YWCA of Greater Portland

designing strategies for our future
The YWCA

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About the YWCA

Founded in 1901, the YWCA’s mission has evolved with the needs of our community. Today, the YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all.
What we mean by “All Women”

Throughout this planning process the phrase “all women” kept coming up. And we decided it’s worth defining.

By “all women,” we at the YWCA mean women of all communities, races, and ethnicities. We mean women of all creeds, religions, and traditions. We mean women of all shapes, sizes, and identities.

We mean all self-identified women.

We mean women who work outside the home and those who labor within it. We mean women who run for office and those who don’t—or can’t—vote. We mean women who play, young and old alike.

We mean all women
The process of our planning followed three primary movements. Each of these included multiple levels of participation for staff, board, partners, and other stakeholders. We wanted to engage people broadly and deeply in the co-creation of our future steps of strategy.

**Part 1 – Getting Clear**

Members of the YWCA’s Board of Directors, Leadership Team, and staff convened 25 interviews with leaders, partners, clients, and others in the community to understand better their vision and heart for the YWCA. The data from these interviews were analyzed to determine themes and salient insights.

We also convened three, 3-hour Dialogue Box™ sessions to which we invited key partners and thought-leaders throughout the community to develop the “Who We Are” portion of the strategic plan. Approximately 60 people were engaged through these meetings.

Through an iterative process with staff members and the task force, we developed the core ideas to provide a foundation for our plan.

**Part 2 – Getting Focused**

Members of the YWCA’s Board of Directors, Leadership Team, and staff convened to respond to the ideas emerging from the “Getting Clear” stage and to set the strategic priorities for the future. These included the articulation of focus for our strategic advantages, strategy screen, trajectories for the future, and a vision for the community impact through the next three years.

**Part 3 – Getting Moving**

We then convened two sessions with stakeholders and participants throughout the community to help us envision the possibilities for our strategies. Over 30 people were involved in these engagements, which generated multiple ideas of paths, programs, and experiments to fulfill the desired intent of the strategic impact and maximize our effectiveness.

The staff of the YWCA then narrowed the array of possibilities to the most promising, developed models for resourcing and putting them into action, and identified indicators of success.

The planning was guided by a task force of the following staff and board members: Board Chair Robert McCarthy, Board Member Julia Markley, Executive Director Susan Stoltenberg, and staff members Rebecca Alexander, Julie Houston, Trisha Martin, and Mamak Tabrizian.
The YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all.

**priorities**

1. Creating opportunity for all women
2. Facilitating safety and security for all women now
3. Mobilizing a caring community around the needs of all women and people of color

**frames of action**

- Pathways to Careers
- Leadership of Women in Industry
- Civic Leadership of Women
- Long-term Support for DV Survivors
- Partnerships for Engaging Men and Boys
- Coalitions for Advocacy
- Education for Power Equity
Our strategic plan is rooted in ideas of who we are and what we are all about. These are the beliefs that guide us, the intent that shapes our vision, and the ways we want to engage in our communities. We believe our identity is unique. We believe our identity is powerful.
OUR ULTIMATE AIMS

These ideas are about our commitment, our resolve, about how we want to “show up” in our communities. We recognize that a kind of essence and ethic needs to be present in us before the kind of change we envision will be realized through us.

As such, in all things we will:

- Be courageous.
- Trust people to know their own experience best.
- Focus on lasting change.
- Consider all women.

OUR PREMISES

We hold fast to certain fundamental ideas to inform our work. These ideas are our conceptual foundation, our starting point, and our guideposts. They are the reason why we are giving our lives to the mission of the YWCA.

These are our premises:

- Strong women make strong societies.
- Our best future is led by people of all backgrounds.
- Cycles of violence and poverty can be broken.
- Only working together can we achieve racial equity.
- Justice can be attained through the thoughtful action of informed communities.

OUR INTENDED IMPACT

Our ideas about intended impact are the areas of change we would like to effect. They are description of what change the YWCA will achieve in society, and of how our world will be a better place as a result of our presence, engagement, and investment.

We intend to:

- Create opportunity for all women
- Facilitate safety and security for all women now
- Mobilize a caring community for all women and people of color
- Attain racial equity for all within progressive women’s movements
- Inspire public consideration of the needs and rights of all women
OUR BEST MEANS

We believe that every endeavor is guided by a set of commitments not just about the “why” and the “what,” but also the “how,” the ways we are committed to engaging those we serve.

