



YMCA of Uruguay Strengthening YMCA Movements

Introduction

The YMCA of Uruguay has been a leading YMCA in Latin America and the world for over 95 years since its founding in 1909. Historically, the YMCA has had a very strong focus on youth and community development. For many decades, the YMCA of Uruguay was the site where the professional directors of all Latin American YMCAs were trained. Today, the YMCA of Uruguay has a presence in five cities impacting over 10,000 members and 8,000 outreach program participants and beneficiaries. The YMCA of Montevideo in Uruguay's capital city, and the country's largest association, provides technical and financial assistance to the YMCAs in the cities of Paysandu, Salto and Rivera.



Board Development workshop, October 2005

A strong YMCA Movement has been defined as "one which has mission clarity, is socially relevant (transformative programs) and institutionally viable and accountable."
-- World Alliance of YMCAs

As was the case with many economies in Latin America, the economy of Uruguay recently faced one of the most serious economic and financial crises of its history. From 1998 to 2002, the country saw the collapse of many banks and other financial institutions. As a result of this challenging environment, the YMCA of Montevideo lost many members, properties and staff in an effort to reduce the deficit and excruciating debt.

In November 2004, the YMCA of Montevideo asked YMCA of the USA for technical assistance to reposition the YMCA, restructure its debt, detect and solve its root problems and strategize the future growth strategy through a four-year movement strengthening process.

Strong community organizations, such as the YMCA, strengthen the social fabric, promote social inclusion and are supportive of the development of civically engaged community members.

Plan and methodology

The movement strengthening plan includes two steps: 1.) critical assessment of the key strengths and weaknesses and 2.) the development of a realistic implementation plan to address the key institutional capacity building priorities. In Uruguay, these steps are done every year.

Assessment

In February 2005, YMCA of the USA sent a technical team to Uruguay to help conduct an institutional assessment (diagnostic). The team was composed of local U.S. YMCA CEOs, VPs and YMCA of the USA staff.

The diagnostic identified four areas to be addressed: 1.) structural issues, including governance and constitutional review, clarification of roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers and a human resources plan; 2.) long-term strategic plan, including redesign of budget and financial plans, branch roles and responsibilities and establishment of benchmarks and targets; 3.) liability management, including debt reduction and development of membership and program strategies for new revenue; 4) asset management, including a facilities maintenance plan and cost analysis of the current facilities and programs.

Implementation plan, Years I and II

The outcomes of the first assessment were used by the board and staff leadership to implement a plan of action for Years I and II to include the following:

- Board development process (U.S. YMCA consultants)
- Human resources restructuring and update of HR management practices (with local and U.S. YMCA HR consultants)
- Professional development programs
- Restructuring of the metropolitan administration (local consultants)
- Market analysis, testing of new products/services (local consultants)
- Buildings assessment and facilities management practices (U.S. YMCA consultant)
- Management tool Balance Score Card (YMCA Brazil consultants) and corporate budget

Keys to success

- High board and staff commitment to the process
- Strong leadership to the process from the board and CEO
- Help from external consultants to address sensitive or technically demanding issues, such as governance, human resources

Achievements of 2005 and 2006

After two years, the main achievements include:

- A significant **reduction of debt** (from USD 1.5 million in 2002 to USD 200,000 in 2006);
- **Deficit reduction** (from 28 percent in FY 2002/2003 to 3.8 percent in FY 2005/2006);
- Incorporation of **model management practices** in human resources management and board development;
- Development of a **strategic plan and budget** (the YMCA had been operating without a written budget for the previous two fiscal years),
- **20 percent increase** in fee-paying membership, and
- The strengthening effort has been extended to **all YMCAs** in the country.

U.S. YMCA participation

- The YMCA of the Pikes Peak Region (Colorado Springs) has a longstanding partnership with the YMCA of Uruguay. Its CEO helped with the overall assessment and sent a staff specialist in facilities management.
- The YMCA of Seattle shared technical staff to help with human resources restructuring.
- The YMCA of Houston shared senior staff to help with governance and board development.
- YMCA of the USA shared consultants in HR, board development and technology.



Future plans

In 2007, the focus is to develop a new health and wellness program model; professional development policy and plan for staff and volunteers; facilities renovation and update; information systems update focusing on membership and programs; and strengthening the YMCAs of Salto, Paysandú, San José and Rivera in social outreach program management, HR and financial management, membership base and income generation.

The YMCAs of Sao Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) are sharing technical advice on fitness programs as well as their governance models. The YMCA of Winnipeg (Canada) is providing financial resources to help strengthen the YMCAs of Salto and Paysandú and IDHU (outreach programs department of YMCA Montevideo).

testimonials

"We understand that this is our highest and historical responsibility in this time. The efforts of so many men and women, the loss of assets and putting programs on hold will be of no use if we do not demonstrate that we are efficient and sustainable. Failing that, we will not be able to continue bearing true witness as we have been doing for the past 95 years."

—Gerardo Vitoreira, Board Chair, YMCA of Montevideo

"Certainly, for the YMCA of Montevideo, and by extension, for all the YMCAs in Uruguay, this [movement strengthening] project will provide the essential support to be able to update and modernize our organization."

— Agustín Silva, CEO and National General Secretary, YMCA of Uruguay

Visit the YMCA of Montevideo Web site at www.acj-ymca.org

