



POWERED BY **ECMC GROUP**

Executive Summary

Why Co-Lab Matters Now

In 2022, over 27,000 young adults in the Twin Cities were disconnected from school and work, representing 8.4% of the region's incoming workforce.*

Statewide, this disconnection costs Minnesota an estimated \$350 million annually.* While these young adults are eager to contribute, they face systemic barriers such as incomplete education, limited networks, unstable employment, and prior justice system involvement.

The Co-Lab model is a 12-week education and workforce initiative co-created by young adults and backed by data. Co-Lab blends career exploration, personal development, and wraparound support.

By bridging the gap between talent and opportunity, Co-Lab enables employers to tap into a motivated, often overlooked workforce while supporting young adults in thriving both at work and in life.

*Measure of America, *Youth Disconnection in America Report*, 2024.

Data reflects young adults ages 16–24.

Investing Smarter In Young Adult Success

Recruiting talent is costly, and keeping talent is hard.

Co-Lab expands the talent pipeline by preparing young adults to explore high-demand careers and develop skills employers value. Co-Lab graduates emerge with a stronger sense of belonging and belief in their ability to shape what comes next.



\$4,700

The average cost of recruiting talent in 2022.¹

\$17,500

The cost of replacing early-career talent can cost up to 40% of their salary.²

20%

Quarterly turnover rate for young adults in Minnesota.³

Co-creation with young adults led to strong gains in belonging, confidence, commitment, and resilience. All are linked to postsecondary education enrollment, completion, and long-term employment success.

With an investment of less than \$5,000 per participant, including close to \$2,000 in direct payments, Co-Lab offers a promising model for advancing career readiness and personal growth.

1. Society of Human Resource Management, 2022.

2. Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), 2022 data.

3. Gallup Workplace, 2024; Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2024.

Mission, Vision, And Values



VISION

Our vision is to engage the full workforce ecosystem to align educational pathways and career development in the Minneapolis–Saint Paul metro area for young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 to thrive.

MISSION

Connect young adults to a collaborative ecosystem that supports their mental and physical health, financial wellness, educational aspirations, and career growth all in one space, co-created by and for young adults. By bridging education and workforce opportunities, we empower young adults to confidently step into meaningful careers and contribute to a thriving economy.

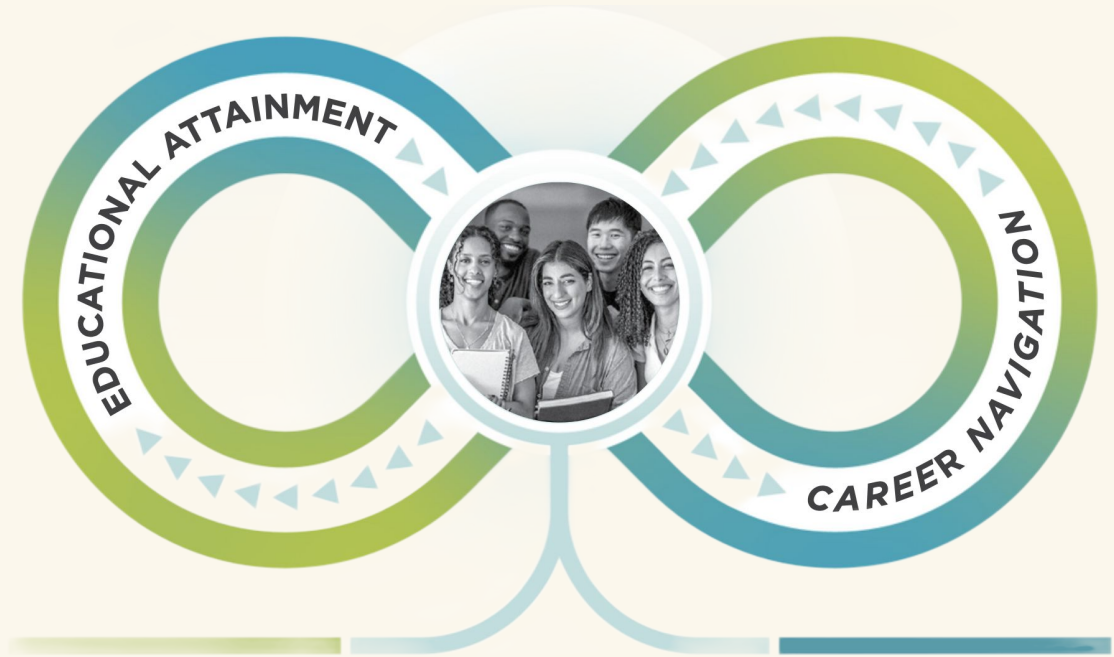
VALUES

- **Quality Over Quantity**
- **Prioritize Young Adult Agency**
- **Meet Young people Where They Are**
- **Elevate Perspectives From Our Emerging Workforce**
- **Listen And Adapt, Early And Often**

The Co-Lab Model

Reimagining Young Adult Success

Co-Lab is a dynamic hub where young adults access support for education, career growth, and wellness—all in one space, created by and for young adults.



