Department of Education (ED)
- U.S. Department Health and Human Services (HHS)
- U.S. Department Labor (DOL)
- Corporation for National and Community Services (CNCS)
- Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)

##### 2015 Act

- U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)

##### 2016 Act

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

1. How did the P3 pilots use Federal-, state-, and local-granted financial and programmatic flexibilities, including waivers and blended or braided funding, to implement interventions with the goal of improving the outcomes of disconnected youth?
2. How and to what extent did the pilots leverage the P3 flexibilities, including waivers and blended or braided funding, to enhance their partnerships to provide effective and efficient services to disconnected youth?
3. Who were the youth who participated and what services did they receive? What were their outcomes, especially in the education and employment domains?
4. What systems and programmatic changes and improvements resulted from P3 at the Federal and pilot levels (as reported by respondents)?

This paper is based on information collected from Cohort 1 pilots and staff of Federal agencies participating in P3. In April through June 2017 and again in May through September 2018, the evaluation team visited each of the Cohort 1 pilots. On these visits, the team interviewed an average of 19 staff per pilot and held group discussions with 156 youth participants across the nine pilots. The site visits focused on understanding pilots' partnerships and governance structures, use of P3 flexibilities, and the interventions provided to youth. In addition, on each visit, the team distributed surveys to pilot partners, collecting 60 and 59 responses on the 2017 and 2018 visits, respectively.

In 2016 and 2018, the research team also interviewed key staff of the Federal agencies participating in P3 and external stakeholders. These respondents were involved in the work developing the vision for and putting P3 into practice. We interviewed 24 and 20 Federal respondents in 2016 and 2018, respectively, who had firsthand knowledge of the development and implementation of P3. Key topics included Federal processes and experiences while preparing notices inviting applications, selecting pilots, granting flexibility and waivers, negotiating performance measures, offering start-up funding, and monitoring grantees. We present the interview data using the Federal agency as the unit of analysis, recognizing that we only interviewed one to three individuals per agency.

Based on the perspectives of Federal partners, the pilots, and P3 youth, this report presents six broad findings on P3's implementation over the four years since authorization. The paper presents reflections and next steps after discussing each of the following findings:

1. The Federal agencies created the interagency systems necessary to award and manage the pilots, but Federal respondents did not anticipate these efforts to last beyond P3.
2. Cohort 1 pilots reported that there were benefits to the approved waivers, specifically in reducing administrative burden and expanding youth eligibility for the services provided.
3. The primary service strategy among the Cohort 1 pilots was case management, and youth participating in focus groups generally reported positive experiences.
4. Two Cohort 1 pilots sought to change their systems serving youth, while other pilots built or enhanced partnerships.
5. A lack of understanding about how to identify and use waivers appeared to limit Cohort 1 pilots' use of P3 flexibilities.
6. The provision of start-up funds led some pilots to view P3 as a typical grant program.

## Box 2. The implementation study and other components of the National Evaluation of P3

In 2015, DOL on behalf of the Federal agencies participating in P3 awarded to Mathematica and its subcontractor, Social Policy Research Associates, a contract to conduct the National Evaluation of P3. The evaluation has several components.

First, the national evaluation's implementation study examines the work of the Federal, state, and local partners and assesses their role in changing systems and providing services to youth. The implementation study seeks to answer five research questions:

1. How did the P3 pilots use Federal-, state-, and local-granted financial and programmatic flexibilities, including waivers and blended or braided funding, to design and implement interventions with the goal of improving the outcomes of disconnected youth?
2. How and to what extent did the pilots leverage the P3 flexibilities, including waivers and blended or braided funding, to enhance their partnerships and work across partners to provide effective and efficient services to disconnected youth?
3. Who were the youth who participated and what services did they receive? What were their outcomes, especially in the education and employment domains?
4. What systems and programmatic changes and improvements resulted from P3 at the Federal and pilot levels (as reported by respondents)?
5. What were the lessons and promising areas for developing and/or building upon the P3 integrated governance and service strategies to improve the outcomes of disconnected youth?

In addition to the data that informed this paper, the implementation study team conducted two data collection activities in 2019. First, the team interviewed Cohort 1 pilot directors to learn more about any efforts and successes in sustaining elements of their P3 pilots. Second, the team conducted one round of visits to the Cohort 2 and 3 pilots authorized by the 2015 and 2016 Appropriations Acts. These activities will result in additional papers of the implementation study. A paper on Cohort 1 pilots' early experiences was published in 2019 (Rosenberg and Brown 2019).

Second, the national evaluation includes two other components:

- **Outcomes analysis.** The national evaluation team collected administrative data from the nine Cohort 1 pilots to define the population of youth who participated in P3, the services they received, and the employment and education outcomes they achieved.
- **Evaluation technical assistance.** The nine Cohort 1 pilots and four of the subsequent six pilots planned to conduct experimental, quasi-experimental, one-group pre/post, or implementation evaluations as part of their grant applications. Through the national evaluation, Mathematica provided ongoing technical assistance to pilot leaders and their independent local evaluators to help strengthen the designs and reporting of their local evaluations. In 2019, the evaluation team synthesized findings from across the Cohort 1 local evaluation reports (Maxwell and Yanez 2020).

## The Federal agencies created the interagency systems necessary to award and manage the pilots, but Federal respondents did not anticipate these efforts to last beyond P3.

