YARH
Youth At-Risk of Homelessness

In The SPOTLIGHT

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Forging Partnerships

The Children's Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services) is funding a multi-phase grant program to build the evidence base on what works to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults who have been involved in the child welfare system. This program is referred to as Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH). Eighteen organizations received funding for the first phase, a two year planning grant (2013 – 2015). Grantees used the planning period to conduct data analyses to help them understand their local population and develop a comprehensive service model to improve youth outcomes related to housing, education and training, social well-being, and permanent connections. Six of those organizations received funding to refine and test their comprehensive service models during the second phase, a three-year initial implementation grant (2015 – 2018).

This spotlight is part of a series that summarizes high-level themes from a process study of YARH grantees' activities and accomplishments during the two-year planning grant period. Additional details can be found in the full process study report. The information in this spotlight comes from grant applications, semi-annual progress reports submitted by YARH grantees and two-day site visits with each grantee in January – March 2015.

The assumption that addressing youth homelessness requires a community response is foundational to the YARH initiative. YARH Phase I resources prompted grantees to pursue a diverse array of partnerships in order to develop their comprehensive service models for youth transitioning out of foster care or homeless youth with child welfare experience. Grantees organized themselves into leadership teams, planning teams, and subcommittees. Teams included staff from a variety of types of organizations. Partnerships varied in terms of leadership strength, staff turnover, and communication, which affected how grantees worked with their partner agencies, accessed data, proposed service models, and completed other tasks.

All grantees formed a leadership team with leaders from their own organizations and individuals from partner organizations. Leadership teams consisted of thought leaders, people with years of experience working directly with or managing the services provided to the target populations. These teams provided guidance or structure to planning teams; they often consisted of the project manager, project director, and key advisors (Figure 1).

All grantees also convened a planning team that complemented the leadership team. Whereas leadership teams generally directed the work, planning teams drove the work. Planning teams ensured that all work was done in a timely way—whether by

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Figure 1. Number and types of partners proposed, across grantees

YARH grantee

Partner organization
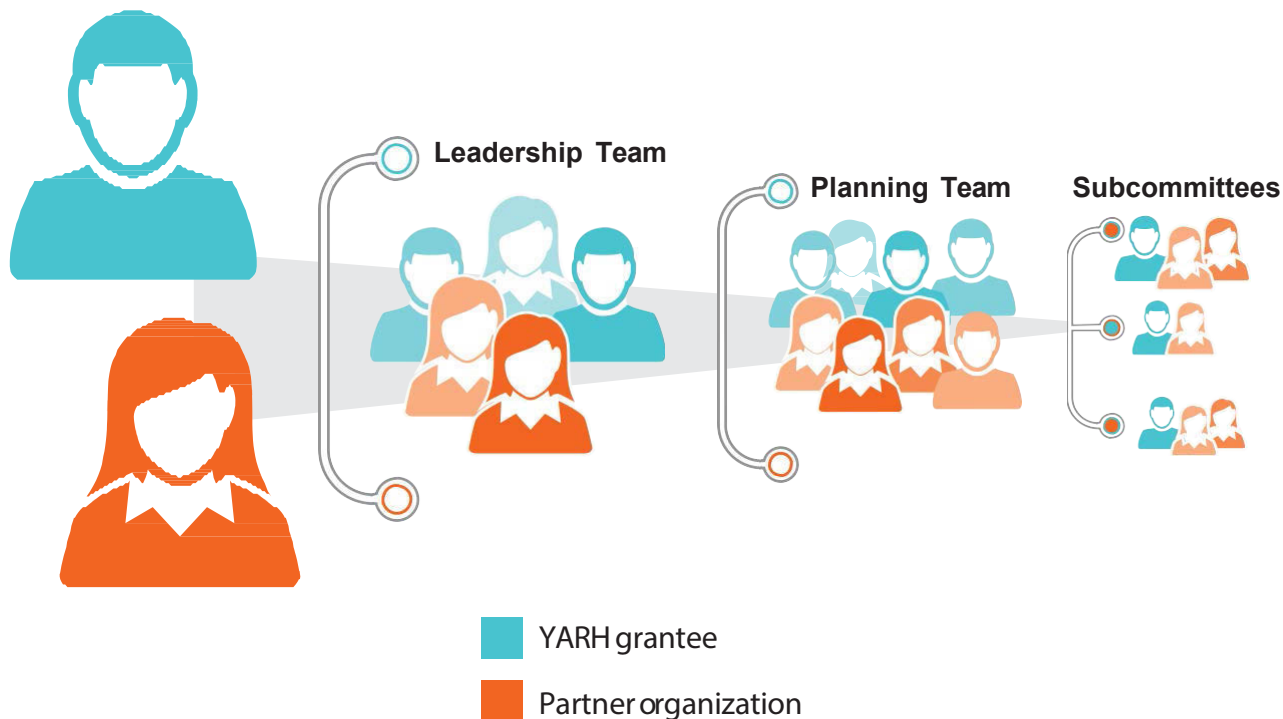
themselves, subcommittees, collaborators, or a combination of entities. Project managers and directors often staffed both leadership and planning teams, and took an active role in each. Subcommittees varied in their functions and organization.

