

Promoting Sustainability for Promise Neighborhood Grantees

Understanding Needs and Strategies

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Across the country, Promise Neighborhood grantees are leveraging significant federal and local investments to improve outcomes for students and families in underresourced communities. In fall 2019, FourPoint Education Partners undertook a needs assessment to understand the financial landscape of Promise Neighborhood grantees and how they are approaching sustainability—what strategies they are employing, what challenges they are facing, and what supports would help them continue their work beyond the federal grant term.

Promise Neighborhoods aim to ensure children and youth living in distressed communities have access to great schools and strong family and community supports that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career.

Promise Neighborhoods, a federal grant program administered by the US Department of Education, helps communities

- identify and increase the capacity of eligible organizations to achieve results for children and youth throughout an entire neighborhood;
- build a complete continuum of cradle-to-career solutions of educational programs and family and community supports with great schools at the center;
- integrate programs and break down agency “silos” so solutions are implemented effectively and efficiently across agencies;
- develop local systems and resources to sustain and expand proven, effective solutions across the broader region beyond the initial neighborhood; and

- learn about the overall impact of the Promise Neighborhoods program and about the relationship between strategies used in Promise Neighborhoods and student outcomes, including through a rigorous program evaluation.

Funding for the Promise Neighborhoods program also includes technical assistance for grantees (box 1).

BOX 1

Promise Neighborhood Technical Assistance

To support Promise Neighborhoods, the US Department of Education awarded the Urban Institute and its partners a technical assistance grant to support programming, data collection, community outreach, and sustainability to Promise Neighborhood implementation grantees across the country. Urban's technical assistance includes guidance on data collection and data systems to manage and produce measurable results, guidance on data security and confidentiality and data-sharing practices, a national leadership conference and leadership training, site visits, webinars, and virtual peer-learning communities. Urban also annually assesses each grantee's progress in achieving systems change and producing measurable results and presents that information to the Department of Education.

The Promise Neighborhoods program is designed around 10 results that each community aims to achieve, from children being ready for kindergarten to families and community members supporting learning in Promise Neighborhood schools. Grantees' progress in achieving these results is measured and reported annually using required Government Performance and Results Act indicators.¹ Promise Neighborhoods also recognizes that each community is unique and provides flexibility for how the results will be achieved.

As of fall 2019, five cohorts have received federal grants for up to five years to create or enhance Promise Neighborhoods in diverse communities. The federal Promise Neighborhoods program provides up to \$30 million over a five-year grant period to selected communities. A required funding match is intended to increase the financial resource base from which communities can draw to establish or strengthen services from birth through career. The first two Promise Neighborhood cohorts, established in 2011 and 2012, have cycled off their federal grants. The current cohorts, some in the early stages of work, are already considering ways to sustain the work beyond the federal investment.

This brief summarizes findings and recommendations from a needs assessment undertaken to help Promise Neighborhood grantees and their technical assistance partners understand how the sites are approaching sustainability. We also review the financial landscape of Promise Neighborhood grantees.

As with other discretionary grant programs, sustaining the work of Promise Neighborhoods after the grant funding ends is challenging. And the specific challenges vary based on local circumstances.

Also, implementing a successful cradle-to-career pipeline takes more than five years. Sustaining the work launched with the federal grants is essential to accomplishing the program's stated goals.

This review made clear that all grantees want to sustain the work. It also made clear that many grantees have embraced a broad and strategic view of sustainability. Rather than a singular focus on replacing grant funds, teams are looking for ways to build the capacity of organizations, partners, and schools to continue pursuing student success. They are also looking for ways to provide supports and services that are effective, all while building continued engagement and support for the work.

This assessment focuses on understanding the sustainability challenges and strategies being employed by the 15 Promise Neighborhood grantees currently receiving federal grant funding. We address the following questions:

1. How does grantee structure and history affect Promise Neighborhood sustainability?
2. What do initial budgets tell us about spending in Promise Neighborhoods? How does proposed spending vary across grantees? What implications might spending patterns have for sustainability?
3. When do grantees begin planning for sustainability? What formal or informal strategies have they enacted? What are their visions for how their Promise Neighborhoods will be sustained beyond the grant?
4. What local or organizational factors support sustainability?
5. What local or organizational factors impede sustainability?
6. What sustainability-focused resources or technical assistance supports would help grantees?

We conclude with recommendations for Promise Neighborhoods to strengthen their capacity to sustain and expand their work. The recommendations also indicate how technical assistance can help grantees implement the suggested strategies.

Methodology

This needs assessment aims to understand challenges and strategies employed by current Promise Neighborhood grantees as a prelude to technical assistance to promote sustainability. It also intends to identify lessons to benefit Promise Neighborhoods and the larger field of place-based, collective-impact initiatives. Though we attempted to speak with some former grantees (some of the current grantees are also former grantees), our primary interest is in understanding the needs and experiences of grantees in the 2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts and from earlier cohorts receiving extension grants.²

Data collection included the following:

- **Budget data review.** We examined approved budgets for grant and matching funds for 15 Promise Neighborhood grantees. These grantees included five that received their initial grants

starting in 2016, four that started in 2017, and three that started in 2018 (figure 1). Also included in the analysis are three Promise Neighborhoods that received grants from 2012 to 2017 and were subsequently awarded two-year “extension grants” in 2018 to deepen their work in those same neighborhoods.

- **Sustainability community of practice and other technical assistance resources.** As part of the technical assistance for Promise Neighborhoods, Urban is supporting a community of practice for grantees to receive expert and peer support on sustainability. We reviewed notes from this community of practice and other resources related to finance and sustainability, including relevant information grantees provided in their annual grant reports, to capture as much information as possible.
- **Technical assistance team and federal staff perceptions.** We interviewed Urban Institute staff working on the Promise Neighborhoods initiative; other Promise Neighborhood training and technical assistance partners, including the Center for the Study of Social Policy, FHI 360, and Clear Impact; and the Department of Education’s Promise Neighborhood program officers to gain their perspectives on sustainability challenges, approaches, and supports.
- **Grantee interviews.** To better understand sustainability challenges, we interviewed teams from six current Promise Neighborhood grantee organizations:
 - » Berea College (Perry, Knox, and Jackson, Clay, and Owsley Counties in Kentucky)
 - » University of Maryland, Baltimore (Baltimore)
 - » Drexel University (West Philadelphia)
 - » Center for Family Services (Camden, New Jersey)
 - » South Bay Community Services (Chula Vista and San Diego, California)
 - » Delta Health Alliance (Indianola and Deer Creek, Mississippi)

We also interviewed teams at the United Way of Bexar County (San Antonio, Texas), where the federal grant has ended. These grantees represent a broad group, and each had a unique perspective to contribute to the sustainability conversation.

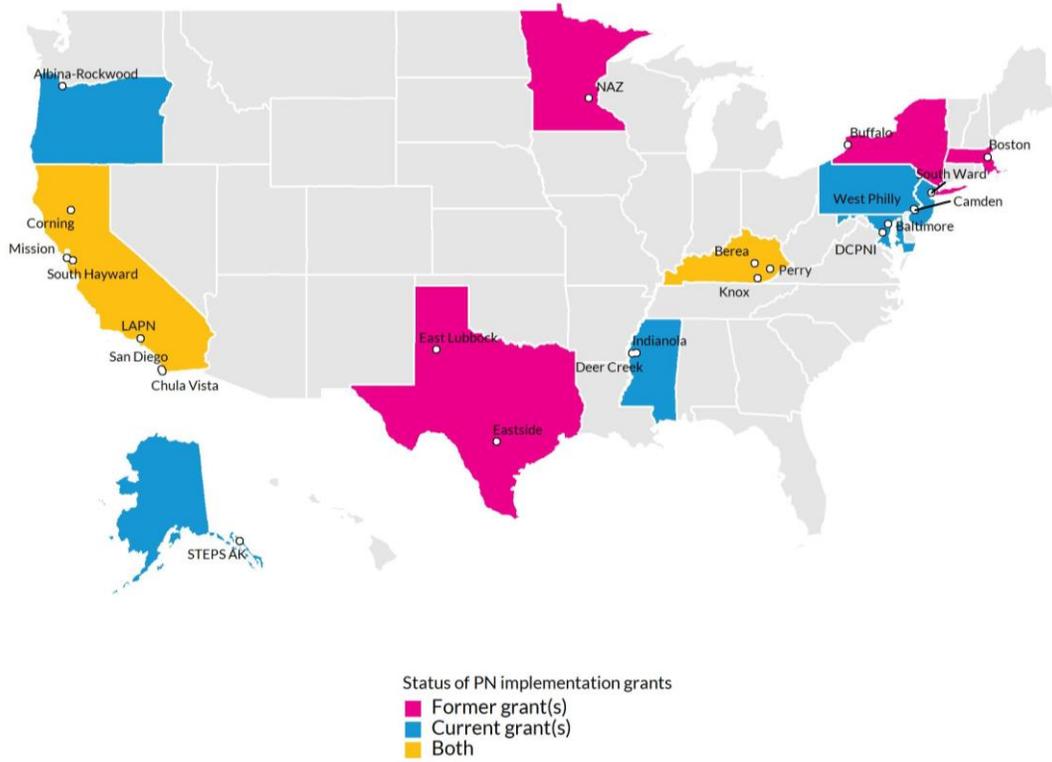
- **Grantee survey.** Building on information gathered during the interviews and data review, we conducted a short survey of all grantees to better understand similarities and differences related to organizational structure and funding and to gather additional data to allow the study team to identify successful practices and common challenges. Survey responses from 14 grantees (including 12 complete and 2 partial responses) informed the report.

These data form the basis for this assessment report.

About the Promise Neighborhood Grantees

Figure 1 shows a map of current Promise Neighborhood grantees. Grantees, though located across the country, are concentrated on the coasts.

FIGURE 1
Current Promise Neighborhood Grantees



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Source: Urban Institute map created from public information from the US Department of Education.

Note: DCPNI = DC Promise Neighborhood Initiative; LAPN = LA Promise Neighborhood in the Promise Zone; NAZ = Northside Achievement Zone; STEPS AK = Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska.

Table 1 provides basic information on each grantee.

