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Auburn YMCA

OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

February 2024





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In July 2023, the Auburn YMCA entered a one-year management agreement with the YMCA of Central New York. In addition to day-to-day operational management, one of the deliverables from YCNY was to provide a high-level operational assessment of the Auburn Y with recommendations to help improve and move the Y forward.

In our review, operations were compared to Y "Best Practices" and/or industry standards. Each area of this assessment reviews current practices with recommendations to improve or enhance operations, function and direction.

After reviewing this assessment, the goal should move to prioritizing where we go from here and develop next steps. We believe many of these recommendations are foundational and can be easily implemented. Others may have more futuristic impact but should be considered and be incorporated into a revised and/or updated strategic plan.

The Auburn YMCA has a long rich history that has proudly met the Auburn community's needs in youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. It is our goal to work with the volunteers and staff to ensure the Y remains a pillar of the community and that the contents of this report support the Auburn Y in the realization of this goal.



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Membership Assessment and Opportunities:

The Auburn YMCA is committed to supporting the community and believes that everyone can benefit from being a Y member. A Y membership is an experience defined by the creation of relationships and a strong sense of belonging. Intentional, cause driven relationship building is key to any successful YMCA. The member experience is the result of the atmosphere we create, the support we give, the connections we facilitate, the options we provide, and the inspiration we offer. A welcoming, engaging staff and a supportive environment, programs and facilities that support all people seeking health for themselves and their families is critical to building a strong membership base.

Observations

The Auburn Y's strengths include dedicated, passionate staff that are engaged, have a strong relationship with members, a solid base in some program areas (building back), a mix of wellness/fitness offerings and a commitment to serving all populations, and has a convenient location. Like many small Y's the Auburn Y does have some facility related challenges that can be barriers to membership growth, but we feel strongly there are foundational things that can be implemented or improved that would enhance the member experience and support growth.

Below is a list of recommendations that would enhance the member experience, grow membership, and/or increase the retention rate.

Recommendations

Facility

- First impressions are critical. The Auburn Y building is a well-maintained facility.
- Program spaces should be evaluated to assess their use, functionality, and appearance.
- Create a plan to upgrade fitness/cardio/strength equipment would be encouraged.



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Membership

- *Focus on building the foundation.*
- Build strategies related to membership growth, retention, and engagement.
- Train and develop the staff team on culture/engagement and the member experience at the Y.
- Create a staff uniform policy, that includes name tags, and all are aware of expectations of membership delivery.
- Identify and work toward strategic community relationships/partnerships.
- Launch member surveys to determine member needs.
- Establish the best method to track Net Promoter Score (NPS) and implement plan for follow-up to members.
- Work to ensure our membership demographics mirror that of the community that the branch is located to ensure that we are accurately serving all through a DEI lens.
- Evaluate community awareness of scholarship opportunities and the application process to eliminate barriers to receiving financial assistance.
- Utilize Y-USA Insight Hub to determine and support areas of opportunity for growth.
- Review and possibly expand third party reimbursement programs (Insurance).
- Review and evaluate corporate discounts.
- Continue to add value to Y memberships (program development is key to this)
- The Y is for all! – Continue to elevate this and share within the community and promote that financial assistance is available. Both would help position the Y as a charitable, mission driven organization.

Milestones Achieved: In the fall of 2023 the process to receive financial assistance for membership was revamped. The prior process included an application process followed by a wait period to allow for committee review of applications. The current model allows for immediate processing at the time of interest at the Y desk, eliminating a wait period for enrollment. In the fall of 2023 Third Party insurance options were added to include Renew Active, OnePass/Aptiva and Active & Fit. Additional options will be considered for 2025.



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Program Assessment and Opportunities:

The Auburn YMCA is a pillar of the community providing programming in Youth Development, Healthy Living and Social Responsibility. In evaluating the program menu, we identified a solid foundation of programs in youth development including childcare and camp. We also identified opportunities for growth in either the number of participants served or in new/expanded programming.