P3 built on an established model for letting subnational agencies streamline Federal requirements. The National Environmental Performance Partnership System administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has offered state

agencies the flexibility to integrate separate EPA grants and to streamline the administrative requirements of the grants. In exchange, participating state agencies face heightened accountability for achieving negotiated performance goals (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2017). Like its EPA antecedent, P3 was not a traditional grant program focused on providing resources, but focused instead on facilitating the use and coordination of existing funding streams.

Past reports on P3 noted three important ways in which P3’s structure differs from the EPA’s partnership system (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2017; Rosenberg and Brown 2019):

1. **Start-up funds.** Three Federal agencies participating in P3 allocated resources to provide start-up grants to pilots to offset the anticipated costs of additional partner collaboration, governance, evaluation, and data integration activities associated with P3.
2. **Interagency collaboration.** P3 introduced an interdepartmental component to the performance partnership model. Instead of negotiating waivers and performance standards within a single agency, P3’s authorization allowed pilots to apply to combine funding overseen by separate Federal agencies. This structure acknowledged the existence of multiple Federal agencies’ programs focused on the needs of disconnected youth. It also allowed pilots to use funding from a range of authorized agencies’ discretionary programs and request waivers to better coordinate their use.
3. **Multiagency oversight.** Typically, multiple Federal agencies were involved in managing and monitoring each pilot.

From the very beginning, even before the 2014 Act, the Federal agencies participating in P3 worked to develop the P3 model, resulting in an interagency agreement signed in fall 2015 by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the six agencies authorized in the 2014 and 2015 Acts (see Box 1). In interviews, staff at every Federal partner agency noted that P3’s multiagency processes required high levels of agency effort. Staff at each Federal partner agency attributed the level of effort required at least in part to the number of agencies involved in the decision-making process, each with its own internal approval processes. In interviews with four of the five agencies authorized by the 2014 Act, staff reported that P3 required significant work within their own agencies and across agencies to clarify the waivers necessary to achieve desired flexibilities and to negotiate performance agreements with the pilots. Indeed, respondents from two agencies participating in P3 explicitly questioned whether the Federal effort invested in P3 was worthwhile given the number of pilots and the small number of youth served by most, even after Cohorts 2 and 3 were underway.

Interviews conducted with Federal staff in 2018 suggested that the agency collaboration to monitor P3 pilots functioned well. Staff from four agencies mentioned interagency collaboration to monitor P3 pilots, and in each case the staff described a consultative process with little unnecessary duplication of effort. In

**“The communication and coordination [are] close to ideal.”**

*- Federal agency on working with other Federal agencies on P3*

two cases, the agency was a participating agency for a single pilot and noted that the pilot's consulting agency handled the relationship with the pilot and would involve them as needed. (See Appendix A for roles of consulting and participating agencies.) In two other cases, agencies with more pilot management responsibilities described handling their responsibilities internally and involving other agencies only when issues arose.

Federal partners attributed successful ongoing interagency communication to adopting existing systems, such as systems to review and award grant applications, and building relationships. Staff across all agencies noted the frequency of interagency meetings and communication to develop P3. Those representing four of these agencies noted that, although intensive, these P3 meetings and communication structures were effective. For example, one respondent noted that the existing OMB portal used to review application materials made reviews easy, even across agencies that use different email systems. Another respondent described P3's communication and coordination as "close to ideal."

At the same time, respondents from all agencies generally indicated that, apart from regular meetings, agencies' existing internal systems did not change appreciably. Only one agency responsible for managing pilots reported that managing them was more time consuming than normal program management, primarily because of Federal monitoring visits and quarterly check-ins. Respondents at two other agencies indicated that they monitored P3 pilots as they would for non-P3 grants. A respondent from one agency noted that the system of meetings and emails used for P3 did not differ meaningfully from other interagency efforts, emphasizing instead that the quality of the interpersonal relationships built across P3 agencies was stronger than in other interagency groups. Similarly, representatives of three other agencies emphasized the strength of the relationships with their counterparts in each agency. A potential downside to the strong interpersonal relationships noted by one respondent was that it means the strength of the Federal P3 partnership does not come from new systems or institutions that will stay in place for the long term. Instead, the relationships rely on the individual staff members currently involved and staff turnover could make it challenging to maintain the progress achieved in building strong interagency connections.

In reflecting on the Federal effort, during interviews conducted in 2018, staff at Federal partner agencies described two other challenges in creating lasting change:

- 1. Slow decision-making process.** Respondents from all Federal agencies participating in P3 noted that the number of separate agencies' internal approval processes involved slowed decision making. Representatives of three agencies noted that buy-in from agency leadership and early engagement on the part of agency legal offices could help to address this.
- 2. Annual authorizations.** A respondent from each of four Federal agencies described challenges presented by the annual structure of P3's authorizing legislation. These staff noted that timing differences between P3's annual cycle and participating program cycles complicated the award and reporting processes. For example, if the program year for a discretionary program does not align with the P3 grant, then the agency must determine what portion of the discretionary program's funding is available for P3 and subject to any approved P3 waiver. Staff at two of these agencies noted that investing in overhauling internal processes is difficult to implement without designated funding and given the year-to-year authorization of P3. Two respondents added that the annual appropriations left agencies little time to develop the application process and conduct outreach for each cohort before authority to award pilots elapsed. Aligning funding and reporting cycles would facilitate better program integration.

## Cohort 1 pilots reported that there were benefits to the approved waivers, specifically in reducing administrative burden and expanding youth eligibility for the services provided.

