



## YWCA Center for Empowerment

Location: Richmond, VA  
Market Sector: Community  
Size: 23,700 SF  
Year Completed: 2022

Founded in 1887, the YWCA of Richmond advocates for racial, social, and economic equity for women, girls, and their families. As the oldest YWCA in the South, they work to empower women by creating leadership opportunities, recognizing women's achievements and hosting community workshops. The non-profit's strategic goal was to expand the path to equity and opportunity, and their historic renovation was driven to embody that mission.

*“Transform the building to support best practices in serving survivors of intimate partner violence, and programming to empower women and eliminate racism.”*

*Richmond YWCA Empower and Transform Campaign*

### DRIVERS

The YWCA of Richmond's 5th Street headquarters was built in 1913 and resides on the National Register of Historic Places. This history brings pride to the organization while also bringing challenges. Their location allows families, clients and community partners to easily access their services, but the prestige of the neighborhood and building could be perceived as a barrier. It was time to have the building represent their communities.

The design was crafted to accomplish three main drivers; accommodate all staff and administrative functions in a thoughtful and functional layout; honor the history and significance of the building while creating a welcoming feeling for women of all backgrounds and ethnicities; and source products and materials designed or manufactured by women.



## APPROACH

As one of the country's oldest non-profit organizations supporting education, counseling, and support of women and children in crisis, the YWCA needed a flexible space to accommodate a variety of settings and programs. This included a counseling center, multipurpose rooms for team and community meetings, workforce development, tenant space for future non-profit partnerships. With the Sprout School moving out of the downtown headquarters, the YWCA project takes advantage of new opportunities to re-allocate existing spaces, such as dedicating the most secure areas for counseling and offices, and providing other areas for workforce development and vocational training. A major intervention to the gym provides multipurpose and conference/training space at the first floor, as well as mezzanine space for collaboration with other non-profits.

The redesign of this 110-year-old 4-story building, seeking historic tax credits, required the design team to craft a vision for the space that honored its storied past and the future of the YWCA that increases operational efficiency, support staff growth, and facilitates a wide range of programs and events. SMBW completed a master plan to determine vision, functional needs, ADA accessibility updates, increased building security, and to modernize the building's amenities. New amenities included a community lounge and exhibit space for community partners and volunteers, a flexible event space for 100 attendees, collaborative work lounges, and an incubator to promote female entrepreneurs.



## MEASURING OUTCOMES

The YWCA serves the Richmond community and provides core programs that promote racial, social and economic equity for women, girls, and their families. Our design provided more efficient and functional space for the YWCA to conduct their programs in a way that honors the community and the value they bring.

*“SMBW’s reputation for work in the nonprofit community preceded them and we were impressed with their understanding and appreciation of how a nonprofit operates, the challenges we face, and the unique needs we have to address. SMBW collaborated with members inside and outside of our organization to come up with the best solutions.”*

*Linda Tissiere CEO of the Richmond YWCA*