TABLE 1

Characteristics of Grantees Included in the Review

| | Grant status | Backbone type | Children in footprint | Number of schools | Students in partner schools | Grant (\$millions) |
|---|--------------|---------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| FY 2018 grantee: South Bay Community Services San Diego Promise Neighborhood in suburban San Diego, CA | Repeat | NP | 6,853 | 8 | 6,370 | 29.91 |
| FY 2018 grantee: Self-Enhancement Inc. Albina-Rockwood Promise Neighborhood in urban Portland, OR | New | NP | 6,567 | 9 | 6,770 | 27.87 |
| FY 2018 grantee: University of Maryland, Baltimore Promise Heights in urban Baltimore, MD | New | IHE | 3,223 | 5 | 1,826 | 29.57 |
| FY 2017 grantee: California State University, East Bay Foundation Inc. South Hayward Promise Neighborhood in urban Hayward, CA | Repeat | IHE | 4,496 | 5 | 3,825 | 29.83 |
| FY 2017 grantee: South Ward Children's Alliance South Ward Children's Alliance Promise Neighborhood in urban Newark, NJ | New | NP | 4,820 | 8 | 1,681 | 29.62 |
| FY 2017 grantee: Berea College Perry Promise in rural Berea, KY | Repeat | IHE | 6,092 | 11 | 4,947 | 30.00 |
| FY 2017 grantee: Association of Alaska School Boards Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska in rural Juneau, AK | New | NP | 11,156 | 18 | 4,800 | 21.16 |
| FY 2016 grantee: Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians Freeman Promise Neighborhood/Corning Promise Neighborhood in rural Corning, CA | New | Tribe | 2,923 | 8 | 3,086 | 14.86 |
| FY 2016 grantee: Berea College Knox Promise Neighborhood in rural Berea, KY | Repeat | IHE | 7,484 | 25 | 7,818 | 30.00 |
| FY 2016 grantee: Center for Family Services Inc. Camden Promise Neighborhood in urban Camden, NJ | New | NP | 3,510 | 5 | 1,895 | 30.00 |

| | Grant status | Backbone type | Children in footprint | Number of schools | Students in partner schools | Grant (\$millions) |
|---|--------------|---------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| FY 2016 grantee: Delta Health Alliance Inc. Deer Creek Promise Neighborhood in rural Indianola, MS | Repeat | NP | 2,476 | 5 | 1,471 | 29.99 |
| FY 2016 grantee: Drexel University West Philadelphia Promise Neighborhood in urban Philadelphia, PA | New | IHE | 7,646 | 7 | 2,778 | 29.99 |
| FY 2012 ^a grantee: Delta Health Alliance Inc. Indianola Promise Community in rural Indianola, MS | N/A | IHE | 3,012 | 4 | 2,044 | 29.99 |
| FY 2012 ^a grantee: South Bay Community Services Chula Vista Promise Neighborhood in urban Chula Vista, CA | N/A | NP | 1,848 | 30 | 6,063 | 27.82 |
| FY 2012 ^a grantee: Mission Economic Development Agency Mission Promise Neighborhood in urban San Francisco, CA | N/A | NP | 7,190 | 9 | 1,205 | 30.00 |
| Average | | | 5,286 | 10 | 3,772 | |

Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications.

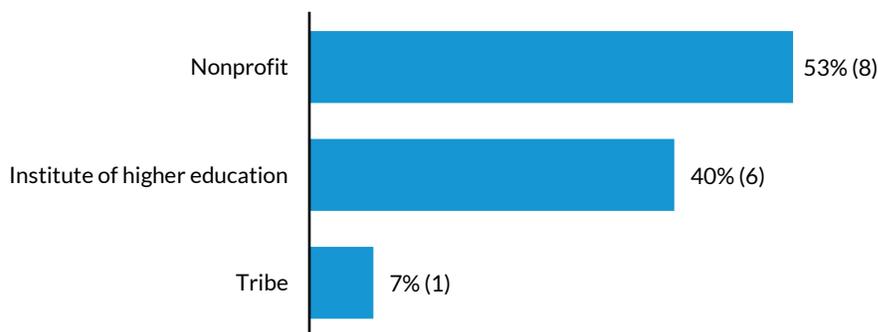
Note: FY = fiscal year; IHE = institute of higher education; NP = nonprofit.

^a Information in this table represents grants to these Promise Neighborhoods for the 2012–17 period. These three Promise Neighborhoods are included in the analysis because they received smaller two-year extension grants starting in 2018.

Key facts include the following:

- Five of the 15 grantees are repeat grantees that received funding in the past to support different Promise Neighborhoods in their local communities.
- Eight of the grantee agencies are nonprofit organizations, six are institutions of higher education, and one is a tribe (figure 2).
- Eight of the neighborhoods are classified as urban, six are classified as rural, and one is classified as suburban (figure 3).
- The average number of children from birth to age 18 who live in the Promise Neighborhood footprint is 5,300, ranging from a high of 11,000 (Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska) to a low of 1,800 (San Diego).
- The average number of students who attend Promise Neighborhood target schools is 3,800, ranging from a high of 7,800 (Knox) to a low of 1,200 (Mission). Figure 4 shows the distribution of grantees by the number of children in the footprint.
- Promise Neighborhoods partner with an average of 10 schools.

FIGURE 2
Grantees by Backbone Type

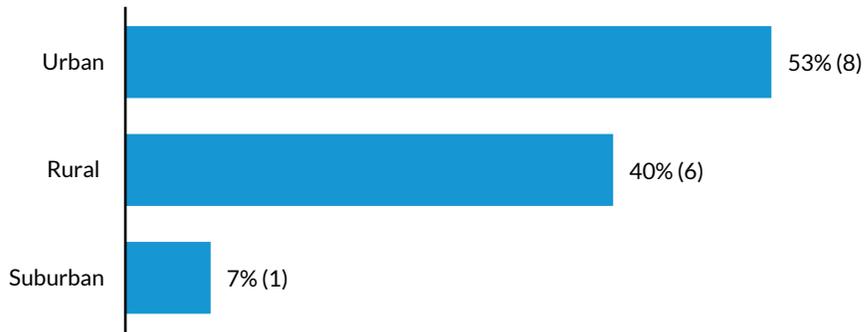


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Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications.

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate number of grantees.

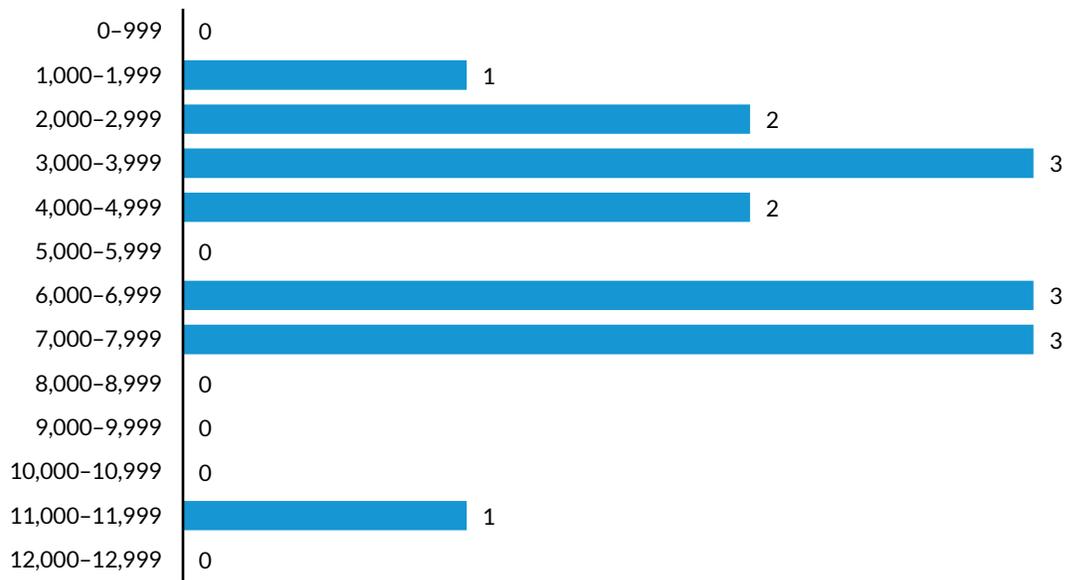
FIGURE 3
Grantees by Location Type



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Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications.
 Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate number of grantees.

FIGURE 4
Number of Grantees, by Children in Footprint



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Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications.

Findings

How Does Grantee Structure and History Affect Promise Neighborhood Sustainability?

When it comes to sustainability—as with the services each Promise Neighborhood undertakes to support its community—context matters. Each grantee is as unique as the community in which it works. **Grantees’ organization type, areas of expertise, history, and relationships with(in) their communities influence the Promise Neighborhood structure and strategy and will also contribute to how the Promise Neighborhood is sustained over time.**

All grantees served low-income children and families before involvement with Promise Neighborhoods, but interviews with grantees indicated that, for some, the grants provided an opportunity to expand and deepen their services. Specifically mentioned was a focus on the full pipeline of services from birth through college. Here, several reported more confidence in being able to sustain the work that was better established before the grant, whether it was early learning and maternal care in Baltimore, the provision of social services in Camden and San Diego, or a full-service community school model supported by Knox. The second difference grantees noted was the grant’s clear focus on education. Deep partnerships with schools were new to some grantees, who have come to realize the importance of leadership stability at the district and school levels.

Most grantees are either institutes of higher education or nonprofit organizations, but even within those two categories, there is much variation in the structure and focus of the backbone organizations. For instance, the office or department where the Promise Neighborhood is located within the various institutes of higher education—whether in the executive offices of the university or in various academic or support departments (e.g., social work or community engagement)—presents different opportunities and access to leaders, staff, expertise, and other resources that come into play during implementation and sustainability planning. Likewise, nonprofit organizations vary in their expertise, connections, and history in the community, all of which will affect their approaches to sustainability.

All grantees are working to advance similar outcomes and create a pipeline of success for children and families, but their programming and strategies differ based on local needs and organizations’ areas of expertise. Some provide wraparound social and mental health services, while others emphasize professional development for school staff. The services grantees support will also affect how the work is sustained, including which sources grantees might tap for future funding.

Grantees vary in how they accomplish their work. All grantees coordinate the work of many partners, but some use the grant to hire additional staff, while others contract with partner nonprofits to provide services. These choices have implications for sustainability.

What Do Initial Budgets Tell Us About Spending in Promise Neighborhoods? How Does Proposed Spending Vary across Grantees? What Implications Might Spending Patterns Have for Sustainability?