EDUCATION, TRAINING & CAREER READINESS

Young adults gain the knowledge, skills and credentials needed to pursue meaningful career opportunities.

YOUNG ADULTS & HOLISTIC SUPPORT

*As co-creators of their futures, young adults are supported by **Funding** for access, **Wellness** for stability, and **Community** for connection.*

CAREER PATHWAYS & WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

Young adults connect with employers, mentors, and opportunities, aligning their skills with workforce needs.

How Co-Lab Drives Change



We tested Co-Lab's theory of change over the course of two 12-week program cohorts.

CO-LAB'S CORE HYPOTHESIS

IF young adults engage in a high-relational, co-created space that provides career connected learning, wraparound supports, and meaningful decision-making power,

THEN they will build the confidence, skills, and direction needed to pursue strong postsecondary pathways, succeed in the workforce, and shape more responsive support systems.

AS A RESULT, our region will benefit from more engaged young adults, access to a better-prepared talent pipeline, and greater alignment between talent development and employer needs.

HOW THIS HAPPENS

- ✓ **Whole-Person Readiness:** Co-Lab supports mental and physical health, financial wellness, and community connection to help young adults fully engage.
- ✓ **Clearer Future Pathways:** Young adults explore high-growth sectors with 1:1 career navigation, grounded in Minnesota's labor market data.
- ✓ **Co-Creation in Practice:** Young adults shape the experience at every stage, keeping Co-Lab relevant and aligned with their goals.

Co-Lab In Action: The 12-Week Experience

- **Cohort-Based Learning**
Weekly, in-person half-day sessions built for connection, in a space designed by young adults.
- **Workforce-Aligned Experiences**
Sessions and hands-on experiences introducing high-growth industries tied to Minnesota's Drive for 5, plus creative, entrepreneurial, and emerging sectors.
- **Wraparound Supports**
Mental health care, career navigation, wellness resources, food, transportation support, and hourly and milestone-based financial support to reduce barriers and promote stability.
- **Flex Learning & Community**
Sessions focused on personal growth, including financial literacy, nutrition, wellness, and digital skills.
- **Young Adult-Led Programming**
In the final 4 weeks, participants lead sessions based on their interests, building toward a personalized future plan.
- **Built-In Feedback Loops**
Real-time input, co-design sessions, and youth leadership keep the program responsive and relevant.

Co-Lab Delivers Value Now

These outputs offer a snapshot of Co-Lab's early impact on engagement, learning, and collaboration.

- **Strong participation and retention**, with 80% of cohort participants (or "NorthStars") attending consistently, driven by trust and relevant content.
- **Future Success Plans** were completed by all NorthStars, with 93% finishing the program with clear education, career, and life goals for the next 3–6 months.
- **Sustained engagement** through steady attendance, 500+ daily survey responses, and high interest in career pathway sessions.
- **Robust partner involvement**, with 62 partners contributing sessions and site visits; 100% indicated they would return.
- **Momentum from the margins**: 21% of NorthStars were neither in school nor working. 14.6% of NorthStars enrolled in, applied to, or transferred colleges during and after Co-Lab (self-reported).
- **Real-world skill-building**: NorthStars earned 45+ IT certifications and 20+ Mental Health First Aid Certificates.

50%

Of NorthStars reported making "strong" connections with both peers and partners during the program

6 out of 8

Career clusters* saw increased interest from NorthStars by the end of Co-Lab compared to the beginning

4.67 / 5

Was the average overall program rating given by NorthStars

What's Emerging: Insights To Build On

Early indicators show that Co-Lab fosters community, strengthens aspirations, and generates powerful learning moments for NorthStars.

