

**THE WOMEN'S COMMUNITY BUILDING:
DEFINING THEIR FUTURE**

Performance Analysis &
Intervention Project
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DESIGNING COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS & MESSAGES 23-640

The Women's Community Building (WCB), administered by the Board of Directors for the City Federation of Women's Organizations (CFWO), is experiencing a transition in its services while redefining its role in the greater Ithaca community. This is appropriate to an organization whose mission is "...to act as a catalyst for the improvement of the lives of all women...", which requires a reassessment of and response to the changing demographics in the surrounding community.

BACKGROUND ISSUES

The mission statement as outlined in the Women's Community Building print materials is as follows:

The Women's Community Building is a non-profit organization that offers a continuing education program, The Women's Information Network for entrepreneurs and women seeking employment, housing for women in transition, current job listing information, a resource and referral link, rental space for other organizations, and office space for entrepreneurs and emerging women's organizations.

Any proposed interventions must be in keeping with the philosophy of this mission and its implications in the community. The proposed transition for the Women's Community Building, as conveyed by board members and staff at the WCB, involves the design and implementation of several ideas (not an exhaustive list):

- Renovate the third floor residence center, previously used for women in economic transition, into office space for women owned businesses and non-profit organizations. The purpose is two fold:
 - 1) Generate needed revenue at a time of donor base decline by renting out the space
 - 2) Encourage sharing of expertise and build networking opportunities by working with these businesses and assisting them in their enterprises

- Attract a growing number of young professional women to their services
- Revitalize the promotional strategies used for the education programs
- Implement a survey, currently in design, targeting other non-profit organizations who may be interested in collaboration, trade, or use of WCB building space; this is being done by an intern, Amy Spenciner
- Increase membership in the WCB to improve fiscal operations and strengthen outreach; this would involve re-evaluation of current promotional activities to increase image appeal, identification with the community, and attract new members
- Publication for the first time of “The Women’s Pages”, a directory of women-owned and women-run businesses in the Finger Lakes Region, by the WCB

RECENT PROPOSALS

Prior to the program coordinator’s first contact with our program at Ithaca College, several proposals and surveys were developed in recent years in part to define a future direction for the WCB. In 1993 a Cornell University student, Joanne Cohen, conducted a survey to generate a data base of resources and materials for the Women’s Economic Resource Center that was to be established at the WCB. Although the center was never established, the data base exists on file at the WCB.

In 1994 two separate proposals were conducted. The first proposal was designed by LunaMedia, a woman-owned, full-service public relations and marketing agency located in Ithaca. The outline of their Action Plan included ideas for a four step process:

1. Marketing Research
2. Image Building
3. Marketing
4. Public Relations

A cost and timeline contract was not offered because the proposal was never implemented due to financial considerations. The second proposal that year was an informal analysis done by an Ithaca College student, Jacqueline Calhoun. She collected information over a period of two months during the fall using an exit survey she drafted. This survey was conducted entirely in the lobby of the WCB,

and her analysis offered suggestions for future program options and pointed out a growing need to reach out to younger career-oriented women.

The most recent proposal consisted of a formal, comprehensive set of recommendations provided by students of the Cornell University Johnson Graduate School of Management. The proposal, presented this fall, included the following categories of recommendations:

- Strategic mission statement
- Business incubator design model
- Management structure analysis
- Web page treatment
- Financial Analysis
- Rental base expansion projects
- Library of business resources

They obtained some of their information from research conducted on women's organizations (such as the YWCA), interviews with members of the board and staff at the WCB, and presidential heads of clubs that use the WCB facilities. The students conducted questionnaires to get feedback from many of these clubs and organizations regarding present and future roles for the WCB within the Ithaca area. However, it is not certain they used this information according to Linda Seyler, program coordinator, who mentioned they never picked them up at the WCB where they are still on file. In the report the students identified the competition with other service providers within the community as the largest problem the WCB faces. To date some of the options above are either in design or have been implemented including a web page and plans for the third floor renovation into a business/non-profit incubator.

Note: Any interventions we propose that have already been proffered by one of these surveys will be noted.