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Youth Coordinating Board: Our Theory of Change

Introduction

- What is a Theory of Change?
- Terminology
- Causal Pathways and Backwards Mapping
- YCB's Organizational Theory of Change
 - Core Assumptions
 - Core Beliefs
 - 5 Causal Pathways
- YCB's Backbone Strategies
- Evidence of Success
- Theoretical and Experiential Grounding of the Work



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Theory + Change

- “Change” refers to the change that YCB wants to bring about in the community
- “Theory” refers to YCB’s idea of how this change will occur
- “Theory of change” is A THEORY about WHY the CHANGE leads to the OUTCOME by mapping out CAUSAL PATHWAYS



Terminology

- **Actions:** backbone strategies, programs, or interventions
- **Assumptions:** underlying beliefs about how the actions bring about change
- **Preconditions:** factors or conditions that must be in place for an actions to be successful
- **Requirements:** necessary tangible inputs (\$, staff, supplies) for actions to take place
- **Outcomes:** a desired increase or decrease in a specific indicator within a specified time
- **Goal:** the desired long-term outcome

Causal Pathway helps to identify...

- Underlying assumptions
- Preconditions and necessary requirements
- Mismatch between actions of the organization and its goals
- Linkages to other program components
- Alternative strategies

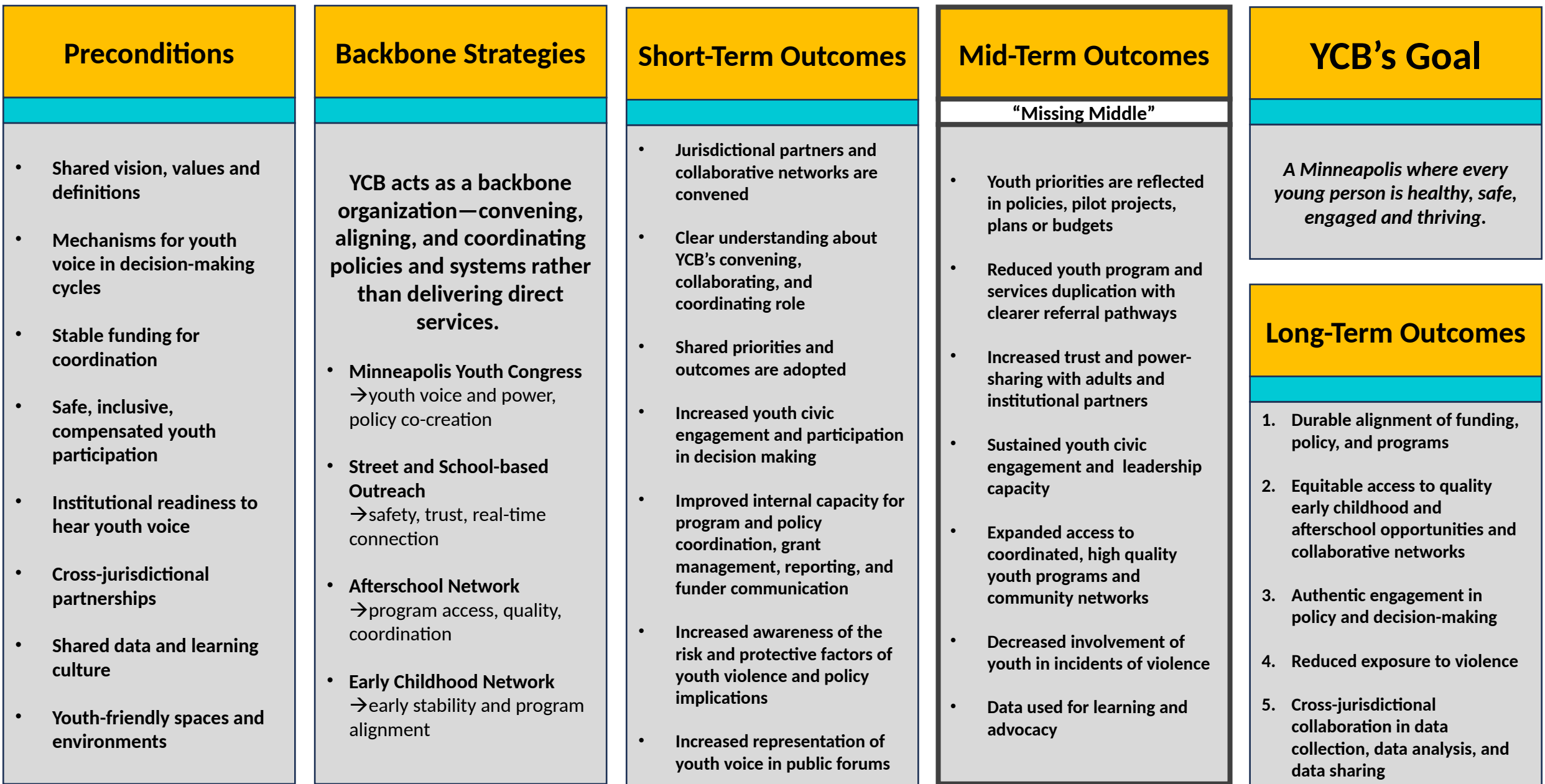


Theory of Change on a Page

Headline: If YCB aligns powerful institutions, equips influential adults, elevates youth power, and drives decisions with shared data, then system-wide practices change, resources flow to what works, and youth outcomes improve equitably.



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Causal Pathway: YCB Entity → Backbone Capacity → Sustainability (durable policy, funding, and program alignment) → Long-term Impact