These are our “how” ideas:

- Genuine connection between people is at the root of human transformation.
- Flexible and adaptive approaches help us respond to the changing needs of people and culture.
- The impacts we intend to achieve call for purposefully developed allies and partnerships, especially with racial and ethnic minority organizations.
- Durable progress will be made only when system change accompanies individual transformation.
- We can effectively serve people and communities only when we truly seek to understand.
- Social change requires an investment in developing the leadership of others.
Over the next few years, our focus will be directed toward achieving a certain kind of impact throughout the communities of greater Portland. This is our strategic direction. This direction will shape our energy, our priorities, and our action going forward.
By prioritizing efforts that create opportunity for all women, we intend for women to define for themselves what it means to be successful and have access to the resources and tools they need to achieve those goals. In addition, and particularly among historically disadvantaged women, we aim to clear obstacles from the paths of women and girls in our community. If we are successful, our community will enjoy the benefits of women’s leadership in larger numbers. Our schools will realize the benefits of girls’ engagement across all subject areas—not just those characterized as “appropriate for girls” in media. And our families will know the power of mothers and daughters whose lives are full of nourishment and encouragement.

When we’re successful, we believe our community will be characterized by the following traits:

A. Women will exercise leadership.
B. Women and girls will maximize their educational opportunities.
C. Women’s work will be valued.
D. Women will have access to affordable childcare.
Conditions of Trait A

Women will exercise leadership.

Whether at work, in civic life, or in their own homes, we believe that strong women can transform their environments for the better, particularly when they hold positions of leadership. Unfortunately, more than three decades after the height of the women’s rights movement in the United States, women are still woefully underrepresented in business and civic leadership. Most women even struggle for parity within their own homes.

In a 2012 article in the Harvard Business Review, leadership experts Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman demonstrated that colleagues tend to rate women leader’s effectiveness higher than men’s, from mid-level managers to chief executives. What new heights might businesses, communities, and families reach if women exercised leadership more freely and fully?

An example of excellence

In 1995, Johnson & Johnson had a bold goal. They wanted to be the number one company in the world for women executives. After a few failed experiments, Johnson & Johnson found success in 2002 when they partnered with Smith College’s Executive Education Program for Women to design a leadership academy specifically for women. As a result, they increased the number of women in leadership positions at Johnson and Johnson 30% over the next 10 years and enjoyed astonishing retention rates of 90-95% among female executives. Today, Johnson & Johnson’s organizational health scores, a common metric used to predict a company’s future performance, are among the highest in the world.

Priority No 1
Create opportunity for all women
Conditions of Trait B

Women and girls will maximize their educational opportunities.

There have been significant advances in academic opportunities for women during the course of the past few generations. Women began the 20th Century banned from most institutions of higher education. But just 100 years later, women’s enrollment in four-year colleges consistently outpaces men’s. Despite this encouraging trend, there are persistent and concerning features of women’s education in Oregon.

Firstly, our high school graduation rates must improve—across the board. Oregon has consistently ranked in the bottom five on this metric in the United States during the past decade. While women tend to graduate at slightly higher rates than men, we still have work to do, particularly in lessening the gap between graduation rates of students of color and their white peers. In order to support women’s economic opportunity, we must also inspire more women and girls to study in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The pay gap between genders persists across all sectors in Oregon, but it is smallest in STEM fields. There, women typically earn $0.92 on the dollar compared to men. The statewide average in the gender pay gap is $0.79.

Our focus on women’s education in Oregon should also include attention to increasing accessibility of professional certificates and Associate’s degrees for women over the age of 30. For this group of women, a modest investment of time and resources can mean the difference between a poverty wage and a living wage. For women already living in poverty—those who are the primary caregiver of their children, those coping with a controlling and abusive relationship, or those facing a myriad of these and other barriers—such educational advancement can be out of reach. What would it mean for the YWCA to help clear the way?

An example of excellence

Oregon Tradeswomen Inc. (OTI) was founded to empower women and girls to seek careers in the trades twenty-five years ago. In that time, OTI has supported thousands of Oregon women to obtain living wage employment through the provision of pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs in the trades. By focusing on a specific deficit in women’s educational opportunities, specifically women’s historic exclusion from construction, engineering, and utility careers, OTI has had a tremendous impact. Their founder and executive director frequently shares her experience in Oregon with organizations hoping to achieve a similar impact across the United States.
Conditions of Trait C

Women’s work will be valued.

Traditionally-conceived female occupations, such as childcare provision, teaching, and nursing, have paid less historically than traditionally-conceived male occupations, even when controlling for the level of skill and education. In a capitalist economy, market forces play a role in this disparity. So also do the funding models of nonprofits, schools, and hospitals. But even when controlling for these and other factors, there is no doubt that the wage gap in the United States is an issue of gender, not jobs.