The Promise Neighborhoods program allowed for requests of up to \$30 million over five years, and each current cohort was awarded five years of funding.

Most Promise Neighborhood grants were at or just below the maximum of \$30 million. Of the 15 grantees we analyzed, the average total grant size is \$28 million, and all but two of the grants are \$27.8 million or greater. The two smaller grants were the \$21 million awarded to Corning and the \$14 million awarded in southeast Alaska. Figure 5 shows funding and grantee matches.

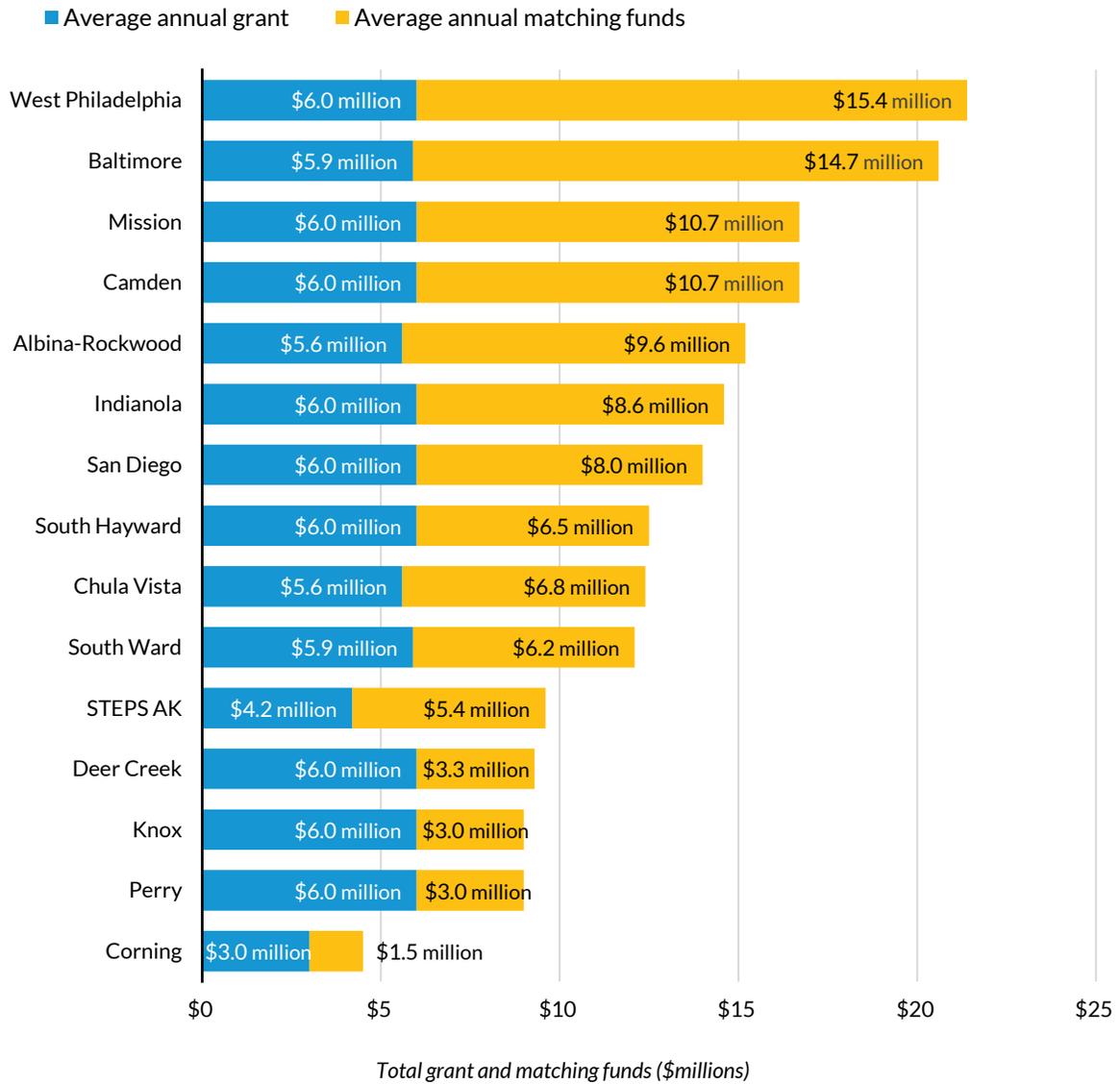
Grantees tended to split their request into relatively equal yearly amounts, with an average grant of \$5.6 million a year. Grant allotments tended to increase slightly over the grant period, with average grants increasing from \$5.54 million in the first year to \$5.65 million by the fifth year, which represents a 2 percent increase over the period. These high-level budgets do not provide a clear picture of whether or how grantees shift resources to promote sustainability, but what is clear is that each grantee will face a significant funding cliff at the end of the grant period.

Matching funds vary widely. Grantees were required to identify matching funds or in-kind contributions representing 100 percent of their federal funds request, with the exception of grantees applying under federal absolute priorities 2 or 3. These priorities targeted neighborhoods in rural areas (priority 2) and neighborhoods serving tribal communities (priority 3) and allowed for a 50 percent match of the federal grant. Across all grantees, matching funds represent an average of \$38 million over the course of the grant, or 137 percent of total federal funds. For urban and suburban grantees, on average, matching funds represent 164 percent of their total federal grant, with each grantee meeting or exceeding the federal requirement. Rural and tribal grantees show an average match of 80 percent, also above the federal requirement.

That grantees could gain the commitment of significant resources through the match provides a head start on sustainability. First, other local organizations that have an economic stake in the work will be important anchors after the federal grant ends. Survey data support this finding. Twenty-three percent of respondents believe most matching partners will continue their contributions, and 9 percent believe some partners will increase their contributions. Another 27 percent thought some matching partners would continue to support the work but at a lower level (figure 6). Most grantees believe they will be able to rely on current matching partners after the federal grant ends, but almost one-third voiced reservations about some matching partners' ability to continue their support.

FIGURE 5

Average Annual Grants and Matching Funds



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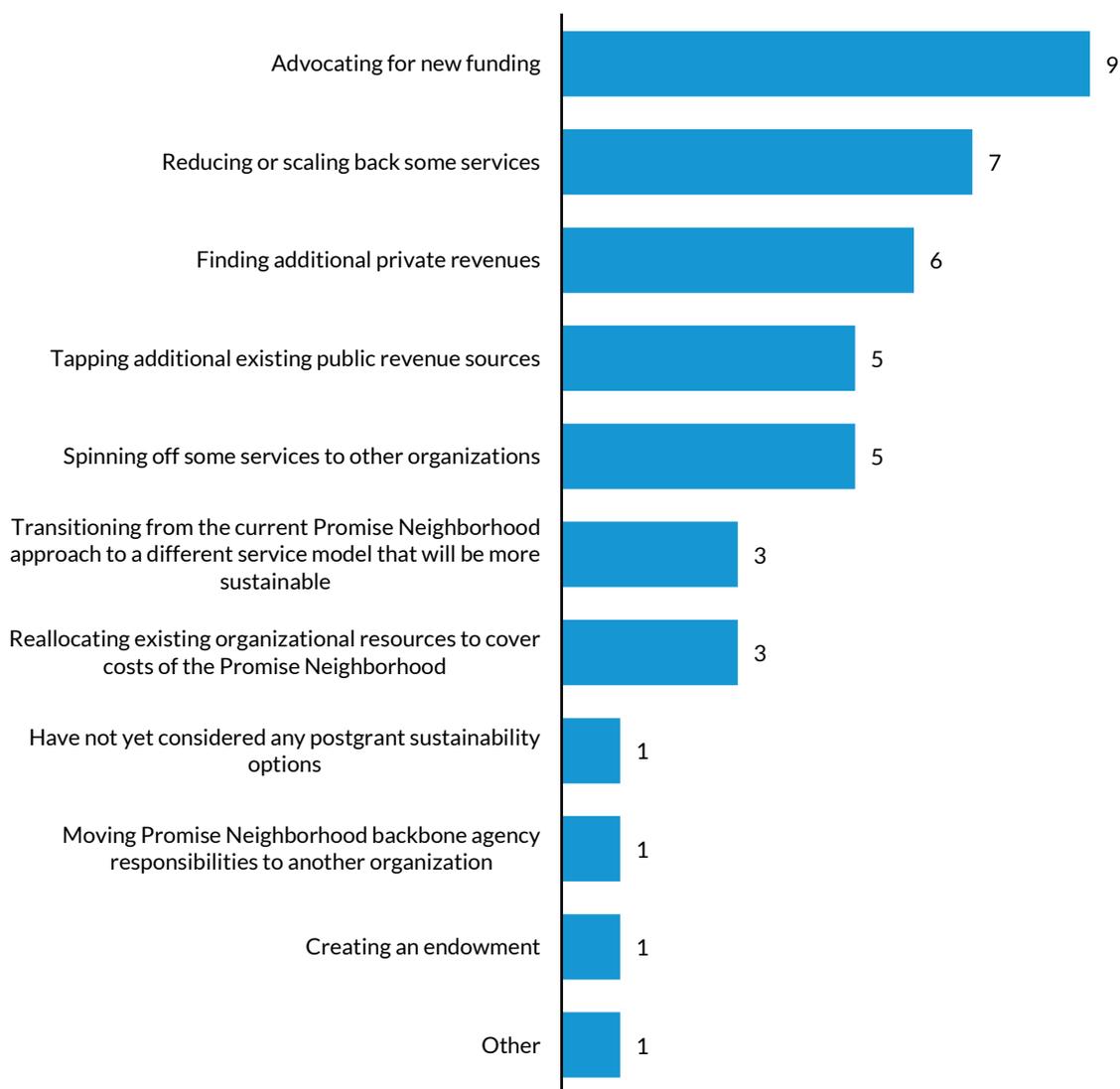
Sources: Promise Neighborhood grant applications. Matching fund data for STEPS AK are from its February 2019 ad hoc report.

Note: STEPS AK = Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska.

FIGURE 6

Grantee Survey Question

What role do you expect partners who contributed matching funds to play in sustaining the work?