The initial notice inviting applications resulted in nine Cohort 1 pilots. The pilot grantees were of different types: a mayor’s office, a police department, social service agencies, a city, county regional workforce agencies, and a tribal entity (Table 1). In seven of the nine pilots, the grantee also served as the lead agency responsible for implementing the pilot. Grantees for the remaining two pilots appointed as the lead agency a partner agency that was familiar with the target populations of the grant. Rosenberg and Brown (2019) describe in more detail both the structures and early implementation experiences of these pilots.

**Table 1. Brief description of Cohort 1 pilots**

| Pilot                        | Grantee  | Primary youth eligibility           | Brief description of services  |
|------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Baton Rouge, Louisiana       | Office of the Mayor–President of Baton Rouge           | At-risk in-school youth             | In-school holistic case management and group skill-building exercises  |
| Broward County, Florida      | Children’s Services Council of Broward County          | At-risk in-school youth             | In-school one-on-one mentoring focused on academic and/or career postsecondary goals and summer work experience opportunities                                      |
| Chicago, Illinois            | Chicago Department of Family and Support Services      | Pregnant and parenting youth        | Subsidized work experience and mentoring program for young mothers of children in Head Start or Early Head Start   |
| Eastern Kentucky             | Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program, Inc. | At-risk in- and out-of-school youth | Case management connecting youth to available resources in their communities, including work-based experiences, as well as providing family engagement programming |
| Indianapolis, Indiana        | City of Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department    | At-risk youth in housing complexes  | Case management providing referrals of youth to health-, education-, and workforce-related community resources   |
| Los Angeles, California      | City of Los Angeles                                    | Out-of-school youth                 | Case management providing provide direct workforce-related services and referrals to other service providers in the community, including housing                   |
| Oklahoma                     | Oklahoma Department of Human Services                  | Youth in foster care                | Coordinated case management providing postsecondary and employment-focused transition services   |
| Seattle, Washington          | Workforce Development–Council of Seattle-King County   | Out-of-school youth                 | Case management connecting youth to education reengagement programs and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act services  |
| Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Texas | Ysleta del Sur Pueblo                                  | Tribal youth                        | Engagement program connecting tribal youth to their native cultures and services offered by the tribe  |

Source: Site visits to Cohort 1 pilots.

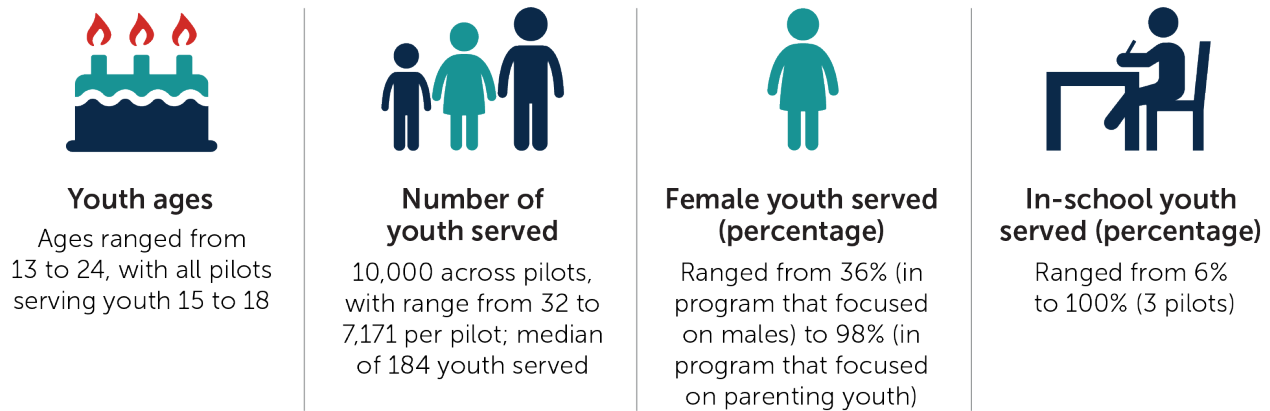


By the time of the second visits, which took place from April through June 2018, all nine Cohort 1 pilots had provided services to youth, although most started services later than summer or fall 2015, as planned for in their grant applications. Seven of the pilots started serving youth 8 to 12 months after the pilots were announced in fall 2015. One pilot started providing services 15 months after the announcement. Only one pilot began providing services within three months of the announcement. An early implementation challenge reported by both Federal and pilot staff was the lengthy negotiation between the grantee and the Federal partners to finalize the performance agreements. Other types of local challenges that pilot staff mentioned encountering included a natural disaster, turnover in pilot leadership, and administrative challenges such as accessing the funding of a discretionary program designated for P3 or receiving approval from a state agency. One pilot also mentioned the difficulty the lead agency experienced serving youth with funds from different programs that had different program years and reporting cycles. The lead agency had difficulty managing the different sources.

In 2018, six of the nine pilots were providing their planned services to their youth population and the remaining three provided youth with services but deviated substantially from their planned interventions. Rosenberg and Brown (2019) described the services pilots intended to offer and their early implementation. One pilot had abandoned its planned intervention due to recruitment challenges. As reported by the pilot's leadership during the 2018 visit, the individual who wrote the application was unfamiliar with the service structure for providing the planned services. This led to complications gaining buy-in from frontline workers and made it difficult to recruit youth. The other pilot struggled to recruit youth and pilot leadership noted that a school-based program would have enabled their pilot to better serve youth. A third pilot had initially offered services as planned but, by the second visit, had restructured how it provided services due to staff turnover and anticipation of the end of the P3 grant performance period.