According to a 2014 report from the Oregon Commission on Civil Rights, Oregon women earn, on average, $0.79 on the dollar to men for doing the same job. This gap is even larger for African American women and Latinas who earn $0.64 and $0.55, respectively, compared to every dollar earned by men. These pay gaps have profound consequences for Oregon families, particularly those headed by single women. In a state where one-third of single, working mothers and their children live in poverty, we must consider the profound impact that eliminating the wage gap could have on some of our state’s most pressing concerns, such as ending childhood poverty.

An example of excellence

In 2013, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino learned something intolerable about his city. Unlike the rest of the country whose wage gap is about the difference between $0.77 and one dollar, Boston women earn $0.91 cents for every dollar earned by Boston men. Even though Boston was leaps and bounds ahead of the rest of America, Mayor Menino was unsatisfied. Later that year, the City of Boston government began working with Boston employers to implement wage parity initiatives within their city. For participating employers like Suffolk Construction, this meant reviewing their entire wage scale, comparing how men and women’s pay different for each position in their company, and reviewing retention and promotion rates. Suffolk Construction completed this work in less than one fiscal year and were began their 2014-2015 year an equal pay employer, taking the City of Boston one step closer to become the best American city for working women.
**Conditions of Trait D**

*Women will have access to affordable childcare.*

According to a recent report from the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, approximately one-third of all working single mothers in Oregon live in poverty. This should not stand. Working mothers should have affordable and reliable support. A 2013 report from the Oregon Child Care Research Partnership at Oregon State University illuminated these facts about our state:

- Childcare can cost nearly twice as much as college tuition at Oregon’s public universities.
- Child care prices in Oregon increased 13% from 2004 to 2012 while household incomes declined 9% (15% for single mothers).

As a women’s organization, we recognize that the vast majority of childcare providers are also women. We believe that childcare should be affordable and that childcare providers should be paid fair, living wages. We will work with our partners on a policy-level to secure funding for needed subsidies to ensure these provisions for parents and childcare workers. In addition, we encourage private and public employers alike to understand the value of supporting working mothers and fathers and to meet the needs of their families, especially when affordable, ample, and quality childcare is out of reach for so many.

*An example of excellence*

In the closing keynote of the first-ever White House Working Families Summit in 2014, First Lady Michelle Obama delivered a powerful message about the importance of employers putting their employees’ families first. She shared her own story. When her second daughter was very young, Mrs. Obama was working a professional job part-time and struggling to balance the needs of her employer with the needs of her family. That struggle became more acute when her trusted babysitter quit for what Mrs. Obama called a good reason: to make more money. At that point Mrs. Obama quit working entirely, but the University of Chicago Hospital soon recruited her for a senior-level position. Unable to find a babysitter, and with a husband out of town, Mrs. Obama took her four-month old daughter to her interview and told her prospective employer plainly that her family was going to come first. Her interviewer responded, “Of course,” and offered her a job. Because her employer understood her needs and provided her with flexibility, Mrs. Obama said she worked like she owed them something—a desirable quality in any staff person.
### Priority No 2 Facilitate safety and security for all women now

We intend to meet the immediate needs of women and girls experiencing crisis while simultaneously taking action to ensure their long-term security. Our strategies and tactics will be informed by the many levels on which the safety and security of women and girls can be undermined—the emotional, physical, psychological, and financial. Our work will be informed by the intersectional nature of oppression, namely how safety and security can be more difficult for women of color, elderly women, and transgender women to obtain.

Throughout the greater Portland community, we seek to realize a future characterized by the following traits:

A. Women and girls will experience well-being, on every level.
B. Men and boys will be invested in women’s safety.
C. All women will have circles of support.
D. Women will enjoy choice at every stage of their lives.
 Conditions of Trait A

**Women and girls will experience well-being, on every level.**

Every year, the Portland Police Department receives 5,000 calls from people experiencing or witnessing domestic violence. This is a staggering number, and it does not yet represent the violence that goes unreported and the violence that is harder to see. What can a neighbor do when she witnesses the increasing isolation of the woman next door? What should she do when she recognizes that her neighbor’s husband has forbid her from talking to family members? What happens when he has replaced her credit cards with a modest weekly allowance of cash? Domestic violence is more than physical abuse; it is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner.

We envision relationships which are characterized by respect, love and dignity, not violence. These are the kinds of relationships people should come to expect for themselves. Inspiring deep and durable self-worth among others is challenging. Helping someone regain this sense of personal value after surviving a violent relationship is even more difficult. But this sense of worth and the confidence that comes with it can be a powerful tool in breaking the cycle of domestic violence.