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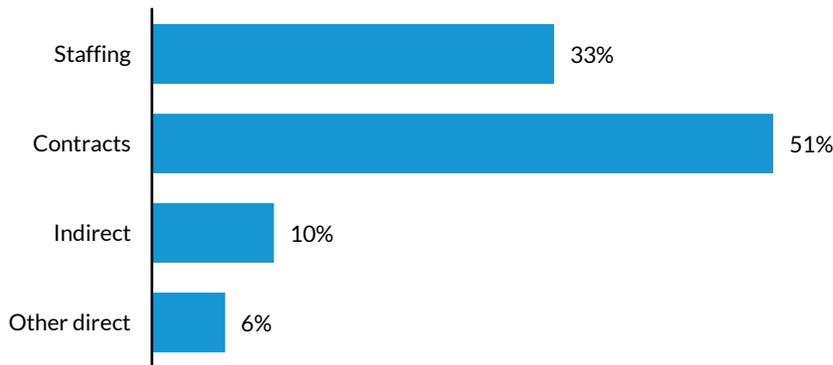
Source: Grantee survey.

On average, half of grant funding across Promise Neighborhoods goes to contracted services, and slightly more than one-third is for staff, but many grantees spend most of their funding on contracts or staffing.

Budgets were disaggregated into four main categories: staffing (salaries plus fringe benefits), contracts, other direct costs, and indirect costs (figure 7).

FIGURE 7

Average Grant Spending by Budget Category



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Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications.

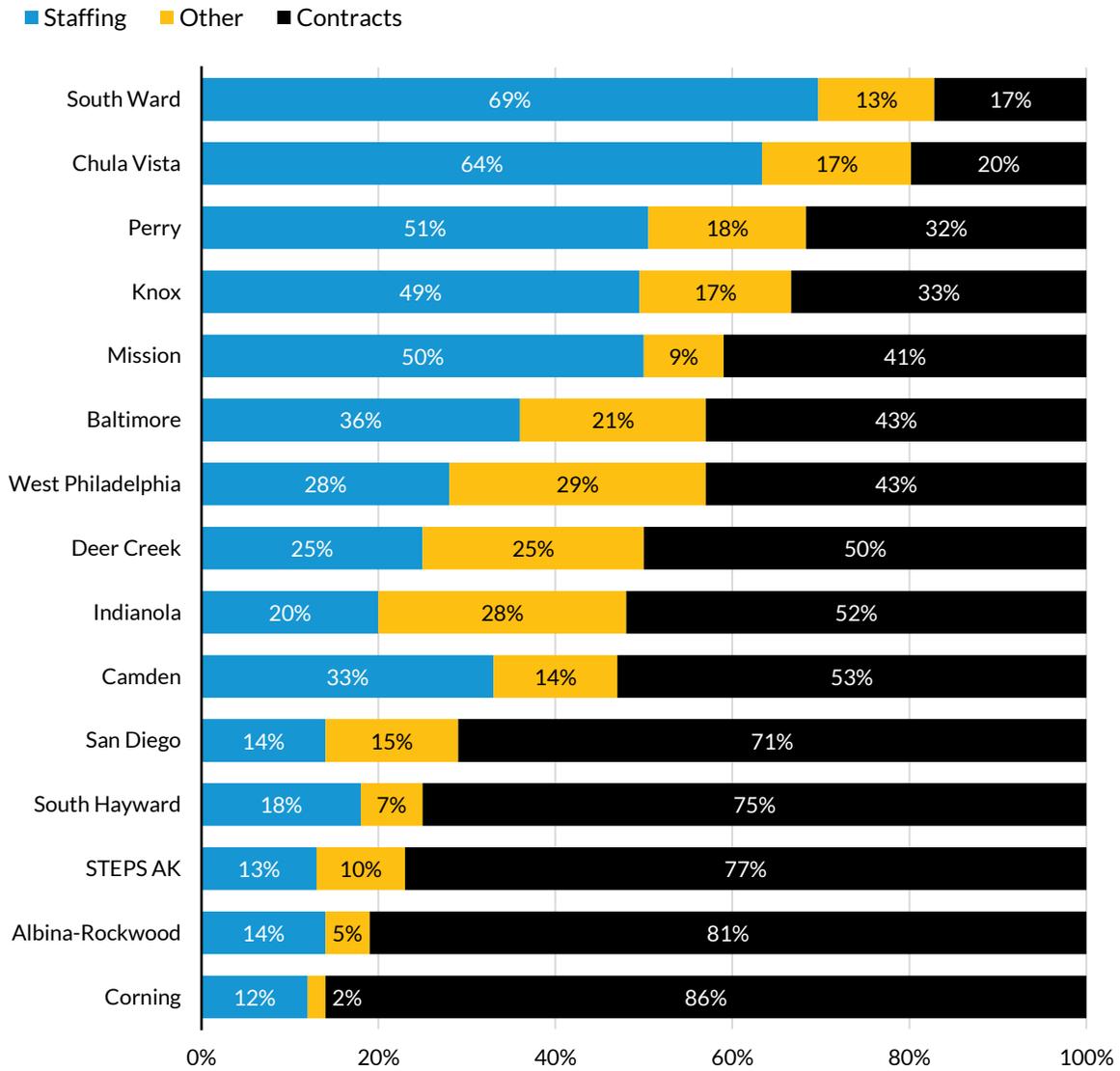
Notes: n = 15 grantees. Average annual grant budget per grantee = \$5,603,319.

These averages mask the reality that many grantees spend most of their funding on either contracts or staffing. The five Promise Neighborhoods on the bottom of figure 8 spend more than 70 percent of their budgets on contracts and less than 20 percent on salaries. The five Promise Neighborhoods on the top spend more than 50 percent of their budgets on salaries and fringe benefits to support additional employees.

Whether a grantee is an institute of higher education or a nonprofit does not necessarily affect whether it spends more on contracts or salaries (figure 9). Grouping the Promise Neighborhoods by backbone organization shows that both types have variable spending patterns on salaries versus contracts. Finally, Corning, a tribal grantee, spends more than 80 percent of its budget on contracts, the highest of all the grantees.

Figure 10 compares spending by rural and urban grantees. It shows a lot of variability across the grantees and that rural Promise Neighborhoods rely on contracts slightly more than urban communities. Two-thirds of the rural Promise Neighborhoods spend at least half their grants on contracts, compared with 44 percent of urban communities. This finding is somewhat unexpected. During interviews, rural grantees said they often struggled to find partners with the capacity to carry out the work and instead chose to build their internal staff. This would lead one to believe that rural Promise Neighborhoods would spend less on contracting rather than more. Additional budget analyses, beyond the scope of this assessment, are needed to better understand these differences, why they arise, and what implications there may be for sustainability.

FIGURE 8
Promise Neighborhood Grant Distribution by Budget Category



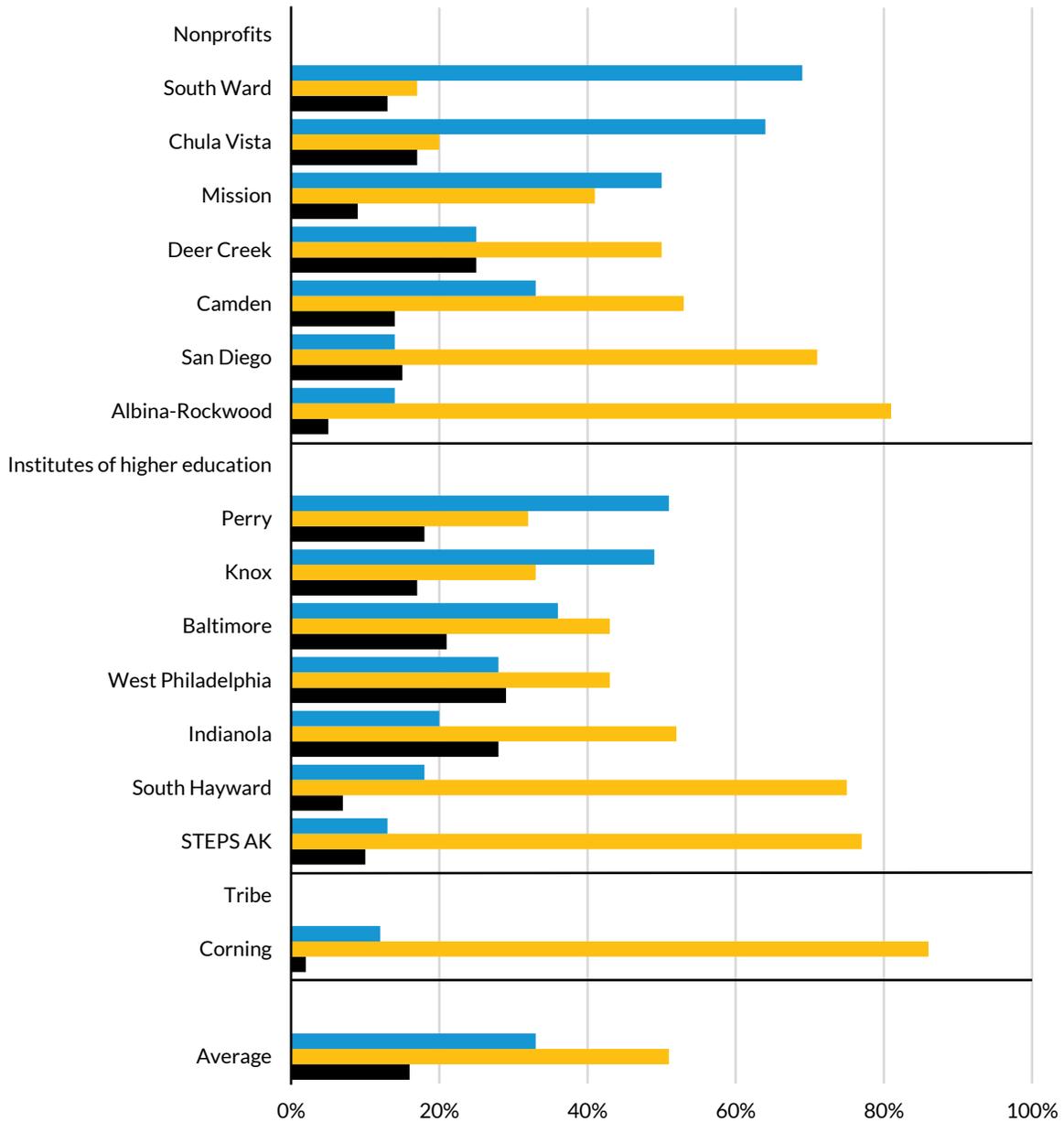
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Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications.