CURRENT PROGRAM OFFERINGS

- **Swim Lesson:** Swim lessons are a pillar program for Auburn YMCA membership growth. Maximizing this program area will benefit membership growth and meet a community need. Enrollment could be maximized by improved scheduling program sessions to increase the number of sessions per year. Pricing is \$50 for family members and \$150 for non- members. The current non-member pricing does support membership value. **Opportunity:** Evaluation of the current swim lesson yearly calendar could support increased session opportunities which would increase overall revenue and membership retention. Adding Safety Around the Water as a community event could also be a pathway to promote swim lessons and drive enrollment.
- **Pool Rentals:** The Auburn Central School District currently utilizes the Auburn YMCA pool for both practices and swim meets for both the Girls and Boys Varsity Swim Teams. While a facility rental agreement is in place, there is currently no payment for use of the pool. With the high cost of maintaining a pool, this arrangement should include payment for the facility use to cover operational costs. **Milestone Achieved:** Management met with the Auburn High School Athletic Director in November 2023 to explain that moving into the fall of 2024, that a rental fee will be required to continue use of the Auburn Y pool.



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- **Camp Y Owasco:** In 2023 Camp Y Owasco served 1,073 youth through both Resident and Day Camp. Recent years' trends show a decrease in residential campers and a growth in day camper participants. Resident Camp was offered for 4 weeks in 2023 and experienced an 11% decrease in income over 2022. Day camp was offered for 9 weeks and experienced a 13% increase in income over 2022.
Opportunity: Consideration should be given to the extent residential camp is offered. There may be opportunities to consolidate the number of weeks offered, increasing day camper spots. The schedule of the residential camp should be evaluated also to allow for cost-saving measures (reducing the number of days). The use of camp for additional programming should be considered. **Milestone Achieved:** The YMCA of the Triangle conducted a camp assessment in the fall of 2023 including a programmatic and facility evaluation. This assessment can be used to facilitate future conversations around programming and capital improvements.
- **Y-Pals:** The current Y-Pals model is struggling to thrive in the post-Covid environment. New child safety practices also need to be considered in evaluation of this program. This program may need to be evaluated and re-imagined to serve the community's needs. **Opportunity:** Consideration should be given to other youth programs/services such as Y-Achievers and Teen Leaders. **Milestone Achieved:** The newly hired Senior Youth Development Director is currently evaluating programs and determining growth opportunities.
- **Family Programming:** Many family programs are offered throughout the year, including Daddy/Daughter Dance, Babysitting Certifications, Game Nights, and Craft Events. **Opportunity:** There is an opportunity to increase family programs to add value to the family membership base. A coordinated yearly plan to ensure value to family members can increase family membership retention. **Milestone Achieved:** The newly hired Senior Youth Development Director is currently evaluating programs and determining growth opportunities.
- **Childcare:** The Y currently offers School Age Childcare, Universal Preschool, and Toddler both onsite and off-site in Auburn, Weedsport, and Moravia. These programs comprise of 38% of the Y's overall income and are strong contributors to the Y's revenue source. **Opportunity:** The Y should continue to evaluate the



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management of these programs as appropriate staffing, pricing, and daily management can increase the overall profit margin. **Milestone achieved:** The Y hired a Senior Director of Youth Development in November 2023 to focus on program quality and program management. Many operational improvements have already been made to maximize resources.

- **Health & Wellness:** There is currently a good offering of both group exercise classes and personal training. There is also a strong offering of Evidence Based Health Initiatives (EBHI) to serve as membership feeders. **Opportunity:** Continue to expand Health & Wellness offerings to remain relevant and keep members engaged. Also continue to engage with the local medical community to expand physician referral opportunities. There are opportunities to increase engagement in the community through promotion of the Y 360 Virtual Platform.
- **Events:** The Auburn Y facilitates 2 signature events to the community. The Bon Ton Roulet (BTR) and the Downtown Mile. The Bon Ton Roulet is a very successful fundraising event with a very high-quality output. This event has a history of a partnership with the Cortland YMCA which should be evaluated to fully capture appropriate resources to cover all true staffing costs. The Downtown Mile is a valuable community event to promote the Auburn Y. While this is a great community event, a cost analysis should be done to evaluate the actual staffing costs related to the true benefits. **Opportunity:** The BTR could be re-imagined maximizing resources and attracting new riders that may be interested in a tour that is less than 7 days. The relationship with the Cortland Y should be evaluated to ensure program growth and to limit operational risk. The Downtown Mile is an opportunity for collaboration with the city or other partners to provide a collective community experience. **Milestone Achieved:** A professional ride director was hired for the 2024 BTR to assist in growth and overall program delivery. Responsibilities and duties were also outlined with Cortland Y and an MOU is in place to provide clarity on roles and payment guidelines.



