

# COMMUNITY TOOL BOX

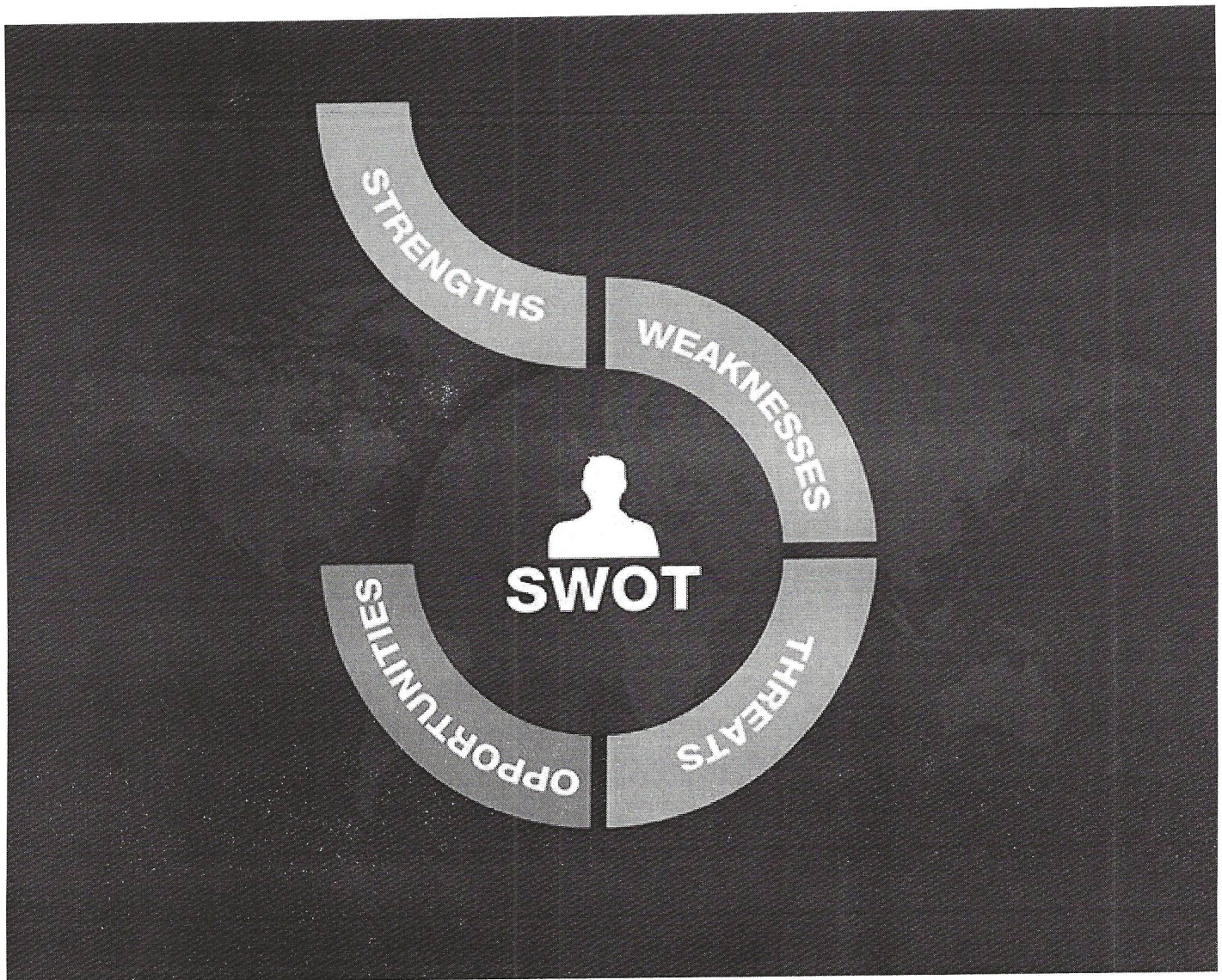
## Chapter 3

### Section 14. SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

(<http://ctb.ku.edu>)

Learn how to conduct a SWOT Analysis to identify situational strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats.

- **WHAT IS A SWOT ANALYSIS AND WHY SHOULD YOU USE ONE?**
- **WHEN DO YOU USE SWOT?**
- **WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF A SWOT ANALYSIS?**
- **HOW DO YOU CREATE A SWOT ANALYSIS?**
- **HOW DO YOU USE YOUR SWOT ANALYSIS?**



Change is an inevitable part of community organizing. If you know how to take stock of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, you are more likely to plan and act effectively. SWOT provides a tool to explore both internal and external factors that may influence your work.

## **WHAT IS A SWOT ANALYSIS AND WHY SHOULD YOU USE ONE?**

SWOT stands for: **S**trength, **W**eakness, **O**pportunity, **T**hreat. A SWOT analysis guides you to identify your organization's strengths and weaknesses (S-W), as well as broader opportunities and threats (O-T). Developing a fuller awareness of the situation helps with both strategic planning and decision-making.