- **Growing confidence:** NorthStars report a statistically significant 13.6% increase in confidence about their future and decision-making from the start of the program.
- **Clearer pathways:** Young adults shift from “*I don’t know yet*” to identifying specific next steps for continuing their education and exploring careers in high-growth industries.
- **Belonging and connection:** Strong relationships with peers and adults lay the foundation for learning and personal growth, reflected in a 15.9% increase in reported belonging.
- **Greater comfort with support systems:** Over 40 in-person mental health sessions were accessed, reflecting increased use of culturally responsive care alongside career and basic need supports.
- **Ownership and agency:** NorthStars co-create the experience, shape improvements, and take initiative in their learning.

60.8%

Of NorthStars stated “*Career Connections*” and “*A Boost in Confidence*” as the most important takeaways from Co-Lab

91.3%

Of NorthStars reported Co-Lab helped them feel ready for their next step “*Quite a lot*” or “*Greatly*”

Co-Lab is Created By And With Young Adults



Co-Lab's most powerful differentiators come from its co-creation with young adults from under-resourced communities.

Over the past two years, more than 80 young people have helped shape the model through the Young Adult Advisory Council, Cohort Councils, daily feedback, and creative data collection.

Co-creation was woven in from the very beginning, shaping how the program was designed, delivered, and evaluated.

In 2025, at each step of the way, young adult voices were sought out and listened to:

10

Young Adult Advisory Council members co-created the program over four, 2.5 hour workshops.

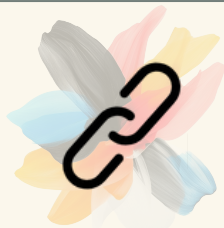
10

Cohort representatives selected by their peers (five per cohort), shaped the last four weeks of programming, provided additional insights and evaluated Co-Lab.

26

Real-time adjustments made to the program based on young adult feedback.

What Sets Co-Lab Apart



Trusting Relationships

Connection is not a byproduct — it's a core component of Co-Lab.

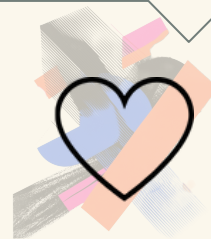
Building relationships and community requires time and intentionality from program leaders, partners, and young adults. When young adults feel connected to each other and to professionals, they have the foundation to learn openly and embrace curiosity.



Responsive Structure

Co-Lab's design meets young adults where they are.

Through a balance of consistency and flexibility, Co-Lab offers a structure that is adaptive to the moment. Through some trial and error, it became evident that clear, yet responsive, expectations provide stability and safety for a positive learning environment.



Whole-Person Focus

Young adults show up most fully when their basic needs, aspirations, and sense of purpose are met at the same time.

Compensation and wellness supports signal Co-Lab's intent of addressing basic needs and fueling aspirations. Just as importantly, co-creation gives young adults real decision-making power. They shape their experience, not just participate in it.

Join Co-Lab: Sponsorship Tiers

ENTRY TIER \$500 – \$5K

Contribute by funding a session's delivery, meals or a field trip. Includes signage and website recognition.

MIDDLE TIER \$5K – \$50K

Support a community provider's paid services, such as access to 1:1 mental health or career navigation sessions; or underwrite weeks of programming. Includes branding on materials and press recognition.

TOP TIER \$115K

Fund an entire 12-week Co-Lab cohort of 25 young adults. Includes naming rights and premier recognition.

To learn more, contact Andrew Mueller, andrew.mueller@wilder.org



CO-LAB



Alpha Cohort Overview - 2024

WHEN

July 09 – August 01, 2024
Tues. / Thurs. 9:00am – 1:00pm

WHERE

Ramsey County
Junior Achievement North

WHAT

A 4-week pop-up to test the desirability, feasibility, and viability of the Co-Lab early-stage concept in market.

WHO

Young Adults (YAs):
n= 20, 18–24-year-old young adults of color*

PARTNERS

n=27 workforce ecosystem partner organizations
(90+ volunteers)



*Co-Lab hosted participants identifying as Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander.

Co-Lab Beta: Engaging Young Adults From Under-Resourced Communities

Co-Lab recruitment efforts targeted young adults from under-resourced communities. Out of 170 interested young adults, 48 became Co-Lab Beta NorthStars*. Participants were randomly chosen from the applicant pool, provided they met the basic criteria: ages 16–24, residents of the Greater Twin Cities area, and living in the U.S. for at least five years.

***NorthStar:** participant in the Co-Lab program, name suggested and voted on by peers in the Young Adult Advisory Council.