Over the course of the initial period of pilot performance from fall 2015 through September 2018, pilots relied on their discretionary program and start-up funds to provide services to nearly 10,000 youth (Figure 1). Six of the nine cohort 1 pilots met or exceeded their enrollment targets. As indicated in Table 1, seven pilot interventions provided case management to youth to help them access youth-related services, such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) employment services, or provided in-school youth with career and college counseling. The range of services offered by these pilots is evident in the data pilots reported to the national evaluation. Three pilots reported that their youth participated in 10 to 90 different activities, such as mentoring, tutoring and homework assistance, workshops, career and college support, and work experiences. Two other pilots offered specific interventions to all participating youth: one provided subsidized employment opportunities to parenting youth and the other provided a leadership and cultural training program.

**Figure 1. Overview of the characteristics of youth served**



Source: P3 Pilot data as reported by each pilot to the national evaluation.

At the time of the second visits to pilots in 2018, three of the nine pilots had not received or were not using any approved waivers. (See Box 3 for the types of waivers pilots received.) In one instance, the pilot had an approved waiver, but its current leadership staff was not aware of its availability. A fourth pilot had discontinued use of its WIOA waiver because it was no longer needed. Because implementing the intervention started late and the local workforce agency had limited roll-over WIOA Youth funds available for the second year of implementation, the pilot used funds provided by a local agency to serve the youth it could not serve without a waiver.

According to the leadership across the pilots, the P3-approved waivers helped them implement their planned interventions, specifically reducing the administrative burden and enabling them to serve more youth. Six pilots received WIOA-specific waivers and cited these as particularly useful. Common WIOA waivers that pilots mentioned included the following:

- Relaxed requirements for WIOA spending on out-of-school youth.** Three pilots had waivers from the negotiated minimum percentage of expenditures to be spent on out-of-school youth. One of these pilots noted that this waiver enabled it to serve more in-school youth than it typically would. In addition, the pilot noted greater cost efficiency serving in-school youth because of the easy access that schools provide to potential youth participants.
- Broader definitions of out-of-school youth.** Four pilots had waivers from the WIOA definitions for in- and out-of-school youth. One of the pilots credited the WIOA eligibility waiver with enabling the pilot to serve both more youth and a broader population of high-need youth than typically served via WIOA Title I funding. Another pilot noted that its approved waiver counted all P3 participants as out-of-school youth, even if enrolled in school, which helped the pilot to meet its enrollment goals. In a third pilot, leadership indicated that the waiver counting youth in foster care as out-of-school youth regardless of their school status enabled the pilot to serve more of these youth.
- Administrative efficiencies.** Leaders of two pilots also attributed reduced administrative burden to their granted waivers. One of the two pilots used its WIOA Title I eligibility waiver to determine eligibility at the school level rather than the individual level, which reduced the level of burden needed to identify youth. The other pilot appreciated the reduced financial reporting requirements provided by a non-WIOA waiver.

### Box 3. Federal statutory waivers received by Cohort 1 P3 pilots

Pilots received waivers from Federal statutory requirements on their use of specific discretionary Federal program funds. These waivers, described in more detail in Rosenberg and Brown (2019), fall into the following categories:

#### WIOA Title 1 Youth program

- **Out-of-school expenditures.** Three pilots negotiated reducing the minimum share of WIOA Title 1 Youth program funds they had to spend on out-of-school youth.
- **Youth eligibility.** Federal partners approved four pilots using alternative definitions of in-school and out-of-school youth, facilitating enrollment and allowing more youth to receive certain services.
- **Performance indicators.** Federal partners allowed five pilots to use alternative performance indicators.

#### Eligibility requirements of other programs

- **Youth eligibility.** Federal partners allowed five pilots to expand other programs' eligibility to specific types of youth who would otherwise be excluded (for example, by expanding the grades that could be served or how income is calculated for means-tested programs).
- **Other.** Federal partners relaxed other eligibility requirements for two pilots, such as the type of school youth attended

#### Administrative

- **Fiscal match.** Federal partners waived a requirement to provide matching funds for two pilots.
- **Subcontracting.** Two pilots were allowed to subcontract funds from U.S. Department of Education (ED) discretionary programs.

Another key reported benefit was that waivers allowed better tailoring of services to meet youths' needs. In particular, one pilot used a waiver to construct a more flexible sequence of state and Federal services for disconnected youth in its community. The new sequence enabled youth to retain their out-of-school status and delay WIOA enrollment, providing frontline workers more time to gather necessary documents and determine the youths' needs and services to meet those needs. Before the waiver, the pilot described youth being quickly enrolled in programs to meet deadlines, which led to less ideal outcomes because the pilot later determined that another program would have been more beneficial for the youth.

During 2018 interviews, six pilots discussed additional waivers they believed would have benefitted their pilots. The pilots' focus was on serving more youth via eliminating eligibility requirements. For example, one pilot noted that waiving a WIOA citizenship requirement would have allowed the pilot to serve more youth because potential P3 youth were determined ineligible based on technicalities such as a laminated Social Security card. Another pilot discussed a waiver to offset a Federal program's hiring requirements to help the pilot's target population secure employment through the program. Yet another pilot saw a need for a WIOA eligibility waiver that allowed foster and justice-involved youth ages 17 and 18 to be

considered transitioning youth, rather than in-school youth, to increase eligibility for services. Pilots' ideas for potentially beneficial waivers included some that were requested but denied and others that were identified when the pilots were underway. Federal staff's comments suggest denied waivers included a combination of requests that were not allowable under the Act and authorized waivers that Federal partners worried would undermine program objectives.