Note: STEPS AK = Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska.

FIGURE 9
Promise Neighborhood Grant Distribution by Budget Category
Grantee organization type

■ Staffing ■ Contracts ■ Other



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Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications.

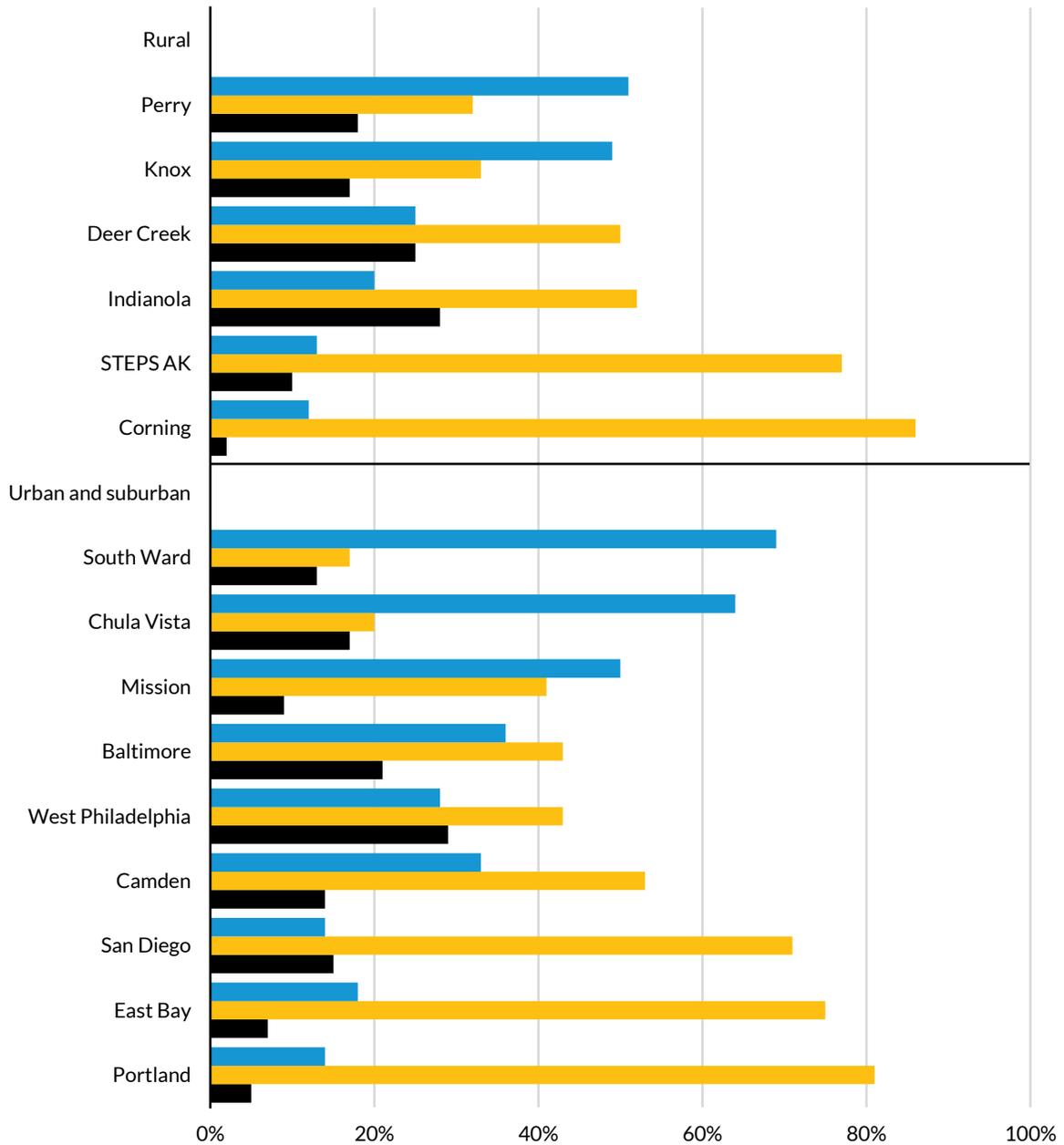
Note: STEPS AK = Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska.

FIGURE 10

Promise Neighborhood Grant Distribution by Budget Category

Urban and suburban versus rural

■ Staffing ■ Contracts ■ Other



Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications.

Note: STEPS AK = Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska.

The choice to invest in contracts versus staff may have implications for sustainability. Some grantees are building the capacity of multiple local organizations (through contracts) to carry on the work and to work together once the federal grant expires. Other grantees are building the capacity of the backbone organization because local capacity is not readily available. As grantees plan for sustainability, their approach to building the capacities of partners or the backbone organization will need to align with strategies.

Promise Neighborhoods vary substantially in the number of children ages 18 and younger living in their footprints and attending partner schools, and that translates into a large variation in available grant dollars per child. One way to understand and compare resources available to the various grantees is by creating a “per child” measure. There are two ways to evaluate per child funding in Promise Neighborhoods: either by number of children 18 and younger in the footprint or by number of students in partner schools. But neither funding per child in the neighborhood footprint nor funding per student in partner schools provides an exact measure. This is true for several reasons. First, Promise Neighborhoods are not likely to serve every child in the footprint. Some may not need or want services, and others may be attending schools outside the neighborhood, where services are not offered. Also, there is not a one-to-one alignment with the number of students living in Promise Neighborhoods and students in partner schools. Partner schools often serve a larger geography than the Promise Neighborhood, and some are charter or magnet schools drawing students from across a region. Even with these complications, a per child or per student estimate still provides a valuable yardstick for understanding the concentration of resources available to various communities.

Looking first at **children in the footprint**, the variation in funding across grantees is clear. Grant funding ranges from \$380 to \$3,000 per child, an eightfold difference from the low end to the high end (table 2). In all but two cases, the grant amounts are similar, indicating the primary reason for the variation is the number of children living within the Promise Neighborhood boundaries. When matching funds are layered on top of the federal grant, the variation across grantees is further magnified. Here, the amounts range from \$900 to \$6,700 per child.

TABLE 2
Average Annual Funding per Child in the Neighborhood Footprint

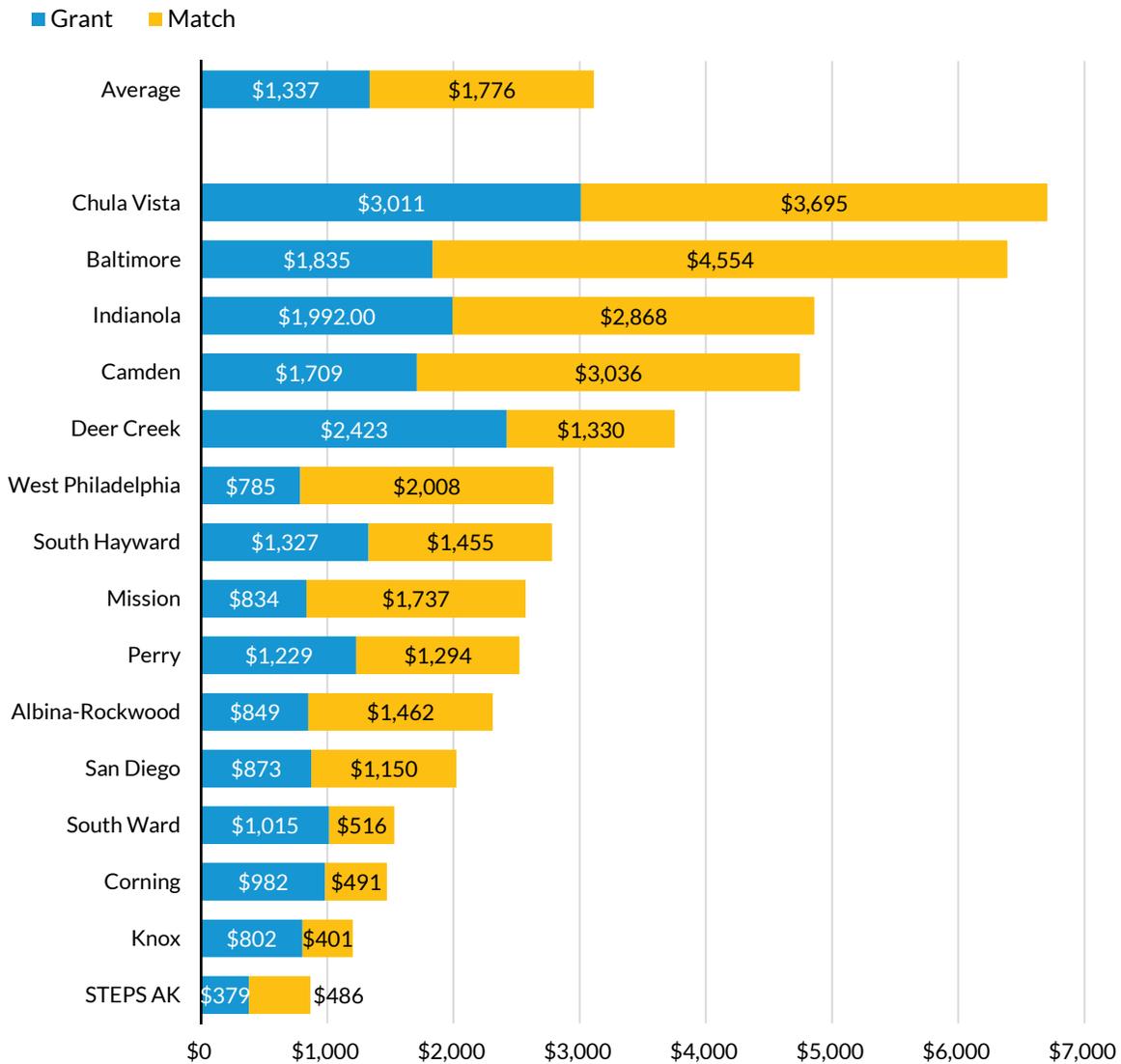
| | Grant dollars per child | Grant + match dollars per child |
|---------|--------------------------------|--|
| Lowest | \$380 | \$900 |
| Highest | \$3,000 | \$6,700 |
| Average | \$1,300 | \$3,100 |

Sources: Promise Neighborhood grant applications, FourPoint calculations. Matching fund data for STEPS AK are from its February 2019 ad hoc report.