Core Assumptions Guide Our Design & Implementation

1. Youth and family participation depends on safety, trust, respect, and belonging.
2. Collaboration outperforms competition across systems.
3. Policy solutions are stronger when youth help shape them.
4. Prevention and early intervention are more effective than crisis response.
5. Cross-system coordination enables earlier and more effective intervention.
6. Policymakers respond to clear, credible data narratives.



Core Beliefs Shape Our Culture

Youth & Power

- YCB centers youth as experts in their lived experience and allies in decision-making.
- Adult willingness to share power with young people increases legitimacy and relevance of decisions.
- Providers are stronger together than individually.
- Relationship-based work is foundational to the YCB, not optional.
- Tokenism undermines trust and long-term engagement.

Systems & Coordination

- Coordination and advocacy are legitimate, fundable functions.
- YCB is a coordinator and convener, not a direct service provider.
- Systems change requires time, trust, and sustained investment.
- Advocacy for youth is on-going and not episodic.
- No single system meets the needs of young people alone.

Data, Equity, & Learning

- Quality matters as much as access.
- Equity-focused work must be intentional and explicit.
- **Data** should support learning and advocacy, not punishment.



“We believe that when youth are respected, represented, and connected to caring adults in equitable systems, they thrive —and so does the city.”

5 Principal Causal Pathways

- Guided by a logical, directional **map**
- Grounded in essential **preconditions**
- Built with specific **requirements**
- Working towards specific **short-term, midterm, long-term outcomes**, and
- Unified by ONE organizational, YCB **goal** or mission