48

NorthStars from the Twin Cities participated in Co-Lab Beta, 24 in each cohort

19%

Of NorthStars held caregiving responsibilities

48%

Of NorthStars were or have experienced housing instability

10.4%

Of NorthStars have been involved with the justice system

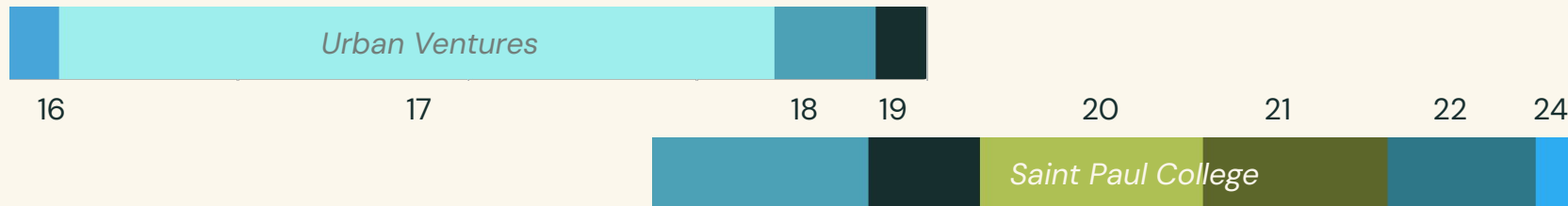
21%

Of NorthStars were neither in school nor working

8.3%

Of NorthStars have or are working on their GED

AGES



Beta 1 Cohort Overview - 2025

WHEN

May 27 – August 14, 2025
Tues. / Thurs. 2:00–6:00 pm

WHERE

St. Paul College

WHAT

A 12-week pilot designed to assess Co-Lab's effectiveness at driving outcomes for young adults, measuring shifts in confidence, belonging, clarity, and connection, while testing program delivery, partner engagement, and early indicators of long-term impact, including adjustments for age, compensation and site characteristics.

WHO

Young Adults (YAs):
n= 24, 18–24-year-old young adults

PARTNERS

n= 40+ workforce ecosystem partner organizations, employers, educators and community based organizations



Beta 2 Cohort Overview - 2025

WHEN

September 15 – December 3, 2025
Mon. / Weds. 3:30–7:30 pm

WHERE

Urban Ventures, Minneapolis

WHAT

A 12-week pilot designed to assess and refine Co-Lab's Beta 1 effectiveness at driving outcomes for a younger demographic of 16 to 19 year-olds, including program adjustments for compensation, core service delivery, and scheduling structure.

WHO

Young Adults (YAs):
n= 24, 16–19-year-old young adults

PARTNERS

n= 40+ workforce ecosystem partner organizations, employers, educators and community based organizations



Impact Measurement Framework: Measuring What Matters

Co-Lab Beta used a mix of participatory, creative, and program data tracking methods to collect feedback from young adults and partners, and track progress at the individual and system levels.



*The number of surveys collected is greater than the total number of NorthStars in the program (48) because some participants completed the intake survey and left Co-Lab during the first two weeks. This data point also includes 18 longitudinal survey responses, 5 from Co-Lab Alpha 2024 and 13 from Co-Lab at Saint Paul College.

599

Participant Surveys Responses

Quick daily surveys to gauge session clarity, relevance, and connection.

125

Co-Lab Intake and Exit Survey Responses*

Comprehensive reflections capturing participant satisfaction, goal progression, and program experience, including 18 longitudinal surveys.

188

Story-Based Reflections

Using arts-based activities to collect personal narratives through visioning exercises, goal setting, and personal reflection prompts.

5

Young Adult-Led Feedback Activities

Opportunities for participants to design and lead feedback moments that shape program adjustments.

42

Partner Survey Responses

To gather partner impressions of collaboration, participant engagement quality, and ideas for improvement. Collected after their session and at the 3-month mark.

1,200+

Administrative Data Points

Ongoing tracking of attendance, completion of participant “Future Success Plans”, use of wraparound supports, and referrals.



The Journey of a NorthStar: Quiet Confidence

19-year-old from Minneapolis

Experience with the justice system, foster care, and housing instability

The NorthStar reluctantly applies for a new program suggested to them by a case manager at the County. After skimming through high school, the NorthStar's experience hardens their worldview. To their surprise, they are accepted into the program. To the surprise of others, they attend.

The NorthStar begins cautiously, nervous to show too much interest and be disappointed. Professionals regularly come through the door, eager to share their experiences, career paths, and sometimes, advice. Along the way, the NorthStar continuously shows up and makes progress on their Future Success Plan.