### **The primary service strategy among the Cohort 1 pilots was case management, and youth participating in focus groups generally reported positive experiences.**

In exchange for the flexibility authorized under P3, the pilots sought to improve the education and employment outcomes of the youth served. For those providing services mostly to in-school youth, common negotiated performance measures were school attendance, graduation, and end-of-course grades. For pilots primarily focused on out-of-school youth, measures emphasized work and achieving industry-recognized credentials. As described in Maxwell and Yanez (2020), the Cohort 1 pilots conducted local evaluations to assess whether the youth participating in P3 interventions had better education, employment, and other outcomes than similar youth not participating in P3. In synthesizing the local evaluation results, Maxwell and Yanez found evidence of favorable outcomes for three of the case management interventions and the two-generation intervention (See Box 4).

#### **Box 4. Favorable findings reported in the Cohort 1 local evaluation reports**

A review of the Cohort 1 pilots' local evaluation reports identified three types of interventions as having favorable outcomes:

- **Case management.** Two interventions providing case management (only) found favorable outcomes. The first intervention reduced school suspensions at the two-year follow-up (difference in means =  $-0.10$ ) and demonstrated an increase in test scores for employability skills one year (difference in means =  $0.12$ ) and two years (difference in means =  $0.13$ ) after random assignment. The second intervention increased the probability that youth returned to school within the first follow-up year (difference in means =  $0.21$ ), and increased employment at the end of the program (difference in means =  $0.20$ ).
- **Case management and WIOA.** The intervention increased the probability that out-of-school youth took two GED tests (irrespective of whether they passed) (difference in means =  $0.29$ ) and attained college-course readiness (difference in means =  $0.04$ ), and that those who enrolled in college attained a GPA of 2.0 (difference in means =  $0.09$ ). Also, the intervention increased the probability of completing job-readiness training (difference in means =  $0.27$ ), career education classes (difference in means =  $0.11$ ), and paid internships (difference in means =  $0.21$ ).
- **Intervention for young parents and their children.** The intervention increased the probability that children attended their childcare program more regularly one month after enrollment (difference in means =  $6.07$ ) and that enrollment in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program increased among parents 11 months after enrollment (difference in means =  $0.11$ ).

From Maxwell and Yanez 2020.

The types of youth served differed across pilots. This is not surprising, because the pilots operated in communities with very different characteristics and, as Rosenberg and Brown (2019) described in more detail, each Cohort 1 pilot defined the target population differently. The youth served included youth who were above the expected age for their grade; from low-income households; parenting; justice-involved; homeless; in foster care; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ); and/or resided in an Opportunity or Promise Zone. In data reported to the national evaluation, pilots reported on special populations of youth served:

- **Youth experiencing homelessness.** Of the six pilots that reported this characteristic for participating youth, the percentage of homeless youth served was 0 (one pilot), less than 1 percent (two pilots), and 4 to 8 percent (three pilots).
- **Pregnant or parenting youth.** Of five pilots reporting this characteristic, the percentage of pregnant or parenting youth was 100 percent (one pilot) and 2 to 10 percent (four pilots).
- **Foster-care youth.** Of three pilots reporting this characteristic, the percentage of foster care youth was 100 percent (one pilot) and 2 to 5 percent (two pilots).
- **Justice-involved youth.** Two pilots reported that 12 to 15 percent of their youth were justice involved.

Other characteristics, such as the percentages of female youth and in-school youth, varied substantially across the pilots (Figure 1).

Youth participating in discussion groups across the nine pilots generally reported positive experiences in P3-supported programming. These perspectives on the pilots reflect the experiences of a large group of youth (in total, 156 youth) who were purposively selected by pilot staff to participate in discussion groups in 2017 and 2018. Therefore, they are not necessarily representative of all P3 youth. Because local P3 partners recruited youth to the discussion groups, participants could be more engaged or positive about the pilots than the average P3 youth.

The aspects of these programs that youth mentioned in describing their positive experiences were case management, mentorship, work experiences, and a sense of acceptance and belonging. At least one youth at all of the pilots that offered these services praised the quality of case management and mentorships. One youth reported that “the staff genuinely cares and are always checking in to see how they can help me.” Youth involved in four separate pilots noted that their P3-supported case managers or mentors provided better support than other case managers, social workers, or guidance counselors with whom they had worked. At the one pilot where youth reported some negative experiences, youth attributed dissatisfaction with case management to staff turnover or case managers simply not following up after initial meetings. Even at this pilot, youth reported appreciation for P3 case managers with whom they could connect repeatedly; one youth reported that a P3 case manager she worked with was “like a second mother.”

**“I come here and I see family; I could come here for almost any reason and I know they will help me.”**

*- P3 youth participant on the relationship with staff at P3-supported program*

Youth participating in discussions at six pilots reported participating in internships and other work experience opportunities. These included part-time one- to two-year positions as Head Start literacy coaches and paid summer internships at local partner organizations, restaurants, beauty salons, retail chains, and a museum. Youth perceptions of these opportunities were generally positive. One youth

reported that the P3-supported program he participated in “opened the doors for me. The job experience they provided me will help me in the future.”

Youth at three pilots mentioned the sense of community staff built at pilot sites. One youth attending a school with no sports teams said that “We don’t have teams, so P3 is like our team.” At another pilot, a P3 youth emphasized their relationships with staff. For example, one said, “I come here and I see family; I could come here for almost any reason and I know they will help me.”

## **Two Cohort 1 pilots sought to change their systems serving youth, while other pilots built or enhanced partnerships.**

One of the purposes of P3 was to be a catalyst for systems change at the state or community level (U.S. Department of Education 2014). For purposes of this paper, we defined systems change at the pilot level as changes in how the pilots’ partner agencies worked together through their governance structures, communication practices, and data-sharing approaches (Box 5). Box 6 lists the common types of organizations that were pilots’ partner agencies.