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NEW PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES (Recommended)

- **Safety Around the Water:** This program teaches participants how to be safe around the water. This program can be provided on land during community events and in school districts in a 45 – 60-minute session. It also can run as a session-based program. This program will assist with brand recognition, getting out into the community and be a feeder for swim lessons and other programs.
- **Family Programming:** There is currently a good range of family programming but a more deliberate effort to schedule programming to include current offerings and new programming should be fully promoted to current and new family members. Childcare and UPK families should also be engaged in these programs to promote membership. **Milestone Achieved:** The new Senior Director of Youth Development is currently evaluating staffing levels to create a staffing model to allow for growth in all areas of youth development.
- **Teen Leaders:** Teen leaders in a program to engage you in community service and social emotional learning. The program would not be a high revenue program but would engage the many teens that are in the building after school.
- **Y-Achievers:** Y Achievers is a career and college readiness program which would be a great partnership with the surrounding colleges and is an easily grant funded program. This also would engage the teens that are in our building.
- **Active Older Adults:** With the growing population of Baby Boomers, a focus should be put on intentional programming and community building activities for this population.

Additional Observations and Opportunities

The Auburn Y should consider looking to grow programs outside its current facility. Programs housed offsite, could be done through partnerships with local schools, churches, parks, colleges and/or other organizations. This type of program development presents unlimited opportunities for the Auburn Y and meeting the needs of the surrounding communities.



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Facility Audit/Summary:

The Auburn YMCA is currently located in a dated facility that does not meet the needs of all current YMCA programming needs. The over-abundance of space results in increased operational costs and the facility flow is not conducive to membership growth.

Recommendations: In addition to the recommendations listed above, the following should also be considered.

- Develop a facilities asset list (updated list of mechanical assets will assist with proper Capital Planning.) **In progress.**
- Create an ongoing facility priority list that will help manage and prioritize all facility issues (and the financial implications). **In progress.**
- Additionally, and more granular dive into higher rated items on deficiency list so that a comprehensive “action list” can be created based on importance.
- Evaluate and plan for the overall long-range plan for the current facility or for the move to a new location.

Governance Structure & Board Composition and Structure:

The Board of Directors is currently comprised of a passionate, dedicated group of volunteers that are committed to seeing the Auburn Y grow, thrive and serve the community.

Board Composition and Structure

The board consists of 17 dedicated members. Recommendations would be to focus on growing this group, becoming more diverse and having a strong representation of the community the Y serves. Look to adding members to the group that represent some of larger employers of the area and/or those organizations/business the Y wants to partner with. Committee structure should be revisited and evaluated. Charts of works would be recommended for all active committees. Creating a board matrix indicating demographic/occupational/business affiliation data, and a more intentional process of recruiting a diverse board is also recommended. **Milestones Achieved:** Updated By-laws in progress that will outline updated committee structure. Board matrix in progress.



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Corporate Documents & Strategic Plan

The constitution and bylaws are currently in the process of revision and is near completion. A new Strategic Plan has been adopted and the process to organize steps to achieve outlined goals is underway.

Future Executive Leadership

The management agreement between the Auburn YMCA and YCNY gives each organization the opportunity to assess the sustainability of this partnership and develop a short-term plan to move the Auburn YMCA forward.

We believe the Auburn Y can benefit from this relationship and work towards implementing these recommendations and focus on building the foundation necessary to be a viable, sustainable nonprofit in the community.

Regardless of future direction we recommend that the key volunteers of both YMCAs, begin to meet to get to know one another and start developing relationships. In this way, mutually beneficial knowledge can be exchanged, and if further collaboration is desired, the key individuals negotiating that future will already possess some level of familiarity.

Marketing Overview

Website/ Social Media Outlets

Overall, the Y does a nice job with the marketing and is in alignment with Y branding standards. The website is contemporary and pleasing to the eye, giving the impression that the Auburn YMCA is relevant to today's needs. The website incorporates fundamentals of Y branding, making good use of images which link Auburn YMCA programs to the YMCA's areas of focus. These images also do a good job expressing why and how the Y could be pertinent to a broad spectrum of ages and social groups within the Auburn community. Social media outlets used regularly by the Auburn Y are linked to the front page of website (Facebook and Instagram) and serves as one of the primary communication channels with members (and the community).