**An example of excellence**

Since 1990, more than 1500 clinicians have delivered a program called the Trauma Recovery Empowerment Model or TREM. Developed by Dr. Maxine Harris to help women recover from the trauma that can result for all forms of violence, this 29-session support group has touched the lives of thousands of women and men. Discussions cover topics of sexual, physical, emotional, and institutional abuse. Participants explore and reframe the connection between abuse experiences and other current difficulties. This program has been adopted by domestic violence service providers across the country, including our partner organization Impact NW.

**Priority No 2**

Facilitate safety and security for all women now
Men and boys will be invested in women’s safety.

Activist and educator Jackson Katz put it best: “Ending violence against women is not a ‘women’s issue.’ It is a men’s issue.” While men are certainly not the only perpetrators of violence in our homes and in our communities, they do comprise the vast majority of abusers. Recognizing the enormous over-representation of men among perpetrators of violence, particularly domestic violence, leads prevention experts to ask, “What is it about the way that we are raising boys into men that contributes to the devaluing and abuse of women?”

Throughout his career, Jackson Katz has urged men to ask of themselves and their peers, “Aside from women realizing the right to live a life free of violence, what potential may be unlocked by the end of violence against women? How might men’s violence be holding back entire community from realizing its full potential?” We at the YWCA believe that ending violence against women will usher in a societal vibrancy so great that few other accomplishments could mirror.

An example of excellence

Men Can Stop Rape’s mission is to mobilize men to use their strength for creating cultures free from violence, especially men’s violence against women. Founded in 1997, this organization works across the United States on college campuses, in the media, and with elected officials to eradicate rape culture. Instead of helping women reduce their risk of being victims of men’s violence, Men Can Stop Rape focuses on helping men develop healthy relationships. They have reached over 2 million youth and professionals with their award-winning youth program the Men of Strength Club, their college program Campus Men of Strength Club, and their Strength Media public awareness materials.
Conditions of Trait C

All women will have circles of support.

The profession of social work is a complex and highly variable field of human service. Social workers support the families of children with special needs. Social workers support veterans returning from combat. Social workers support survivors of rape. Uniting this field is a simple and important idea: People need at least one person in their life they can count on.

Finding support is critical to our security. It is our support systems that help us face life’s challenges. They get us through car accidents, stomach flu, and the loss of those we love. And for those of us whose challenges are more aptly described as forces than occurrences, support systems are even more important. People living in poverty, people who are elderly, people experiencing domestic violence all need others to count on. Some of them find this support from family or friends. Others look to their communities. The YWCA has answered this call for almost 115 years in Portland. And we will continue to. Providing a circle of support to someone in need is a profound contribution.

An example of excellence

CirclesUSA believes that solutions to poverty don’t have to be complicated, but that they have to be personal. They are dedicated to the idea that the responsibility for both poverty and prosperity rests not only in the hands of individuals, but also with societies, institutions, and communities. Affiliates of CirclesUSA across the country work with entire communities to pair people living in poverty with others with greater financial and social resources to build a caring circle of support. While those living in poverty access financial empowerment and job training resources, their partners receive training on how to be effective and respectful allies to people with backgrounds different from their own. In a 2012 article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, CirclesUSA reported that it now operates this program from 65 communities across the United States.
Women will enjoy choice at every stage of their lives.

One of the ways that domestic violence advocates help others understand the profound significance of the co-occurrence of poverty and violence is to characterize the “choices” that survivors face in these situations. Survivors in poverty regularly experience judgment from others about their choice to continue living with their abusers, particularly if they have children. We’ve all heard something similar to the following, “Why does she continue to put her children at risk? She knows he has a temper.” What advocates help others understand is that survivors living in poverty aren’t choosing between staying and leaving. They’re choosing between the known and unknown threats. They are choosing between the abuser in their house and the dozens of potential abusers they may encounter on the streets should a friends’ hospitality wear out, a shelter be full, or a family member’s allegiances change. What kinds of choices are these?

These choices are not entirely dissimilar to what women may face at other critical life junctures. For instance, parents sometimes face a similar choice when considering divorce: Remain in an unsatisfying relationship or realize what can be more than a 50% reduction in Social Security income. The common features of these “choices” are that there are no good options. We at the YWCA believe that having real choice is a central feature to women’s safety and security. Without safety and security, we cannot claim women’s empowerment.

An example of excellence

For over 45 years, BUILD has worked in some of Chicago’s toughest and most violent neighborhoods. Since children who are at risk of joining gangs often have little in the way of meaningful choices, BUILD’s youth development programs have worked hard to establish interesting, constructive alternatives to gang involvement. Their programs focus on recognizing the innate and individual strengths of the youth with whom they work and “build” from there using culturally-responsive tutoring, workforce development, and college preparatory program models. Over 3,000 Chicago teens have graduated from their programs, avoided gang involvement and realized greater possibilities for their futures.