Grantees had varying amounts of experience working with partners, although most had at least some experience. Not all YARH Phase I grantees had prior experience with collaborative planning. Ten grantees had an "established" collaboration history with their proposed partners, whereas eight grantees had an "emerging" collaboration history with little prior experience with their partners. The number of proposed partners varied within "established" and "emerging" collaborations. In all, 13 grantees proposed to work with five or more partners, whereas 5 grantees proposed fewer than five partners.

**Grantees recruited governmental, community-based, philanthropic, and business partners to join their planning teams.** Community-based, non-governmental partners were most common on the teams, followed by governmental partners, typi-

cally from state, county, or local governments. Some teams included philanthropic and business partners. Across grantees, on average grantees worked with 7 governmental partners, 11 community-based partners, and one philanthropic partner, for an average of 19 partners (Figure 2).

Partnerships unfolded with varied levels of leadership strength and consistency, buy-in and shared goals, responsiveness between partners, and youth engagement. Leadership and planning teams typically had consistent and well-defined leadership. Many interviewees, in a variety of roles, were clear on who was leading and driving the planning phase. However, a few grantees' planning was hampered by inconsistency and unpredictable changes in the leadership and planning teams. Grantees varied in the responsiveness of their leadership team to feedback from planning team partners. Several grantees stood out regarding how well partners and other staff felt leaders solicited and responded to suggestions. A few grantees had difficulty in engaging partners and obtaining buy-in from the start.