Figure 11 shows a breakdown of grantee spending per child in the footprint and makes clear the wide variation in resources.

FIGURE 11

Average Annual Grant + Match per Child in the Neighborhood Footprint



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Sources: Promise Neighborhood grant applications, FourPoint calculations. Matching fund data for STEPS AK are from its February 2019 ad hoc report.

Note: STEPS AK = Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska.

Funding per student enrolled in partner schools is higher than funding per child because, in most cases, there are more children living in each neighborhood than students attending partner schools (table 3). Grant funding per student ranges from \$770 to almost \$5,000 and averages \$2,100. And like the per child measure, adding matching funds introduces substantial additional variation. Figure 12 shows funding per student enrolled in partner schools for each Promise Neighborhood.

TABLE 3

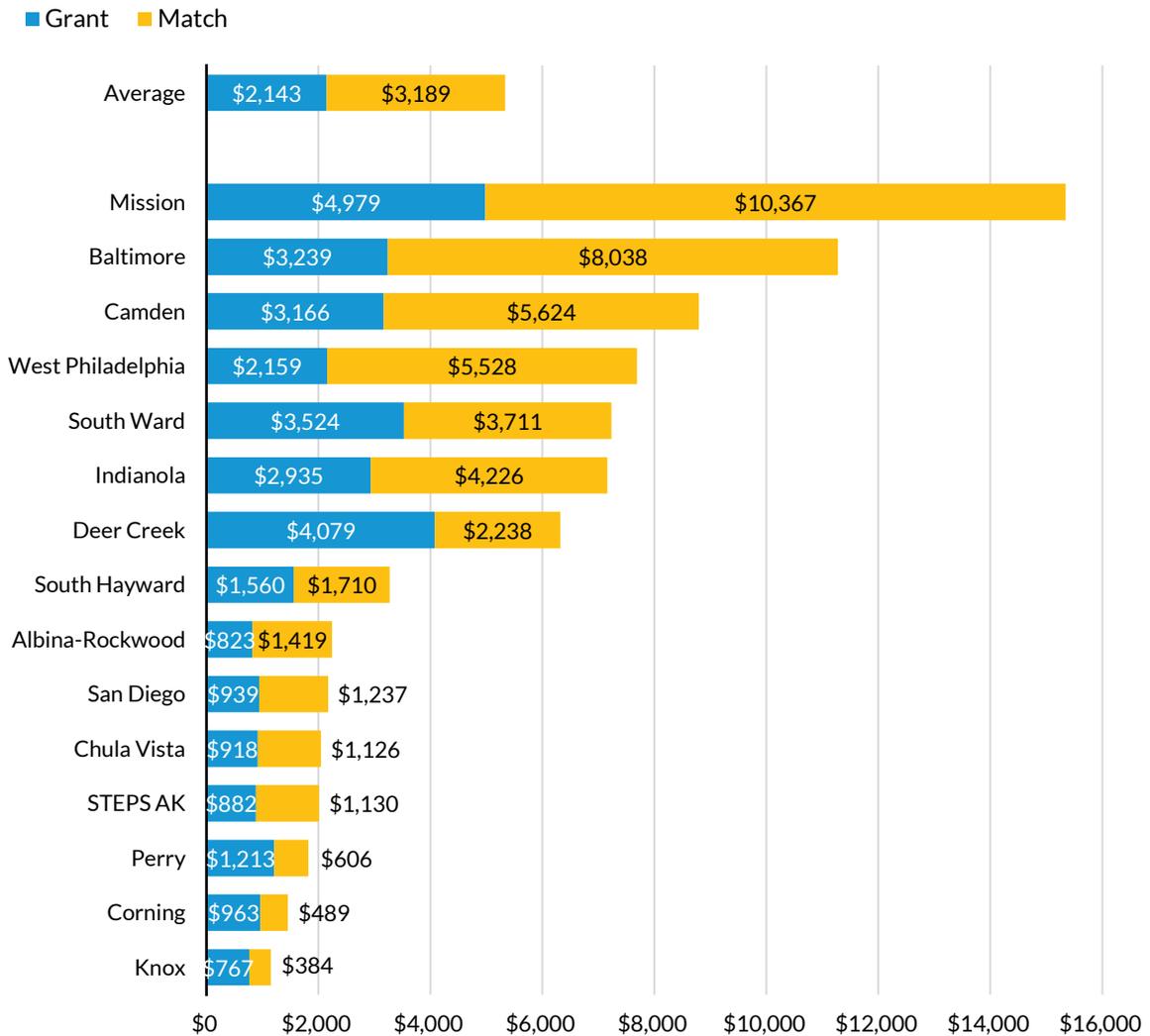
Funding per Student Enrolled in Partner Schools

| | Grant dollars per student | Grant + match dollars per student |
|---------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Lowest | \$770 | \$1,200 |
| Highest | \$4,980 | \$15,300 |
| Average | \$2,100 | \$5,300 |

Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications, FourPoint calculations.

FIGURE 12

Average Annual Grant + Match per Student Enrolled in Partner Schools



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Sources: Promise Neighborhood grant applications, FourPoint calculations. Matching fund data for STEPS AK are from its February 2019 ad hoc report.

Note: STEPS AK = Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska.

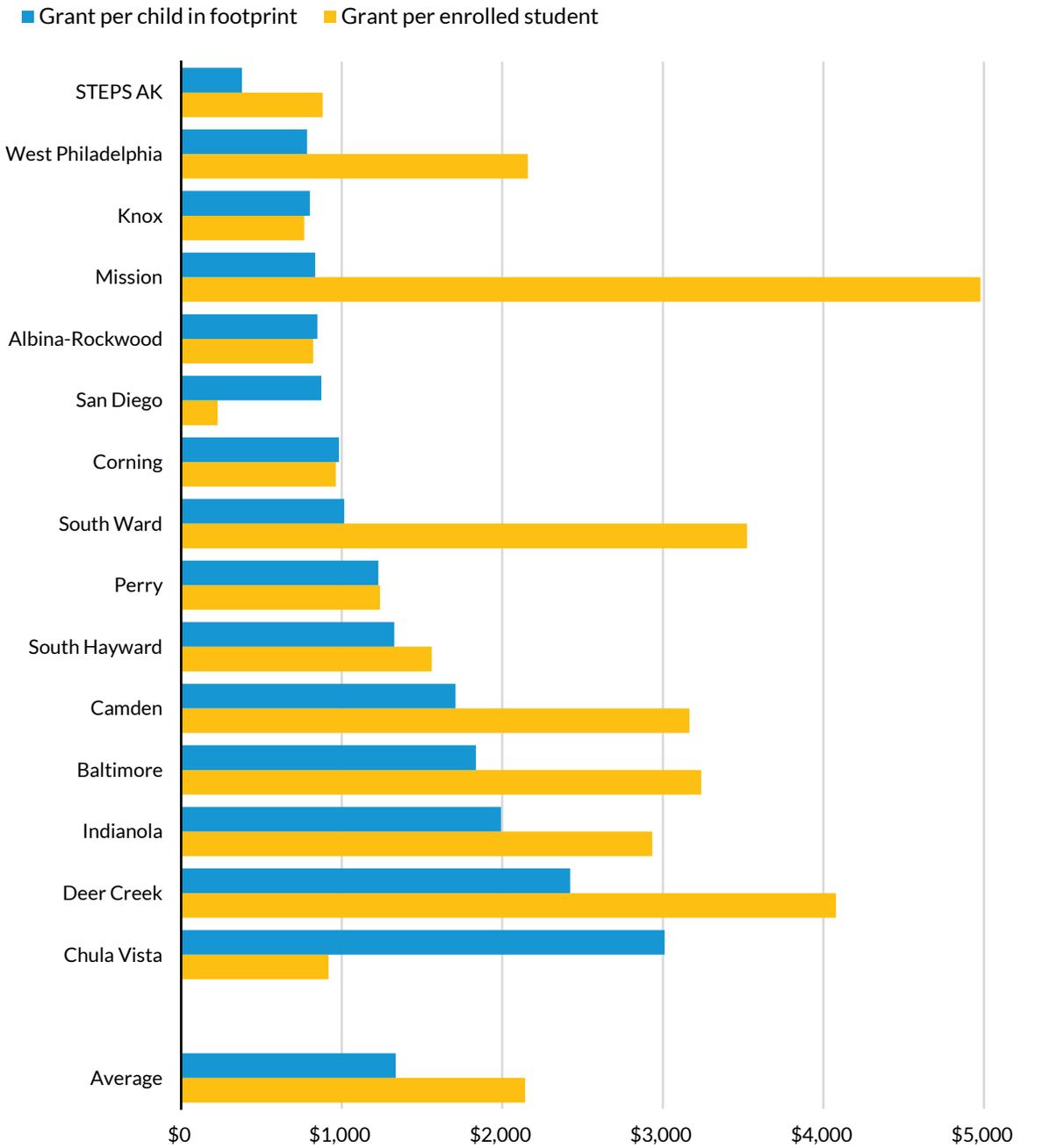
Interestingly, grant-per-student amounts do not appear to be highly correlated with grant-per-child amounts (figure 13). Of the Promise Neighborhoods that rank in the top three for spending per student, only one also falls in the top three for spending per child in the footprint. As described above, this is because the students attending neighborhood schools are not simply a subset of the children living in the neighborhood. Interesting to note is that the San Diego and Chula Vista Promise Neighborhoods, the only grantees where funding per child in the footprint is greater than funding per student, are both managed by South Bay Community Services (SBCS). Additional information is needed to assess whether this is a deliberate strategy or a result of the population and school structures in those neighborhoods.

Figure 14 shows one more measure of resource concentration: total spending per partner school. Here, too, there is significant variation. Annual funding per partner school ranges from \$200,000 annually in Chula Vista, which partners with 30 schools, to \$1.5 million per school in Indianola, which partners with 4 schools.

The per student and per school amounts have clear implications for sustainability. For schools where resources are more concentrated (higher per school and per student amounts), schools will face a steeper funding decline when the grant ends. And over the long run, it will be interesting to see whether and how results vary based on the concentration of resources (per student amounts) in various neighborhoods.

