

WordBridge Work Sample

Announcing major organizational changes of a long-standing Portland institution

In late 2010, the YWCA of Greater Portland was ready to announce the dramatic changes it would be making to its services and facilities structure in order to undertake a reinvention of the hundred-year-old plus institution. The Executive Director brought me on board to develop an internal talking point guide and a public letter that would be used with multiple stakeholders to announce the changes.

The YWCA was committed to being transparent about the changes and the reasoning behind them. This commitment made it much easier to keep the focus on illustrating the strategic reasons behind the changes and highlighting the potential that the reinvention could bring.

This project combined elements of strategic planning, crisis communications and public relations. Attached is the two-page flyer.

Reinventing the YWCA

For over a hundred years, the YWCA has provided service to the greater Portland area. To ensure that we continue to do so, we have done a lot of work over the past three years to better align YWCA services to our mission.

The YWCA board and leadership have made several strategic decisions pertaining to core programs and facilities. We are making hard, but necessary adjustments that will preserve capital and allow the organization to fully engage in a reinvention. This process will stabilize YWCA's finances and create a more balanced operating model from which the YWCA can offer unique, high-quality services and programs that deliver transformational change for our clients.

The decisions we are making are significant. However, the reality facing the YWCA is that all programs and services are at risk if we continue with the current lineup of programs and their related operating expenses.

The YWCA is taking proactive steps to ensure we can continue to provide services to our community. We feel confident that the changes we are making will provide a creative space from which we can redefine the YWCA and emerge as a stronger community partner. The page that follows guides you through the strategic decisions made regarding programs and facilities.

A task form is being formed that includes members from the Board of Directors, community members with specific expertise, and executive staff to re-vision the organization, which will include the development of a new, adaptable operating model and tightly focused programs.

As we work through this transition, we will provide updates through YWCA communication channels. If you have additional questions about the strategic direction of the YWCA, please contact me at ericb@ywca-pdx.org.

Sincerely,

Eric Brown and the YWCA Board of Directors

Fund Development for the Future

It is not realistic to rely on government funding streams for long-term strategic planning. In the past three years, the YWCA has experienced a 35% reduction in government funding streams. In addition, when we forecast with an eye to funding trends for the next three to five years, we anticipate additional reductions that will significantly affect the YWCA's budget.

Foundations, major donors, and corporations are increasingly looking to fund unique services that are transformational in nature. In order for YWCA to deliver this type of service, we must be more focused and efficient in our use of funds and staff resources.

A focused model creates a more compelling fundraising and story-telling platform, which can open pathways to additional development sources and preserve the YWCA's ability to deliver service to those in need.

Reinventing the YWCA

Operations

In 2009, YWCA launched a three-year strategic plan to stabilize and strengthen its business core. This process has taken a close and critical look at how services, program administration and facilities align with the YWCA mission. The goal is to assure we can meet community needs today and in the future. During the first phase of this strategic cycle, we reduced our operating expenses by 12%.

An additional 28% will be reduced in the first quarter of 2011 through further administrative, facility and program refinements. This allows the YWCA to preserve capital in the short term, and provides the creative space needed to reinvent the YWCA with a model that can deliver mission-aligned, transformational services.

The YWCA re-invention task force will convene in January 2011 and will be charged with providing a deliverable to the Board of Directors by March 31, 2011.

Services

Each YWCA program has been evaluated against a set of criteria, including mission alignment, funding sustainability, community need and measurable outcomes.

Beginning December 1, 2010, the YWCA core service offering will focus on domestic violence services, East County Senior Services and Camp Westwind. These programs currently make up 53% of the YWCA's services. This focus will continue through the reinvention process and will continue to be a part of the overall visioning discussion for the YWCA.

Based on our evaluation, programs that will be transitioned from YWCA are the Health and Fitness center, Energy Assistance, LearnLinks, Transitional Opportunity Project (TOP) for women transitioning from prison and Transitional Housing. They currently make up 47% of the YWCA's services. In addition, all associated development and administrative expenses will be eliminated.

Where possible, we will transition programs and staff to other organizations to preserve jobs and service continuity. For staff members impacted by these changes, the YWCA board is committed to offering transition support services to the greatest extent possible.

Facilities

For a service-delivery organization, the YWCA has a disproportionate amount of assets and expenses associated with facilities.

Although many people identify with the downtown building as being the YWCA, in reality, our mission has always been about delivering service to women, children, and families in need all over the Portland metro area. In fact, most of our services are delivered outside of the downtown building.

In the early 2000's, the building was renovated with an \$8.2 million capital campaign. At that time, no one could have anticipated that less than a decade later, Oregon would struggle to overcome the prolonged challenge of a difficult economic recession.

The downtown building will be placed on the market in January 2011. Changing the YWCA's utilization of the downtown building will be a big change for many, including us. The YWCA does want to maintain a presence in the building. However, the configuration and location of services will shift depending on the results of the Reinvention Task Force as well as a lease or purchase agreement related to the building.