Through the use of braiding or blending different program funds and using waivers to smooth requirements across these programs, Federal agencies sought to test whether the pilots could more effectively serve youth and improve their outcomes. However, seven of the nine pilots did not prioritize systems change that involved new governance structures or shared intake processes; instead, they focused on providing services to youth as part of the pilots’ three-year performance period. Still, all pilots reported bringing multiple partners—often those that they had worked with before—together to work on behalf of the youth.

In 2018, all pilots continued to work within the provider networks that they had engaged from the start of P3. Indeed, the majority of partners in all nine Cohort 1 pilots reported that P3 resulted in new partnerships between their organization and other organizations. Through these networks, pilots connected partners or encouraged a more in-depth understanding of providers’ services and roles in the community. As a result, partners from across the nine Cohort 1 pilots credited P3 with expanding their awareness and understanding of services provided by other organizations in the community. Partners also noted that their newfound connections with other providers facilitated referrals of participants for services. In particular, two pilots credited P3 with breaking down silos between education and workforce providers in their communities.

### **Box 5. System change to overcome barriers to serve disconnected youth**

As noted in the P3 consultation paper (U.S. Government 2014), the system for providing effective services to disconnected youth experiences “poor coordination and alignment across the systems that serve youth, policies that make it hard to target the neediest youth and overcome gaps in services, fragmented data systems that inhibit the flow of information to improve results, and administrative requirements that impede holistic approaches to serving this population, among other factors.” P3 was intended to provide pilots with the means and flexibilities to address these issues and improve coordination, including “effective governance structures, aligned outcomes and performance measures, and more efficient and integrated data systems.”

**Box 6. The types of organizations and agencies involved in P3 pilots' partnerships**



**Community-based organizations.** Seven pilots included CBO partners to help recruit youth for services, provide services, and contribute to system-building efforts. For example, in one pilot, a local CBO provided home visits and held weekly socialization meetings for youth involved in pilot activities.



**Justice-related organizations.** Four pilots engaged justice-involved youth through these organizations. Police departments, juvenile detention centers, and court systems served in pilot advisory committees or as direct service providers. For example, in one pilot, the judicial department provided educational presentations to youth on the consequences of negative behaviors, responsible citizenship, and the court's services.



**Human services agencies.** Three pilots used human services agencies to provide supportive services to disconnected youth. In one pilot, the local human services agency actively engaged with other P3 partners to connect youth who visit workforce centers with cash assistance, food assistance, and available supportive services such as transportation assistance through these programs.



**Housing agencies.** Three pilots partnered with housing agencies for P3. Housing agencies provided services in two pilots and participated in the advisory committee in the third. One of these pilots specifically tried to engage youth at two local housing agency apartment buildings. In another pilot, the housing agency used information collected through an assessment to identify needs and provide temporary housing placements for youth while working on long-term stability.



**Health providers.** Three pilots included local health system partners to provide mental health and substance abuse services. In one pilot, a local health system provider hosted mental health support groups open to the community that disconnected youth could attend.



**Local library systems.** In two pilots, library representatives attended P3 partner meetings, provided space, and helped identify disconnected youth in need of services.

From Rosenberg and Brown 2019.

At the same time, six of the nine Cohort 1 pilots reported that their work positively affected their larger communities. Pilot leadership of three of these pilots reported that organizations serving other in-need populations had replicated or planned to replicate the P3 concept of collaborations across service providers. For example, one pilot described that American Job Centers in the area had replicated its co-enrollment technique for adult services. City agencies lead all three of these pilots, which one pilot credited with providing ample opportunities to highlight the work and encourage other networks to adopt the philosophy of coordinated care.



In addition, two pilots reported that P3 led to the formation of new committees to carry on the enthusiasm for collaborating and improving service delivery to disconnected youth. One of those two pilots also resulted in a planned spin-off of the case management services provided by P3. The P3 lead agency, a well-respected convener in the community, based the pilot’s P3 model on a needs assessment of its youth. Learning from this experience, a P3 partner created the spin-off that provides two-generational case management to connect youth participants and their parents to existing services in the community. These same two pilots also focused on particular aspects of systems change in their communities. One of the pilots put P3 into operation as an approach to engage more partners in systems change efforts involving disconnected youth. The pilot began regional meetings to bring together local stakeholders and providers to discuss how to improve the outcomes of individual youth through coordinated services. Another pilot planned to launch an integrated data system in September 2018. The early implementation paper (Rosenberg and Brown 2019) describes these efforts in greater detail, and a future implementation study’s paper on the sustainability of Cohort 1 pilots will cover them more extensively. The remaining seven pilots did not demonstrate major changes in system-related efforts from the first visit in 2017 to the second visit in 2018.

