

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-208](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 established a framework intended to increase federal agencies' use of performance information and evidence in decision making. In performance partnerships, agencies and grant recipients manage toward outcomes, which can help measure program performance and collect evidence about what works to achieve desired outcomes. OMB has encouraged the use of such partnerships by agencies that make federal grants.

GAO is required by the act to report on how its implementation is affecting federal agency performance management. This report identifies the key characteristics of 2 existing performance partnerships. It also provides an in-depth review of the design, implementation, and evaluation of 1 of the 2 initiatives—the disconnected youth pilots.

To address these objectives, GAO reviewed relevant laws, regulations, and documents and selected 8 illustrative examples from the 2 partnership initiatives (4 each), based on various criteria, such as the type and number of grants included and location. GAO also interviewed federal and non-federal officials involved in these partnerships.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OMB coordinate with federal agencies implementing the disconnected youth pilots to identify (1) agency resource contributions needed for the lifetime of the pilots and (2) criteria and related data for assessing scalability. OMB neither agreed nor disagreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-17-208](#). For more information, contact Allison B. Baw den at (202) 512-6806 or [bawdena@gao.gov](mailto:bawdena@gao.gov).

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## PERFORMANCE PARTNERSHIPS

### Agencies Need to Better Identify Resource Contributions to Sustain Disconnected Youth Pilot Programs and Data to Assess Pilot Results

## What GAO Found

Congress has authorized 2 federal performance partnership initiatives. The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Performance Partnership Grants (PPG) has been in place for 20 years and allows state agencies to consolidate funds from up to 19 environmental program grants into a single PPG. The other, Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (disconnected youth pilots), is a more recent initiative authorized in 2014 that allows funding from multiple programs across multiple agencies to be combined into pilot programs serving disconnected youth. GAO identified 4 key characteristics shared by the 2 federal performance partnership initiatives. Specifically:

- 1. Documented agreement.** Federal and non-federal partners identify goals, roles, and responsibilities. EPA and state agencies accomplish this through a PPG work plan. For each disconnected youth pilot, multiple federal agencies and non-federal partners, such as local government agencies and community-based organizations, use a performance partnership agreement.
- 2. Flexibility in using funding.** PPGs combine funding from 2 or more EPA program grants. The disconnected youth pilots can combine funding from multiple programs across the agencies involved in the initiative.
- 3. Additional flexibilities.** PPGs reduce administrative burden for state agencies, for example, by requiring only a single application for all grants in them. Disconnected youth pilots also provide non-federal partners flexibility to serve disconnected youth, including the ability to better tailor service interventions to their target populations.
- 4. Accountability for results.** In both initiatives, non-federal partners report to federal partners on progress towards mutually-established goals. Partners in the disconnected youth pilots are also assessing results through national and pilot-specific program evaluations.

GAO's in-depth review of the disconnected youth pilots found that agencies had taken actions consistent with leading practices for collaboration and pilot design, such as establishing a leadership model for collaboration. Although the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is responsible for coordinating agencies' overall efforts to implement the pilots, GAO identified additional actions that OMB should take in coordination with the agencies to help ensure future success.

**Resources.** Agencies have not fully identified the funding and staff resources each will need to contribute to sustain their efforts over the lifetime of the pilots. This is because agencies primarily have been focused on meeting near-term needs to support design and implementation. By fully identifying specific future financial and staff resource needs, agencies can better plan for their individual contributions to ensure they are sufficient to support the pilots.

**Scalability.** Agencies have not developed criteria to inform determinations about whether, how, and when to implement the flexibilities tested by the pilots in a broader context (this is known as scalability). Although the agencies identified a variety of data to collect, they have not identified criteria for assessing scalability. Officials involved in the pilots told GAO it was too early in pilot implementation to determine such criteria. By not identifying these criteria during the design of the pilots, they risk not collecting needed data during their implementation.