

## Case Study

### The Challenge

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The YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh was facing bankruptcy and hired WordWrite to repair the reputational damage.

### Our Solution

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WordWrite developed a series of messaging tools and organized a cadence of communications that allowed for transparency and authenticity to shine through.

### Client Takeaways

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The YMCA received praise for remaining open to media and public questions during its time of crisis. The organization is now rebuilding itself financially and remains in good standing with its patrons.

# Weathering a Crisis with Open Communication

For nearly all organizations, it's not a question if they will encounter a crisis that affects operations and/or reputation, but when.

As an organization with a more than 150-year history, the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh had endured its share of fraught moments, but the nonprofit still could use help when times were tough. In this situation, the YMCA was facing a grim long-term financial outlook, highlighted by an unsustainable building lease on its headquarters that contributed to cuts in certain vital community services and delays to much-needed facility repairs.

The best route out of the crisis, in an operational and financial sense, was a court-ordered bankruptcy. To avoid reputational damage, however, a communications plan was required — and that's when WordWrite entered the picture.

## The Plan

Transparency and being open to sharing key messages surrounding a crisis is key to weathering it with little to no reputational damage. But what if there is no immediate solution? Communicate process — clearly explain the steps the organization is doing in the early days of the crisis. The public and media outlets generally understand mistakes will occur and that organizations are not perfect — therefore, they appreciate hearing what is being done to solve the problem, as well as authentic apologies when appropriate.

We followed this approach during the YMCA's bankruptcy crisis, beginning with creating a roadmap for maintaining reputation and collaboratively devising authentic, consistent messaging. We focused on positioning the decision as one that would preserve the organization's future, while politely rebutting false suggestions for the cause of the bankruptcy.



After announcing the bankruptcy, we quickly organized a news conference that allowed the YMCA to share its story surrounding the decision, sidestepping false assumptions before speculation could take root. At the same time, we helped implement a website landing page to educate the public and inform employees and stakeholders on the decision and next steps.

## Results

These tactics kept the organization's reputation intact, with the news conference being positively received by media and stakeholders. The organization received praise for the decision and its openness during the process, and its home newspaper even penned an editorial in support.

The crisis was the beginning of a long retainer relationship between WordWrite and the YMCA, and after weathering the initial storm, we were back to sharing positive stories that took its reputation to new heights.

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