

Principles & Practices in Action

By Erin DeStefanis, CT Nonprofits



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Every day, CT Nonprofits promotes the good work of its members and the fundamental values of quality, responsibility and accountability that govern the nonprofit community. Each issue of the Nonprofit Advantage highlights one organization that has improved their infrastructure and operations through the use of our Principles and Practices for Nonprofit Excellence in Connecticut (Principles & Practices). Through this series, we aim to showcase our members' great work and underscore the importance of knowing how to form, govern and manage a nonprofit in a manner that will earn the support and confidence of stakeholders, consumers, and the public. This month we examine the work of YWCA Hartford Region.

YWCA Hartford Region is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and

**eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca
hartford region**

dignity for all. This organization is part of a legacy that places it at the forefront of movements for racial justice, fair pay and equality for women.

YWCA helps the community by providing a number of services, including child care for more than 850 children in seven towns, safe and supportive housing, a child abuse prevention program, financial education

for 400 women, and a young women's leadership program. It also offers a racial justice awareness program for more than 1,700 individuals through the Stand Against Racism movement. Today, it is the oldest and largest multicultural women's organization in the world.

Four years ago, the YWCA Board and CEO recognized a lack of strategic focus, outdated policies and procedures, and declining Board engagement. In addition, the Board faced delayed decision-making and unclear Board and CEO responsibilities. Since then, the Board has enhanced its governance, strategic planning and leadership functions. Most importantly, it has made significant changes to the way it governs itself.

To achieve these objectives, the Board

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worked with a consultant and established a governance committee in charge of instituting a framework to achieve maximum Board function. To continue to enhance the quality of the Board's work, the organization established a long-term plan to conduct ongoing reviews and recommendations. The Board also focused its efforts on the mission alignment and development of a new strategic plan.

CT Nonprofits' Principles and Practices helped guide the YWCA Board by utilizing the top ten responsibilities of nonprofit Boards and identifying the areas where it could be more effective. This included more involvement in fundraising, a more rigorous process in evaluating the CEO, and ways to continue to assure legal and ethical accountability and integrity.

This effort involved a major time commitment from both Board and staff. Because of the potential impact of the YWCA in the community, the Board made the time commitment and continues to stay very involved.

As a result of the YWCA's improvements, the Board has undertaken new projects in fundraising, public policy, and strategic program evaluation. In addition, Board giving has increased by 50% in the last two years. The YWCA established a Racial Justice Committee and hired a Racial Justice Director to focus on the elimination of racism in all the organization does both internally and in the community. The Board also made some difficult decisions which included eliminating the YWCA summer camp that was no longer profitable and leasing space to a start up school for low income boys with the option to purchase this space in the future. Overall, this transformation allowed the Board to function as a high performance team, and focus on the mission of the YWCA. ■

Has your nonprofit implemented our Principles & Practices in an effort to improve the quality, responsibility and accountability of the organization? If so, please let us know! Contact Melissa Harris at CT Nonprofits at 860-525-5080, or email her at mharris@ctnonprofits.org.

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