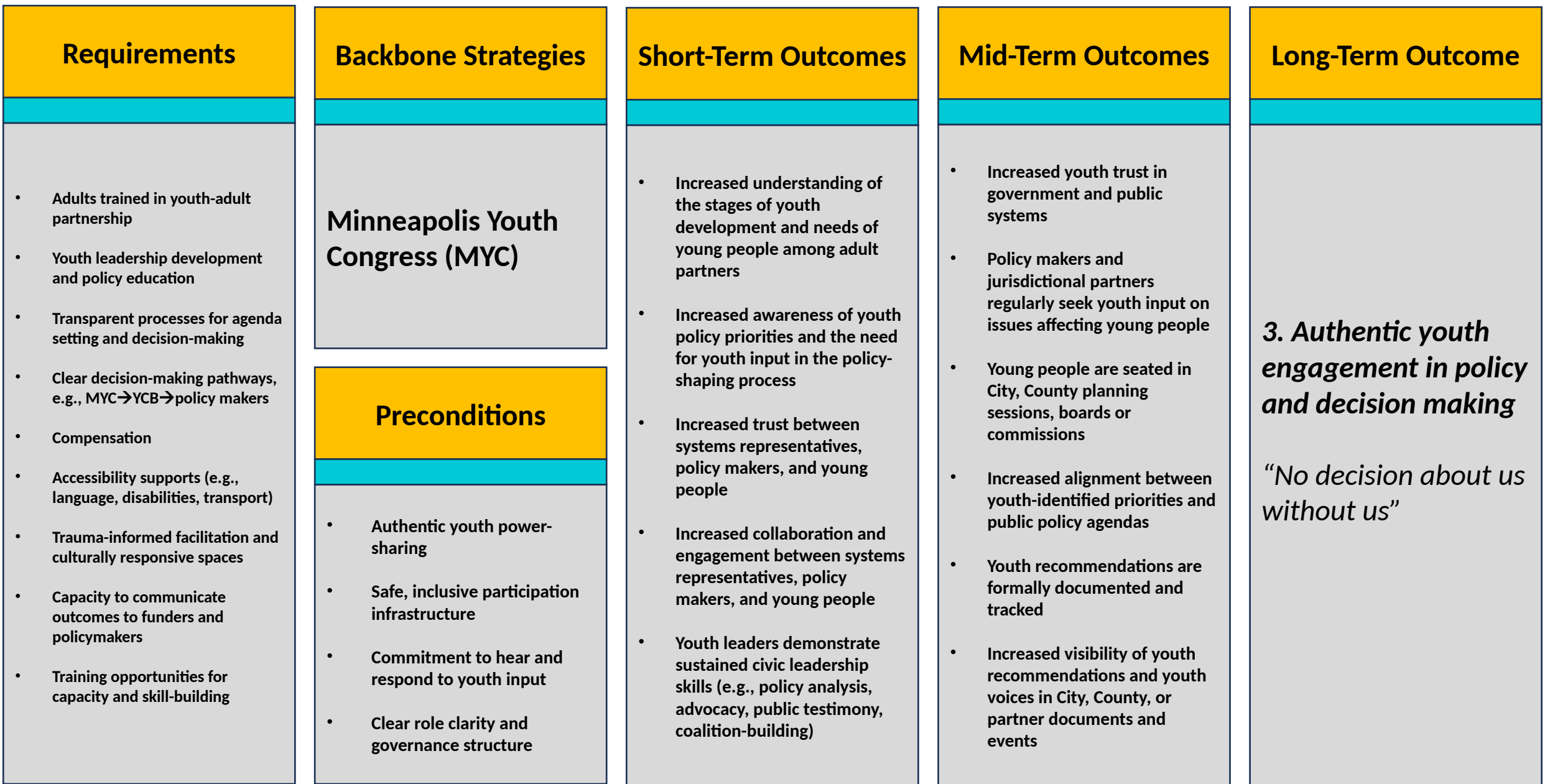
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Requirements	Backbone Strategy	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcome
- Dedicated staff capacity for convening, policy tracking, and communication - Training opportunities for capacity and skill-building - Policy agendas - Transparent processes for agenda setting and decision-making - Institutional receptivity to youth voice - Strong cross-jurisdictional partnerships, MOUs, and agreements	Youth Coordinating Board (YCB) as an Entity Preconditions - Shared vision, values and purpose - Stable funding for coordinating and backbone functions - Institutional receptivity to youth voice - Visibility	- Jurisdictional partners and community networks are convened regularly - Increased clarity about YCB's mission, strategies, and value proposition among funders - Improved recognition of YCB as a backbone convening and coordinating entity, rather than a single, direct service program - Increased skill-building in policy analysis, advocacy, youth leadership, and civic engagement - Increased alignment of activities, metrics, and messaging among jurisdictional and community partners and networks - Improved internal capacity for grant management, reporting, and funder communication	- Positive feedback from stakeholders about YCB's leadership and coordinating role - Shared funding priorities are formally adopted among jurisdictional partners and networks - Reduced fragmentation and duplication of efforts across partner agencies - Coordinated advocacy for and access to youth programs and services - Coordinated data collection, analysis, and reporting efforts - Coordinated policy agendas - Sustained advocacy for youth leadership pathways and participation within key systems	1. Durable alignment of funding, policy and programs

Causal Pathway: YCB Entity → Backbone Capacity → Sustainability (durable policy, funding, and program alignment) → Long-term Impact