### **A lack of understanding about how to identify and use waivers appeared to limit Cohort 1 pilots’ use of P3 flexibilities.**

As discussed in Rosenberg and Brown (2019), the Federal agencies participating in P3 collaborated to inform the community about P3, publish the notice inviting applications in November 2014, and review the applications, resulting in the awards to the nine pilots in fall 2015. Still, both Federal and pilot staff indicated that P3 applicants had insufficient knowledge about how to assess potential waivers for their P3 pilots and/or support for developing their P3 approaches. Federal staff from five agencies participating in P3 reported ways in which, with a few exceptions, prospective pilots struggled to identify waivers that could meaningfully support program improvement. Staff from two agencies noted that some prospective pilots requested flexibilities that the P3 authorizing legislation did not permit. For example, one applicant requested waivers for a HUD program, even though the agency’s discretionary programs were not authorized until the 2016 Act. In addition, staff of three agencies recounted examples of pilots requesting flexibility that did not actually require a Federal waiver, and pilots could achieve their objectives simply by clarifying Federal requirements. Federal

partners noted that some cases of pilots requesting flexibilities that were not necessary from the Federal perspective stemmed from additional requirements imposed by state intermediaries. In such cases, Federal partners’ clarifications could not address the concern unless state agencies also approved a waiver. As noted in Rosenberg and Brown (2019), pilot leaders reported that their understanding of the flexibilities available and ability to obtain buy-in from state and local partners hampered their use of the flexibilities.

**“How can you make it easier? How do you really make it easier without losing the ability to hold folks accountable?”**

*- Federal agency participating in P3 on the tradeoff between reducing administrative burden and strong monitoring*

Staff across four of the six Federal agencies involved in Cohort 1 reported that the waivers received by pilots generally did not address central programmatic challenges. For example, one respondent expressed frustration that applications did not propose new or innovative ways of serving disconnected youth. Respondents from other agencies reported that the flexibilities pilots received “were very limited in scope and scale” or “didn’t really move the needle.” These pilots might have used the P3 authorization to link



youth to existing services or develop a new program, but they were not changing the way their systems served youth. Another respondent noted that Federal communication about P3 might have focused too much on waivers, leading local agencies to start the process of designing pilots with a narrow focus on waivers instead of starting with their programmatic goals and then identifying the flexibilities their vision would require.

At the same time, Federal partners reported that they denied some waivers out of concern that the waivers would reduce accountability. Staff from across the Federal agencies involved in Cohort 1 noted concern about waivers' potential to erode funding stream-specific accountability even when requested waivers might have fallen under P3's authority. For example, staff at one Federal agency described one pilot's application that raised the possibility of blending (that is, fully combining) funds. However, the agency's leadership insisted on braiding the funds (that is coordinating, but still tracking the funds separately) to preserve established reporting and accountability for each funding stream to ensure that the program funds were meeting their initial purpose. A respondent at another agency added that even if Federal partners trusted a particular locality with reduced reporting requirements, they had to consider the risk of a waiver becoming a precedent with wider application.

Thus, a tension existed between (1) Federal partners' desire for pilots to rethink the usual ways they served disconnected youth and change how their systems worked to meet the youths' needs and (2) the partners' hesitance to relax established accountability measures. As one respondent said when asked about Federal systems' ability to affect systems at the state and local levels, "How can you make it easier? How do you really make it easier without losing the ability to hold folks accountable?"

### **The provision of start-up funds led some pilots to view P3 as a typical grant program.**

A second factor that appeared to limit efforts to transform systems for serving disconnected youth was how applicants approached the available start-up funding. Although P3's authorizing legislation did not provide new funding for awarded pilots, as noted, three Federal partners identified other funding to make start-up grants to Cohort 1 pilots to incentivize participation in P3 and to offset the anticipated costs of additional partner collaboration, governance, evaluation, and data integration activities associated with P3. Cohort 1 pilots received up to a maximum of \$700,000 in start-up funding, a cap that was reduced to \$350,000 for Cohort 2 and \$250,000 for Cohort 3 (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2017).<sup>1</sup> The notice inviting applications for the 2018 and 2019 fiscal years did not offer start-up funding.

Federal and pilot respondents discussed the role start-up funding played in communities' interest in applying for P3. Respondents from four of the Federal agencies involved in Cohort 1 noted the role it played in supporting pilots as they developed their P3 partnership. However, at the same time, staff from a different set of four agencies explicitly mentioned their perception that most pilots' participation was motivated primarily by the available start-up funding, not the flexibility to combine funding streams or relax program requirements. Similarly, leadership in five Cohort 1 pilots reported that they applied for P3 as a funding opportunity to support a particular intervention in their communities. They did not report responding to Federal partners' interest in service innovations and system change, instead taking the

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<sup>1</sup> In September 2016, eight of the nine pilots received supplemental funds, which ranged from \$48,000 to \$175,000.

opportunity to access the start-up funds to support the provision of services to youth. Another three pilots' leadership reported that they viewed P3 as an opportunity to connect youth to existing employment, education, and other services.<sup>2</sup> One Federal agency noted that start-up funds were less of an incentive for applicants in Cohorts 2 and 3, given the smaller sums of start-up funding those cohorts could receive.

Pilots and Federal partners suggested approaches to encouraging communities to transform systems and services in future P3 cohorts. Leaders of three pilots suggested that a planning period would have helped them to develop the capacity to implement the federal vision for P3. Two pilots suggested that their initial applications would have benefited from more information from the Federal agencies, such as a list of waivers that P3 could approve.<sup>3</sup> Federal partners echoed the suggestion to provide more information during the application process. Federal staff at two agencies noted that they had addressed some cases of pilots not understanding available flexibilities by clarifying Federal rules to prospective pilots. One Federal agency described this “myth-busting” effort as one of P3’s most valuable activities.

Changing how available funding is communicated and rolled out to potential applicants might help Federal agencies participating in P3 provide additional technical assistance during the application process. Staff of six of the eight Federal agencies participating in P3 reported planning to increase the amount of technical assistance offered to future cohorts of prospective pilots before application deadlines to improve the quality of applications. For past cohorts, the need to maintain neutrality and transparency ahead of what was, due to the available start-up funding, a competitive grant process limited the tailored technical assistance offered before the application. One Federal respondent noted that without the funding, Federal agencies could be more responsive to applicants’ questions. As the 2019 notice inviting applications did not make start-up funds available to pilots, it will be possible to examine how the absence of start-up funds affected community response.