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General Observations:

- Using multiple methods to communicate programming, membership and services is important.
- Continue to use in-house marketing strategies. Bulletin boards, flyers and digital media. Consider postcard style marketing that can be shared via downtown stores and used in mailings.
- Increase the Y's visibility in the community by continuing to participate in community events/functions.
- Looking to hosting Days of Service program that can highlight impact of the Y.

Financial Development

The Auburn Y's Annual Campaign is the foundation for all Y's financial development. The annual campaign is the vehicle that leads to building strong relationships and is a precursor to capital and endowment development efforts. It is also a great way to tell the Y story providing an opportunity to share the impact the Y has on so many people and the value it brings to the community.

All language should be case driven on all fund development communications. For example: As a charitable, mission-driven organization, the Y strives to ensure that its programs and services are available to all who wish to participate. Our scholarship program provides financial assistance to those individuals, children and families who are not able to afford memberships or programs.

Recommendations:

- Strive for 100% of Board of Directors & Full-Time staff participation in giving to campaign.
- Board & staff members should serve as campaigners, making in person asks, sending letters/emails and phone calls.
- Look to recruiting passionate members to share their Y stories and serve as campaigners.
- Look to a more robust online giving format that makes giving online easy and simple.
- Continue to grow the Annual Support Campaign to reach at least 10% of revenue coming from contributed dollars.



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Staff Structure and Staff Development

The staff at the YMCA serve a critical role in providing programs and services for the membership and the community. The staff also plays a vital role in developing the relationships needed to grow community support for the YMCA. Relationship building is every staff member's responsibility.

The Auburn Y leadership team consists of 6 team members (Branch Director, Finance/HR Director, Membership Director, Facilities Director, and Senior Program Director).

Milestones Achieved: This was a focus of the first 6 months of the assessment period and successful transitions were made to put together a high functioning leadership team. The following positions were filled to support future growth: Facilities Director, Finance/HR Director, and Senior Program Director of Youth Development. Various positions were evaluated and the tough decision to eliminate some positions was made to allow for improved efficiency and use of resources. The 2023 budgeted productivity ratio was 70%, the rolling average due to staff transitions was 77%, the current 2024 budgeted productivity rate is 64%.

Recommendations:

- Continue to evaluate current staff structure and ensure it will support the Y in meeting its strategic direction.
- Implement a staff recognition plan.
- Create a staff recruitment plan that allows the Y to attract top talent.
- Implement a uniform policy (staff shirt) that would make it easier to identify staff (include a name tag).
- Develop a staff training & development process that aligns with job function.
- Ensure a talent development system is in place and executed in affirming, culturally competent and effectively.
- Encourage the team by creating a spirit of camaraderie, inclusion, and sense of mission and purpose.
- Create a learning organization to help staff achieve their highest potential.
- Utilize Y-USA resources focused on staff development and training.



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Business/Finance Overview

Like many Y's, the Auburn Y continues to rebuild from the pandemic. This will continue to be a long road of building back programs and membership. But the goal of this relationship will be to focus on creating a strong foundation (basic functions) that can be built upon and support the Y moving forward.

Before the YCNY officially started the management agreement, the previous Auburn Y Chief Financial Officer announced their resignation. As a result, an interim CFO was put in place for 3- 4 months. During this interim, the Human Resource Director also resigned. Together it was determined to combine the positions and recruit a Finance/Human Resources Director. **Milestone Achieved:** A Finance/HR Director was hired and started employment in September 2023.

Additional Recommendations

- Review and evaluate new operating and accounting software solutions. The current operations software is dated, not efficient and overly challenging in many aspects. Recommendation is to move the operating system to Daxko Operations. Initial conversations with Daxko have begun. The current contract with Active ends in 2025. **Milestone Achieved:** A plan has been discussed with Daxko to begin the transition in late 2024, with a full transition completed in 2025.
- Look to additional cost reduction strategies (Y Purchasing, etc.).
- As mentioned above, all program and membership pricing strategies need to be reviewed and evaluated. Recommendations should be made and implemented before the summer to help support cash flow.
- The physical assets inventory of the organization should be reviewed and updated annually.
- All leadership staff should be involved in the annual budget process and on-going forecasting. **Milestone Achieved:** All leadership staff were involved in the 2024 budget development and have been trained in forecasting procedures.