

# CASE STUDY: YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh

Sustainable  
Solutions from



## The Situation

The YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh, a legacy fixture in and around the city that has provided a host of health and wellness-related services to thousands of members for decades, had arrived at a strategic and cultural crossroads. The Y knew it needed to do more in terms of sustainable behaviors and practices in order to truly live up to its mission of social responsibility, healthy living, and youth development.

## How Sustainable Pittsburgh Became Involved

"Sustainability was the right thing to do," explained Rich Perallo, Vice President of Facilities and Construction for the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh. "We decided that any capital projects, new or upgraded, would be as sustainable as possible and that we would seek LEED certification. At our existing facilities, we would do everything at the sustainable level as much as possible. We understood sustainability as more than an environmental issue, it is a cultural component for our organization."

A "Green" sub-committee was then formed, including every department and comprising both internal staff and outside volunteers. Before long, though, the group knew it needed professional assistance to carry out this commitment properly. After hearing Sustainable Pittsburgh's Executive Director, Court Gould, speak at a management conference, the Y decided to reach out to the organization on a consulting basis, said Perallo.

## The Sustainable Pittsburgh Solution

The Y engaged Sustainable Pittsburgh for Phase 1, which was to provide a general assessment of the existing condition and opportunities to improve sustainability at the 14 branch facilities and two camps. Phase 2 included the use of a team of specialized sub-contractors assembled by Sustainable Pittsburgh to address integrated opportunities in nine specific areas for assessment.

"Over the course of the discovery phases, we stressed that everyone must be engaged in this culture change around sustainability," said Perallo. "With the ideas and implementation plan generated by Sustainable Pittsburgh and its team of specialists, we took the next year and a half to put those ideas into place. We addressed transportation issues, cleaning products, recyclable and compostable consumer products, energy audits and resulting changes in products and practices there, and many other specific steps."

"Sustainable Pittsburgh helped us secure a grant from The Heinz Endowments to build and manage an urban garden in Hazelwood," he continued. "We installed a greenhouse, planted beds of vegetables and herbs, and made this facility a high-profile example of sustainability at the Y."

"The entire process simply made a lot of sense," Perallo said. "By taking the time and investing the resources to do it right, we've found that it's easy to get consistency of quality and sustainability in the products and materials we use, and it's helped leverage pricing as well for us. We're doing right while we're doing well."

**YMCA OF GREATER PITTSBURGH:**  
*Sustainable Pittsburgh used its expertise and insight to help a historic non-profit community-based agency retrofit its multiple facilities and advance outdoor camps to models of sustainable practices that have attracted the attention of national leadership for the breakthrough nature of planning, execution, savings, and efficiencies achieved.*

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## Results Achieved

The Y has seen some impressive improvement in its operating metrics, like:

- Buildings now operate more efficiently
- Water and energy consumption has been reduced
- Camps are doing more composting, using rain barrels and onsite well water for washing and irrigation, and achieving better stormwater management overall
- Branches have received select retrofits

"Because Sustainable Pittsburgh has helped us get grant funding, we've done most projects at no capital cost, all of which allows us to be a more sustainable organization, putting more resources back into our members and communities," Perallo noted.

He stressed that sustainability ties into the Y's mission of social responsibility, healthy living, and youth development perfectly and in very tangible, visible ways. The YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh has done so well in researching and implementing sustainable behaviors and practices, in fact, that it stands today at the forefront globally. For example, it is likely the first Y in the world to hire a full time Sustainability Coordinator. The YMCA General Assembly is meeting in Pittsburgh in 2011, with members coming from around the world, to learn more about what has been accomplished here.

"This is our opportunity to show how the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh is leading the world in sustainability," Perallo said. "There is no way we could have reached this level of achievement and notoriety without the team of experts at Sustainable Pittsburgh. We would abundantly recommend Sustainable Pittsburgh, no doubt. They have helped our bottom line with savings that can be put back into the community, they have helped us live up to our mission with high impact ideas, and they have helped us garner the attention of our peers around the world."

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*- Rich Perallo  
VP of Facilities and  
Construction  
YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh*

**To learn more about how Sustainable Pittsburgh can help your business, non-profit organization, or municipality achieve similarly impressive results, contact us at 412-258-6642 or online at [www.sustainablepittsburgh.org](http://www.sustainablepittsburgh.org).**

*Sustainable Solutions is a niche consultancy of the non-profit, Sustainable Pittsburgh.*

*Sustainable Pittsburgh brings together a tailor-made multi-disciplinary team of experts to conduct a comprehensive Sustainability Assessment – an integrated examination of a client's needs such as: energy usage, waste management, storm water management, transportation options, management practices, policies, strategic assets, and other areas. These Assessments use a whole systems approach and are intended to build capacity and provide specific quantified recommendations to save money in operations, conserve resources, enhance civic stewardship, and foster a culture of sustainability practice.*