Requirements	Backbone Strategies	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcome
• Program alignment with early childhood and youth development best practices • Active, formalized partnerships with safety, health, housing and education systems • Opportunities for capacity and skill-building • Accessibility supports (e.g., language, disabilities, transport) • Clear pathways and protocols for follow-up and referrals	Early Childhood & Afterschool Networks: A Foundation for Lifelong Wellbeing Preconditions • Agreement on quality standards and core outcomes • Safe, inclusive participation infrastructure • Shared understanding of equitable access	• Increased family and caregiver awareness of and support for youth participation in programs and civic engagement activities • Increased understanding of the need for quality youth programs among partners and collaborative networks • Increased access to training and technical assistance (e.g., YPQA, FFN) • Increased referrals and connections between youth and supportive community resources and programs	• Clear pathways for families to access quality care as children grow and develop • Youth programs such as early childhood and afterschool programs are recognized by jurisdictional partners as critical youth development strategies, not optional add-ons • Increased participation in youth programs and collaborative networks • Increased utilization of community services intended for youth • Reduced duplication of youth programs and community services • Improved access to quality youth programs	2. Every child receives equitable access to quality, consistent, early childhood and afterschool opportunities (i.e., safety, health, housing, and education) with support from collaborative networks

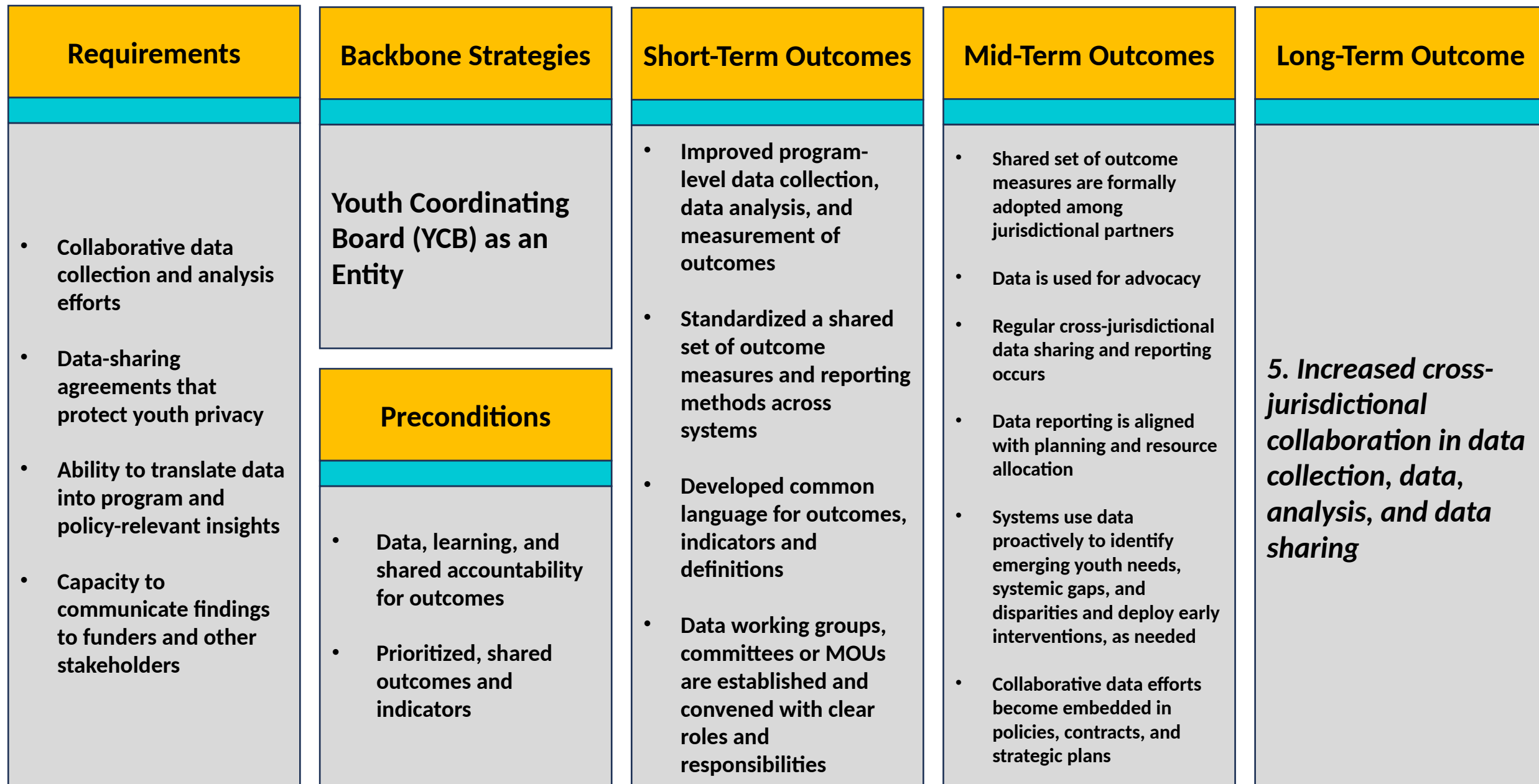
Causal Pathway: Early Childhood & Afterschool Networks → Coordination & Alignment → Reduced Fragmentation → Continuity & Equitable Access