FIGURE 13

Average Annual Grant per Child in Footprint and Average Annual Grant per Enrolled Student



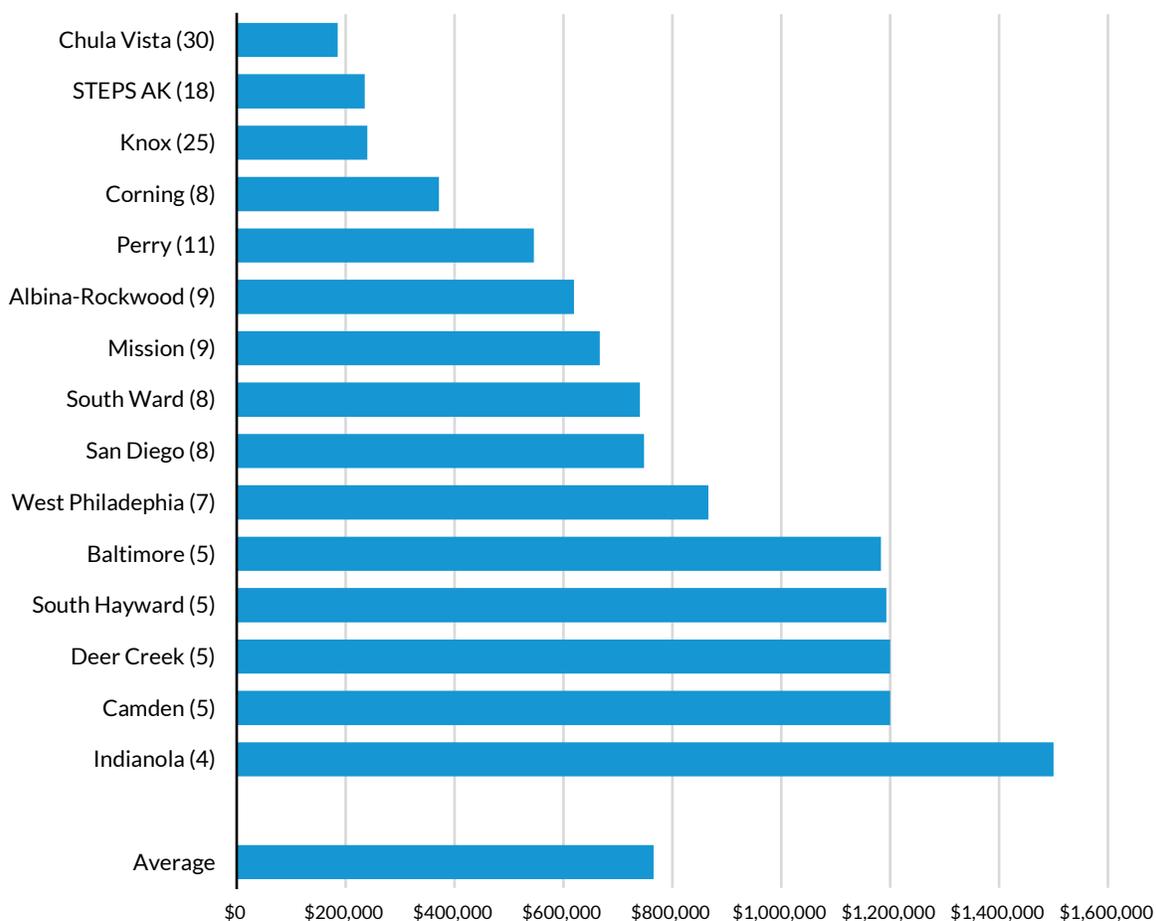
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Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications, FourPoint calculations.

Note: STEPS AK = Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska.

FIGURE 14

Average Annual Grant per School



Source: Promise Neighborhood grant applications, FourPoint calculations.

Notes: STEPS AK = Supporting Transitions and Educational Promise in Southeast Alaska. Numbers in parentheses represent the number of schools within the Promise Neighborhood.

When Do Grantees Begin Planning for Sustainability? What Formal or Informal Strategies Have They Enacted? What Are Their Visions for How Their Promise Neighborhoods Will Be Sustained beyond the Grant?

Grantees are at different stages of postgrant planning and are approaching long-term sustainability from multiple angles. Grantees nearer to the end of their grant are paying close attention to sustainability and balancing an urgent interest in continuing their Promise Neighborhood strategies with the realities of the community funding and education landscapes.

Grantees feel confident about being able to continue the work of Promise Neighborhoods after the grant. About half indicated they expect the work to continue at the same level, and the other half thought it would continue but with reduced support.

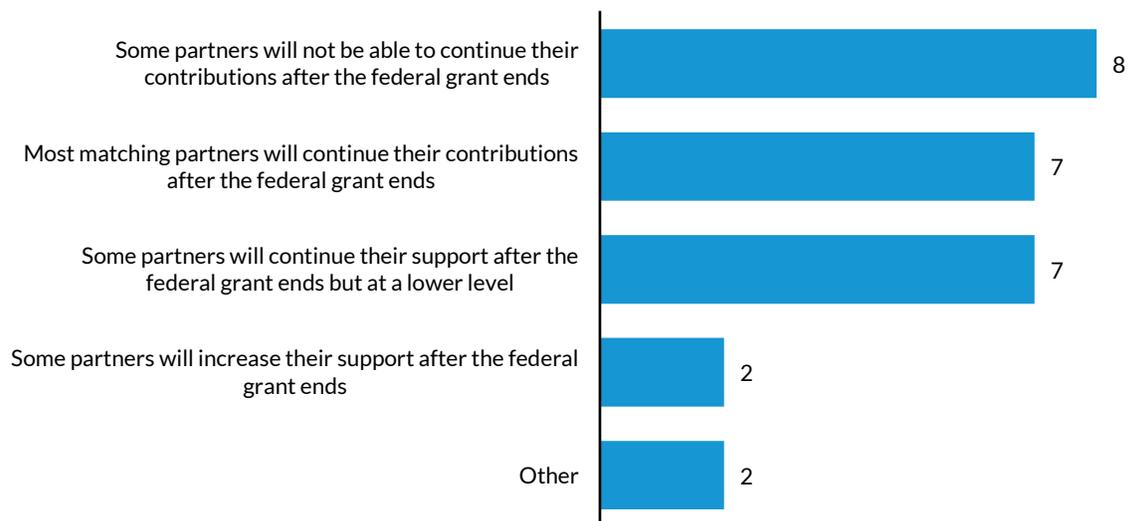
Many grantees view their Promise Neighborhood grant as a runway to change culture and mind-set and to build local capacity for supports and services that will continue, even if at a different scope and scale. In Indianola and Deer Creek, grantees have focused on providing professional learning in schools that has led to an aligned curriculum and new ways of educator practice. Chula Vista has instituted a routine meeting structure at schools that allows support providers to better coordinate their resources and services. In Perry and Knox, school-based coordinators are frequently hired by districts directly, which helps institutionalize practices that have been introduced through the Promise Neighborhood.

Leaders also recognize, however, that many services and programs provided as part of the Promise Neighborhood will require new funding and are focused on replacing their federal Promise Neighborhood grant with new sources. Indianola has secured Head Start and Early Head Start funding to continue early childhood programs previously funded through the Promise Neighborhood grant. Camden and West Philadelphia are using Medicaid reimbursements for services that have been provided in schools to help cover those costs. In Chula Vista and San Diego, grantees are part of a state coalition that has sought out new public and private funds to support their work. Interview and survey data suggest that most grantees are attempting multiple approaches to sustainability (figure 15). Noteworthy is the focus on advocacy indicated by most grantees as a top strategy. Similarly, many cited raising new public and private resources. About half of respondents indicated they foresee reducing some of their services to sustain the work beyond the federal grant.

FIGURE 15

Grantee Survey Question

What option(s) is your Promise Neighborhood considering to support sustainability beyond the federal grant term?



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Source: Grantee survey.

Grantees have worked to institute sustainable strategies from the beginning of their grants. Baltimore, Knox, and Perry are leveraging AmeriCorps members to staff key strategies, as AmeriCorps funding will likely continue beyond the Promise Neighborhood grant period. In West Philadelphia, the university secured agreements with the city and school district to continue behavioral health services after a pilot period and to continue to support a community school beyond the grant period.

Extension grants and carry-over funds are mitigating the funding decline associated with the end of the federal grant, giving grantees more time to put sustainability strategies into place.

Many sites are working toward developing long-term sustainability strategies, but only one of the grantees in the interviewed sample and two of the survey respondents had written a sustainability plan to share with stakeholders. Furthermore, formal sustainability plans are often created at the tail end of the grant or even shortly after the grant ends, creating an extreme urgency for finding new funding. Survey respondents confirmed this finding, with more than 50 percent reporting they are still in the early stages of sustainability planning with no formal plan in place yet.

What Local or Organizational Factors Support Sustainability?

Grantees and training and technical assistance partners identified several conditions that promote Promise Neighborhood sustainability. These factors can both help grantees unlock funding and fundamentally shift schools' and communities' approaches to supporting children and families.

Grantees thought strong working relationships with the district and with school-level leaders were essential to sustainability. Grantees pointed to superintendent, principal supervisor, and principal buy-in as being necessary both for starting and sustaining their Promise Neighborhood. They also indicated that when education leaders experience the value of the work, they are more likely to adapt practices and contribute financially to continuing services.

Deep, trusting relationships among partners are important for sustaining Promise Neighborhoods. These relationships change mind-sets and practice, leading to authentic collaboration and a sense of joint responsibility for the work going forward. Several grantees mentioned that training partners in and using results-based accountability is rallying partners, deepening relationships, and fostering a shared sense of accountability.

Even so, survey responses point to a lack of clear, long-term leadership for many grantees. When asked about a committed group of leaders to carry on the work after the grant, only 15 percent of respondents reported having a strong group of committed leaders. More typical is that some leaders are committed while others are less so, which almost half of grantees reported.

Grantees that manage multiple grants have applied lessons from early work to new sites. This includes new emphasis on building local partners' capacity to take on more of the work and a larger focus, from the beginning, on changing practice. South Bay Community Services applied lessons from its experience in Chula Vista to promote sustainability of the San Diego Promise Neighborhood. According to leaders in Chula Vista, SBCS staff provided 80 percent of Promise Neighborhood supports, and other

local partners provided the other 20 percent. In San Diego, however, those shares are flipped. SBSC staff provided 20 percent, and partners provided 80 percent. This change alters the organization's role to one of technical assistance and capacity provider for its contracted partners, leading to increased communitywide capacity for supporting children and families along the developmental pathway as well as distributing the weight of diminished federal funding across multiple organizations. Similarly, Delta Health Alliance is building on the lessons learned in Indianola to support its work in Deer Creek and is hiring and building capacity with local residents to support Promise Neighborhood strategies.