The program's end comes about faster than the NorthStar realized. After 12 weeks, the NorthStar feels ready to step into their future. Quietly, steadily, this confidence grew. Three months after the program, the NorthStar shares a small success:

"I'm applying to the medical manufacturing and microelectronics program and one of the questions is what related skills do I bring to this field. I started panicking and then I realized I can just check my Co-Lab binder. It's crazy how everything is just coming together. When things like this happen I just have a whole new appreciation for the Co-Lab program."

-NorthStar

The Journey of a NorthStar: Behind-The-Scenes

22-year-old from Saint Paul

Enrolled at local technical college

**Parent and experience with
housing instability**

The NorthStar notices a flyer in the hall of the technical college they attend: a program to explore different careers and get paid. The NorthStar excitedly applies. Soon, they are attending the first day of Co-Lab.

The program starts off well for the NorthStar, the people are friendly, the professionals are interesting, and the NorthStar explores possible careers paths. Then the following week, their babysitter didn't show up and stopped responding; and the next the NorthStar's car broke down. Each event resulted in an absence. The NorthStar felt unsure if they could return to Co-Lab.

However, the program manager reached out, invited the NorthStar back and to bring their child. The Co-Lab team supported alternative transportation options and brought in coloring books for the child. The NorthStar completed the program with greater confidence and sense of belonging.

"Co-Lab has put me in such a better place mentally and emotionally they have taught me that no matter what, you can be and do whatever you wanna be and do whatever you wanna do as long as the work is being put in."

– NorthStar

The Journey of a NorthStar: Becoming A Leader

17-year-old from Minneapolis, high school student

Experience with foster care

The NorthStar hears from a friend about an opportunity to get earn money and applies. Both attend the first day, unsure of what to expect and sit toward the back of the room.

Although consistently attending, the NorthStar kept to themselves. In week three of the program, the NorthStar is nominated for a position on the NorthStar peer representatives council. In week six, the group visit a local community college. They work through the activity with ease, excitement for the work growing.

After gaining some confidence, the NorthStar shares concerns about high school graduation with the program manager. The program manager connected with the school, which supported Co-Lab's recruitment efforts. By the end of the program, the NorthStar got back on track for high school graduation.

"Today I realized I could be a leader and role model for the younger generation"

- NorthStar

Understanding the Cost of Young Adult Disconnection

Minnesota's young people are participating in the workforce at record rates, yet many are underemployed, disconnected, or stuck in low-growth jobs.

71%

Of Minnesotans ages 16-24 are in the labor force

This is a historic high in youth participation. Teen unemployment has dropped to 5-6%, the lowest since tracking began.

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), 2023 data

27,800

Young people ages 16 to 24 in the Twin Cities (8.4%) disconnected from school and work in 2022

These young adults are not accessing education, employment, or training, leaving long-term talent and potential untapped.

Measure of America, Youth Disconnection in America Report, 2024

85,300

Minnesotans working part-time involuntarily, data from March 2025

That is an increase of 30,800 people in one year who are working part-time but want to work full time. Young adults are often employed in roles that don't offer sufficient hours or stability.

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), 2025

\$350 M

Annual cost to Minnesota taxpayers from disconnected youth

According to national estimates, each disconnected youth costs taxpayers approximately \$14,000 annually, accounting for lost tax revenue and increased public expenditures.

Measure of America, Youth Disconnection in America Report, 2024

High Turnover Undermines Workforce Stability

Many young adults are cycling through unstable jobs without building momentum. High turnover rates and short job tenure leave young workers disconnected from long-term opportunity and employers struggling to retain talent.

20%

Quarterly turnover rate for young adults, ages 16 to 24, in Minnesota

Based on recent state data, roughly 1 in 5 young workers leave their jobs each quarter.

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), 2022 data

\$4,700

The average cost of recruiting talent in 2022

Recruiting even entry-level talent comes with significant cost, making retention a smart workforce investment.

Society of Human Resource Management, 2022

\$17,500

The replacement cost for a recent college hire in Minnesota earning a median salary of \$43,867

Replacing early-career talent can cost over 40% of their salary, highlighting the value of keeping young workers engaged and growing.

Gallup Workplace, 2024; Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2024

85%

Of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been created yet

This underscores the importance of equipping young adults with adaptable skills and career readiness to navigate an evolving job market.

RealTime Talent, SPPS Career Clusters Report 2025