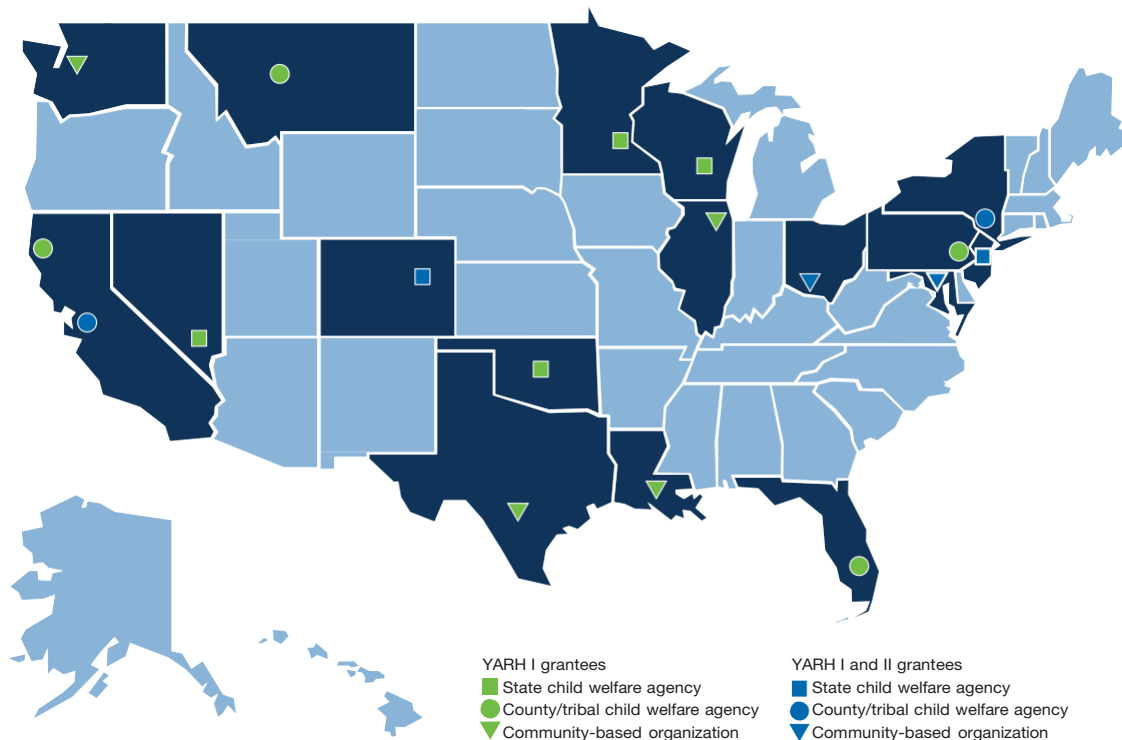**Figure 2.** Number and types of partners proposed, across grantees
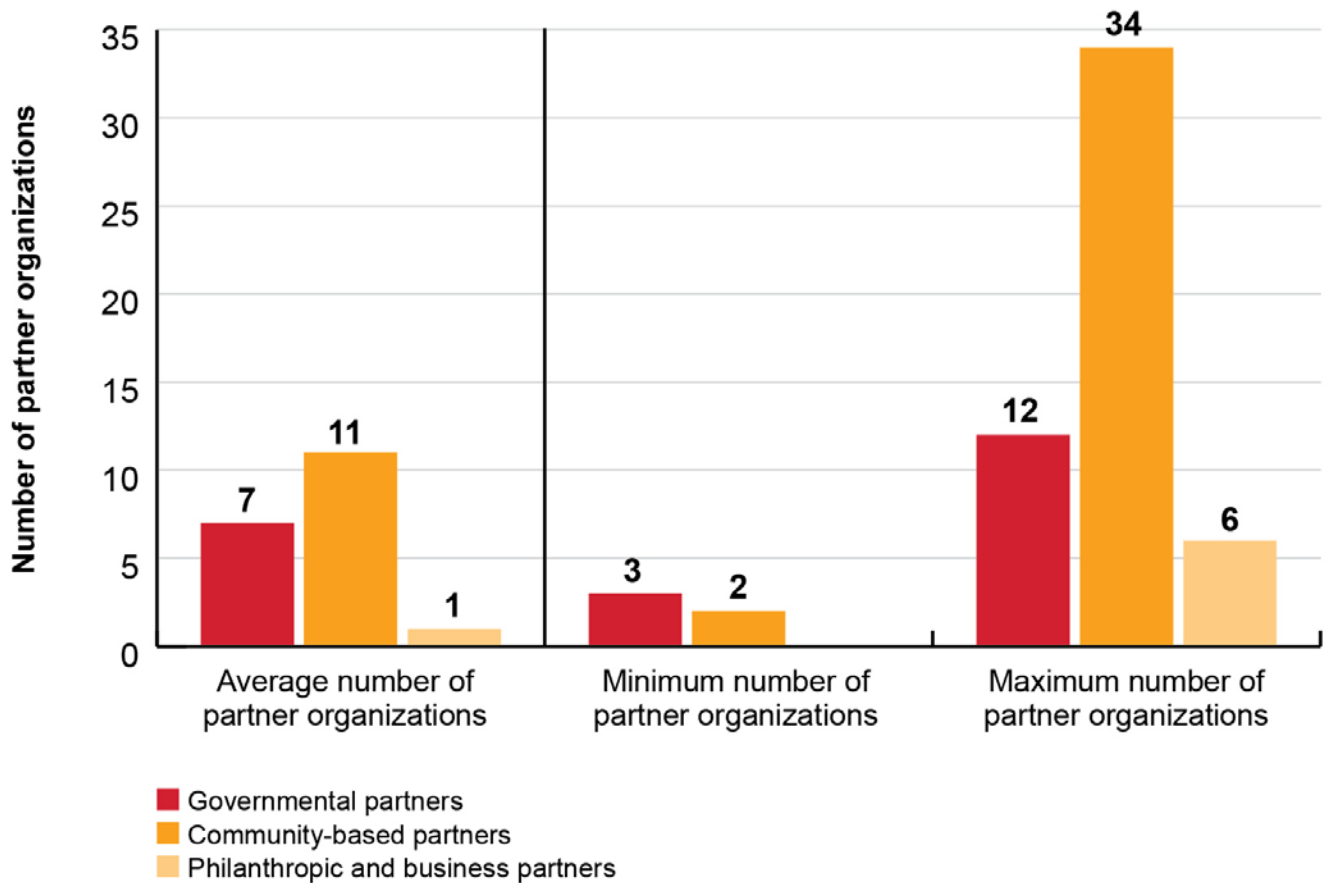
Source: Grantee profiles based on grant applications.

The type of lead agency often affected the staffing of planning teams, their access to data, and the types of services proposed. For a few grantees, all of which were non-profit organizations, the child welfare agency was present on the planning team but difficult to engage fully, which these grantees saw as detrimental to their planning. For example, child welfare agency staff often were dealing with crises which limited their ability to fully engage in the planning process. Two state-level grantees experienced hiring-related challenges as contracting at the state level was a difficult and lengthy process. Being a child welfare agency grantee also did not guarantee data access. One state-level grantee had immediate access to a longitudinal, comprehensive statewide data set that helped it understand indicators of need as well as services that the

target populations received. In contrast, one grantee led by a county child welfare agency had information on child placements but not on the services youth received while in care. For grantees with a child welfare agency as the lead, comprehensive service models were likely to include intensive case management, services to strengthen permanent connections, independent living services, and education services. For grantees not led exclusively by a child welfare agency, in addition to those services, comprehensive service models were also likely to include housing and comprehensive services (for example, health services, wrap-around services, or other individualized service arrays) as their proposed comprehensive service models.

The YARH grantees represent a diverse array of geographic areas and organizations. The Phase I grantees are located in 17 states across the nation. They include state child welfare agencies, county child welfare agencies, and community-based organizations. The Phase II grantees are located in 6 states and include state child welfare agencies, county child welfare agencies, and community-based organizations.

YARH I grantees
■ State child welfare agency
● County/tribal child welfare agency
▼ Community-based organization

YARH I and II grantees
■ State child welfare agency
● County/tribal child welfare agency
▼ Community-based organization

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