Causal Pathway: MYC → Youth Voice & Power → Policy Influence → Systems Change

Requirements	Backbone Strategy	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcome
• Outreach team members “steeped” in youth development • Outreach training, policies, and procedures • Consistent presence of outreach teams in community spaces • Systematic response protocols to incidents of violence • Communication methods and protocols • Brand recognition • Clear pathways and protocols for follow-up and referrals to services and supports • Data collection and analysis capacity	Street & School-based Outreach Preconditions • Institutional-level commitments to early intervention and reducing exposure to violence • Safe, inclusive participation infrastructure • Visibility • Trust between partners	• Increased awareness of the risk and protective factors of youth violence and policy implications • Increased visibility of outreach teams in school and community spaces • Increased contacts between youth and members of the outreach team in school and community settings • Increased knowledge, skills, and awareness among youth to recognize and deal with abusive, disrespectful or bullying behavior • Increase knowledge of non-violent problem-solving emotional regulation skills • Increased youth-adult trust • Increased referrals to safe, supervised youth programs and community services	• Advocacy for youth-prioritized policy issues related to violence prevention • Increase community-level knowledge and awareness about violence and its effects on young people • Decreased involvement of youth in incidents of violence • Increase academic engagement and performance among students • Improve perceptions of safety among students and community residents • Improve coordination of outreach efforts	4. Reduced youth exposure to violence <i>R-redirect to positive alternatives</i> <i>E-educate youth</i> <i>S-shift the energy</i> <i>P-positively engage</i> <i>E-empower youth</i> <i>C-connect youth</i> <i>T-transform the relationship</i>

Causal Pathway: Outreach Team → Safety & Trust → Youth Connection → Engagement & Well-being



Causal Pathway: YCB Entity → Data & Learning → Credibility → Policy & Funding Shifts

Theory of Change

Demonstrated Systems Coordination

1. Cross-jurisdictional planning among City, County, Schools, Parks, Libraries, and community-based organizations
2. Coordinated response to funding instability and workforce challenges
3. Aligned professional development across early childhood, after school, outreach, and civic engagement

Policy and Funding Influence

1. Secured State and City investments supporting afterschool coordination and access
2. Institutionalized youth participation in City policy and planning processes
3. Advanced Minneapolis' designation as a UNICEF Child-Friendly City

Evidence Base

Youth Voice & Engagement in Practice

1. Minneapolis Youth Congress embedded in policy dialogue and decision-making
2. Youth-led research, testimony, and public storytelling inform policy solutions
3. Youth engagement structured, compensated, and supported

Data, Learning, and Adaptation

1. Shared dashboards and tools (Safescape, Smartsheet, surveys, CPI) used for learning and improvement
2. Annual planning and evaluation retreats inform strategy adjustments
3. Data used to support advocacy and learning – not punishment

Why these pathways work



- Aligned with Youth Development, Childhood Education, Youth Violence Prevention, and Public Health Literature
 - NAEYC, Child Friendly Cities, CDC, YPQA
 - Policy, systems and environmental change approaches
- Data collection and evaluation consistent with:
 - Collective Impact Research
 - Continuous Program Improvement (CPI)
 - M3® (Making Meaning with Multiple Datasets)
- Informed by YCB's 20+ years of cross-jurisdictional practice

YCB's coordinated youth engagement and policy advocacy has contributed to youth-informed changes in transit access, tobacco policy, and youth safety strategies.



YCB exists to make alignment possible—so that policies, programs, and investments work together in the lives of children and young people.