## Reflections and next steps

Four years after the authorization of P3, the Cohort 1 pilots approached the end of their grants’ performance period. They had collectively provided services to about 10,000 disconnected youth across the nine pilots. Although programs could have provided most of the interventions without the flexibilities provided by P3, pilots reported that their approved waivers did enable them to widen their eligibility requirements and to realize efficiencies in their administrative requirements.

Furthermore, at both the Federal and pilot levels, P3 expanded networks and built new or enhanced relationships. At the Federal level, agencies had prior experience working together but P3 required additional efforts to jointly review pilot applications, approve waiver requests, and monitor pilots’ activities. At the pilot level, especially in those pilots primarily providing case management interventions, partners developed new appreciation for each other’s work and, in some cases, developed new connections across the education and workforce domains.

At the same time, P3 did not appear to affect how most organizations—at the Federal or pilot level—structured their own work internally. At the Federal level, although realizing P3 required significant time and staff resources, P3 was a relatively small effort not likely to shift any one agency’s procedures. At the

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<sup>2</sup> One pilot experienced turnover in its leadership, so interviewers could not collect perspectives on the application process.

<sup>3</sup> A list of waivers approved for pilots awarded for fiscal years 2014 to 2016 was provided as part of the notice inviting applications published in January 2019 for funding in fiscal years 2018 and 2019.

pilot level, eight grantees and their partners initially used the grant mostly as an opportunity to provide services to disconnected youth, without focusing on the greater systems change goals intended by the P3 authority. The Cohort 1 pilots' focus on their interventions suggest the need for a more hands-on approach to developing future pilots if they are to result in greater systems change.

Future papers of the national P3 evaluation will discuss the implementation of Cohorts 2 and 3 pilots and the experiences of Cohort 1 pilots in sustaining P3-supported programs and systems change beyond the end of the pilot. In addition, a final report will reflect on the full scope of the national evaluation's work, including the work supporting and synthesizing the pilots' local evaluations and the collection of pilots' data.

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## **Appendix A:**

### **Key P3 terms defined**

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- **Blended and braided funds.** Both blending and braiding combine funds from two or more separate funding sources to support program services for a particular target population. When blended, however, funds of each source are not allocated or tracked by the individual source. Thus, the funding streams lose their individual identity and are pooled together to meet the population’s needs. With braiding, on the other hand, each funding stream retains its initial programmatic and reporting requirements, although some requirements might be waived (AGA Intergovernmental Partnership 2014).
  - **Consulting agency.** The Federal Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3) agency responsible for monitoring a P3 pilot on behalf of the Federal partners. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) assigned the consulting agency based on the discretionary program funds identified for the pilot. Designated consulting agencies for the nine Cohort 1 pilots included the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) (four pilots), the U.S. Department of Education (ED) (three pilots), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (one pilot), and the Corporation for National and Community Services (CNCS) (one pilot).
  - **Disconnected youth.** Youth who are not engaged in school or work, or who are at risk for becoming unengaged. P3 further defined these youth as ages 14 to 24 and from low-income households. They could be homeless, in foster care, or involved in the juvenile justice system.
  - **Federal partners.** The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 authorized five agencies—ED, HHS, DOL, CNCS, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services—to enter into P3 performance partnership agreements with state, local, or tribal governments. OMB convened the agencies and coordinated the government’s overall efforts.
  - **Lead agency.** The Federal agency responsible for managing the P3 performance partnership agreements, including coordinating performance agreement negotiations on behalf of and in partnership with all participating agencies, providing start-up grants, and overseeing start-up grants. ED serves as the lead agency for all 15 pilots announced to date.
  - **Lead pilot agency.** The partner agency tasked with operationalizing the P3 authority in the pilot. In seven of the nine Cohort 1 pilots, this agency was also the grantee of record. In two pilots, the grantee designated another partner to serve in this role. The lead pilot agency typically held decision-making authority over daily operations, policy, and programming, or convened partners.
  - **P3 authority.** The authority allowed awarded pilots, led by state, local, or tribal governments, with flexibility to test innovative strategies to improve the outcomes of their disconnected youth. Pilots proposed to pool together the funds from at least two federal discretionary programs, requesting waivers as needed to serve their youth efficiently.
  - **Participating agency.** The Federal agency or agencies that have approved waivers for a P3 pilot. Participating agencies support the lead agency (ED) and consulting agency as appropriate by providing feedback on performance reporting and guidance in addressing implementation issues.
  - **Performance partnerships.** A strategy used to provide grant recipients of Federal programs with flexibility to blend or braid across two or more of these programs and obtain waivers in exchange for improving outcomes for the intended population.
  - **Pilot partner agency.** The federal agencies encouraged P3 grantees to collaborate with youth-serving and other organizations, as appropriate. Pilots collaborated with many organizations, such as those providing workforce, education, justice, housing, library, and other services.

- **Start-up funds.** Discretionary funding allocated to P3 pilots in addition to the existing Federal programs the pilots involved, designed to help pilots cover the costs of implementing programmatic changes involved in P3 and of conducting local evaluations on their pilot's success.
- **Waivers.** Waivers from Federal discretionary programs provide state and local service providers with the flexibility to organize their programs and systems to better meet the needs of their populations. Providers submit requests for waivers from programmatic requirements to the appropriate Federal agency for approval.

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