The availability of outcome data to engage partners and funders is important for sustainability. Chula Vista's leadership reported that a school district assumed costs for two school-based positions based on data showing dramatically improved student attendance. In Perry, successful health initiatives launched with the county government during the grant period are being continued by county staff. Likewise, some grantees are using outcome data to make the case for new or additional funding from foundations, from states, and as part of other federal grant applications, such as Early Head Start and Head Start. Finally, grantees reported that it takes time to see results. Half of survey respondents indicated that it is too soon to determine results with the preliminary data. This means grantees may also need to focus on short-term results that go beyond the Government Performance and Results Act metrics on which Promise Neighborhood grantees must report.

Funding to continue backbone operations is also important for long-term sustainability. This includes funding for staff, critical data functions, and capacity-building efforts. Survey results indicate that half of grantees are confident the current backbone organization will continue to support their Promise Neighborhood after the grant. Another 40 percent are exploring other options or believe another organization will take over. The remaining grantees are not certain what they will need. Grantees also shared ideas for continued backbone support. Notably, at Berea College, which supports the Perry and Knox neighborhoods, leaders convinced the college administration to reserve some of the grant funds earmarked for administrative overhead to form the basis of an endowment to support backbone functions for the Promise Neighborhoods after the federal grant ends. Other grantees are exploring similar options.

Many grantees said that supporting professional learning to change practice during the grant period was a primary way of promoting sustainability after the grant. In so doing, they are building capacity among school staff and community organizations to work independently and together to provide broader supports and services to students. For sustainability, the strategy of building capacity across a broad range of staff can help the work continue even in the face of staff transitions.

Hiring or contracting with development professionals to tap additional public and private resources was another strategy several grantees mentioned. Twenty-five percent noted it as a key strategy. Camden, for instance, hired a development staff member to help raise funds.

What Local or Organizational Factors Impede Sustainability?

Many grantees were optimistic about continuing their Promise Neighborhoods after the grant, but they were clear eyed about the challenges they face.

The lack of available state funding, tight or even declining education budgets, and limited private funding are challenges. Survey respondents flagged insufficient local (54 percent), state (46 percent), or national funds (46 percent) as sustainability challenges. Maintaining services and backbone supports such as data strategies are difficult when funding is scarce and competition for resources is high. Even with great outcome data, finding new funding for Promise Neighborhood strategies in financially depressed communities is a significant challenge. In Camden, for example, leaders acknowledge that the likelihood of the district—which faces budget cuts and is pursuing several school and district improvement strategies—picking up the costs for after-school and summer programming initiated through the grant period is low. Similarly, grantees serving rural communities report that their districts will simply not be able to find resources to support school-based positions or other services introduced as part of their Promise Neighborhoods. This is reportedly a significant worry for schools and districts that have come to rely on having extra hands for doing important professional development and wraparound work in schools.

Turnover among key stakeholders, especially in schools, is another challenge to sustainability. As many grantees acknowledged, this work is relationship based, and even in the best of circumstances, momentum slows and plans get revisited when new district or school leaders take the helm, as happened in Camden, Indianola, Perry, and other communities. In some places, such as West Philadelphia, complicated school-feeder patterns and charter environments make universal commitment to school-based approaches challenging. Promise Neighborhood leaders worry these complications will make eventual district- or school-based ownership of the work unlikely.

Sustaining the whole pipeline of services is also challenging. Several grantees said that strategies that got under way later in the grant period—notably, graduation-focused and college-transition strategies for older youth—will likely be harder to sustain because the infrastructure and partnerships are less well developed. This was also indicated on the grantee survey, in which nearly 70 percent of respondents indicated that their community values some of the work of the Promise Neighborhood but does not understand or support the whole-pipeline approach.

Several reported a catch-22 when raising new private resources. Some private funders are unwilling to provide resources when there is already a significant federal investment. Private investors see themselves as seeding public investments, preferring not to backfill when services are reduced.

In rural communities, all these challenges are magnified. Potential partner organizations are few and overstretched. In the two rural Promise Neighborhoods in our sample, backbone organizations acknowledged the importance of their ability to staff much-needed school positions through the Promise Neighborhood and be an intermediary for grant funds, making sure that resources are used in alignment with the grant and not to address one of the many other challenges severely underresourced districts face. Rural grantees reported a need for more than five years, as their opportunities for

backfilling funding, especially though private sources, are limited. In Knox, where the lead agency, Berea College, is a repeat grantee, the second grant enables continuation of staff, programs, and services. In Indianola, which is at the tail end of its extension grant, there are few options for funding ongoing work. Thirteen percent of survey respondents noted local organizations had limited capacity to carry on the work.

What Sustainability-Focused Resources or Technical Assistance Supports Would Help Grantees?

Grantees indicated they would welcome technical assistance and tools to help them identify and secure postgrant funding sources for their Promise Neighborhoods, including the following:

- Tailored talking points to promote the return on investment for Promise Neighborhoods that could be used to engage state agencies, governors, mayors, and other leaders. Several asked for help to customize talking points for their local context and for various stakeholders.
- Support for private fundraising, including how to identify funders outside the local area who are interested in funding the strategies promoted by Promise Neighborhood grantees.
- More information on tapping public funds, especially state dollars, with clear information about the administrative burden of using these funds. A question was also raised about how to ensure that any new state or local funding channeled toward Promise Neighborhoods did not reduce funding available for other key priorities of Promise Neighborhood partners and other neighborhood nonprofits.
- More substantive and customized technical assistance that reflects the unique sustainability challenges individual communities face.

Recommendations

This needs analysis points to the importance Promise Neighborhood grantees place on sustaining and expanding their work. It also highlights the challenges and strategies being employed to overcome them. The following recommendations aim to support Promise Neighborhood grantees as they strengthen their capacity to sustain and expand their work. The recommendations also indicate how technical assistance can help grantees implement the suggested strategies.

Develop a consensus with key partners on what sustainability looks like. The first step in effective planning is being clear about what you want to sustain. Having a clear plan can also help grantees develop effective timelines for this work. Experience shows that it is important that grantees and their partners have these critical conversations about the next phase of work early enough in the grant period to have time to build capacity and to gather information to make informed choices about where to focus future investments. Similarly, these conversations can inform plans for growth, ensuring the right structures and supports are in place to support expansion. Technical assistance can help grantees agree on which organization, agency, or collaborative will support the management and infrastructure

for the Promise Neighborhood; determine which services and supports will be the primary focus of the work; and get clarity on partners' roles and responsibilities.

Create a detailed sustainability plan. A sustainability plan has many benefits, such as clarifying the priorities and responsibilities each partner will assume for moving the work forward. At the heart of a sustainability plan are detailed budgets that show costs, revenues, and funding gaps for each strategy, as well as how the supporting infrastructure will be funded. The plan also details how pieces of the work are or will become institutionalized and how continued engagement and support will be fostered. In addition to guiding the work, the plan can also be used as a marketing tool to generate additional financial support (as part of a proposal or pitch deck) and as a way to introduce the work to new partners. Technical assistance can provide structures and support for grantees to develop a detailed plan to guide the work of sustaining Promise Neighborhoods after the federal grant expires.

Invest in communications tools and resources. Whether building the Promise Neighborhood brand or taking on another local association, building a clear identity and sharing results are important for sustainability. Many collective-impact organizations tailor communications materials to better engage partners, funders, community members, schools, and others. Community members may be most interested in success stories for children and youth, and funders may be more interested in return on investment. Once developed, the lead organization and partners can regularly share news and results to build momentum and support for the work. Creating scripts, frames, and approaches that grantees can customize would help address this need. Here, too, technical assistance can accelerate this part of the work by developing boilerplate content and helping grantees identify and customize messages for local target audiences.

Collect and share success stories. Promise Neighborhoods are part of a growing national movement of collective-impact strategies. One of the most notable features of the Promise Neighborhoods model is its reliance on data to document progress and drive results. Along with the data are stories that bring to life the work and success strategies being employed. These stories can serve several purposes, such as documenting the work and demonstrating early results. Technical assistance could include the development of short case studies, videos, and narrative examples that can provide information and encouragement to others facing similar challenges and are a way for Promise Neighborhoods to support each other and the larger field of collective-impact organizations. This is very much the case when it comes to financing and sustainability, where grantees are interested in learning from each other about successful strategies and what it takes to implement them.

Currently, technical assistance for Promise Neighborhoods is funded almost exclusively by the federal Promise Neighborhoods program. The work of Promise Neighborhoods, however—particularly, the ability of communities to sustain multifaceted pipeline approaches to promote success for young people—has broader implications. The potential to leverage what is being learned in Promise Neighborhoods, especially related to scale and sustainability, has implications for funders and policymakers alike.

Funders have an opportunity to piggyback, connect, coordinate, and amplify the work of Promise Neighborhoods through targeted research and technical assistance. A study of Promise Neighborhood grantees whose federal funding has ended to understand if work has been sustained, what has been sustained, and how it was sustained could inform strategies and tools that promote success for current grantees and other collective-impact initiatives that receive funding to do similar work. Funders can also use their convening ability to support networks of grantees, both Promise Neighborhood and others, to learn about successful ways to expand and sustain promising strategies.

Likewise, policymakers can both support Promise Neighborhoods and learn from their work when sustaining and expanding pipeline approaches to student success. Many states and localities are experimenting with similar approaches to promote student success. Identifying ways to leverage existing resources and to support backbone organizations are two areas where improved policy and practices can promote sustainability.

Notes

- ¹ For a description of the result areas, see “Results Framework,” Promise Neighborhoods, accessed December 8, 2019, <https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/data-and-results/results-framework>.
- ² This analysis excludes the LA Promise Neighborhood in the Promise Zone, who received Promise Neighborhoods funding in 2016, because the grantee organization, Youth Policy Institute, has ceased all operations as of October 2019.

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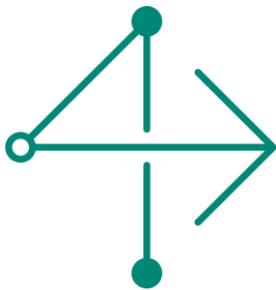
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