The SWOT method was originally developed for business and industry, but it is equally useful in the work of community health and development, education, and even for personal growth.

SWOT is not the only assessment technique you can use. Compare it with other assessment tools in the Community Tool Box (<http://ctb.ku.edu><http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources>) to determine if this is the right approach for your situation. The strengths of this method are its simplicity and application to a variety of levels of operation.

## WHEN DO YOU USE SWOT?

**A SWOT analysis can offer helpful perspectives at any stage of an effort. You might use it to:**

- Explore possibilities for new efforts or solutions to problems.
- Make decisions about the best path for your initiative. Identifying your opportunities for success in context of threats to success can clarify directions and choices.
- Determine where change is possible. If you are at a juncture or turning point, an inventory of your strengths and weaknesses can reveal priorities as well as possibilities.
- Adjust and refine plans mid-course. A new opportunity might open wider avenues, while a new threat could close a path that once existed.

SWOT also offers a simple way of communicating about your initiative or program and an excellent way to organize information you've gathered from studies or surveys.

## WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF A SWOT ANALYSIS?

A SWOT analysis focuses on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Remember that the purpose of performing a SWOT is to reveal positive forces that work together and potential problems that need to be recognized and possibly addressed.

We will discuss the process of creating the analysis below, but first here are a few sample layouts for your SWOT analysis.

Ask participants to answer these simple questions: what are the strengths and weaknesses of your group, community, or effort, and what are the opportunities and threats facing it?

Internal		External	
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats

If a looser structure helps you brainstorm, you can group positives and negatives to think broadly about your organization and its external environment.

Positives	Negatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths</li> <li>• Assets</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Opportunities</li> <li>• Prospects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weaknesses</li> <li>• Limitations</li> <li>• Restrictions</li> <li>• Threats</li> <li>• Challenges</li> </ul>

Below is a third option for structuring your SWOT analysis, which may be appropriate for a larger initiative that requires detailed planning. This "TOWS Matrix" is adapted from Fred David's *Strategic Management* text.

	<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Opportunity-Strength (OS) Strategies 1. Use the strengths to take advantage of opportunities 2.	Opportunity-Weakness (OW) Strategies Overcome weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities 1. 2.
<b>THREATS</b>	Threat-Strength (TS) Strategies Use strengths to avoid threats 1. 2.	Threat-Weakness (TW) Strategies Minimize weaknesses and avoid threats 1. 2.

David gives an example for Campbell Soup Company that stresses financial goals, but it also illustrates how you can pair the items within a SWOT grid to develop strategies. (This version of the chart is abbreviated.)

	<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current profit ratio increased</li> <li>• Employee morale high</li> <li>• Market share has increased</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal suits not resolved</li> <li>• Plant capacity has fallen</li> <li>• Lack of strategic management system</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Western European unification</li> <li>• Rising health consciousness in selecting foods</li> <li>• Demand for soups increasing annually</li> </ul>	<p>Opportunity-Strength (OS) Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquire food company in Europe (S1, S3, O1)</li> <li>• Develop new healthy soups (S2, O2)</li> </ul>	<p>Opportunity-Weakness (OW) Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop new Pepperidge Farm products (W1, O2, O3)</li> </ul>
<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low value of dollar</li> <li>• Tin cans are not biodegradable</li> </ul>	<p>Threat-Strength (TS) Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop new biodegradable soup containers (S1, T2)</li> </ul>	<p>Threat-Weakness (TW) Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close unprofitable European operations (W3, T1)</li> </ul>

This example also illustrates how threats can become opportunities (and vice versa). The limitation of tin cans (which aren't biodegradable) creates an opportunity for leadership in developing biodegradable containers. There are several formats you can use to do a SWOT analysis, including a basic SWOT form (<http://ctb.ku.edu/http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/swot-analysis/tools>) that you can use to prompt analysis, but whatever format you use, don't be surprised if your strengths and weaknesses don't precisely match up to your opportunities and threats. You might need to refine, or you might need to simply look at the facts longer, or from a different angle. Your chart, list or table will certainly reveal patterns.

**LISTING YOUR INTERNAL FACTORS: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES (S, W)**

## **Internal factors include your resources and experiences. General areas to consider:**

- Human resources - staff, volunteers, board members, target population
- Physical resources - your location, building, equipment
- Financial - grants, funding agencies, other sources of income
- Activities and processes - programs you run, systems you employ
- Past experiences - building blocks for learning and success, your reputation in the community

Don't be too modest when listing your strengths. If you're having difficulty naming them, start by simply listing your characteristics (e.g., we're small, we're connected to the neighborhood). Some of these will probably be strengths.

Although the strengths and weakness of your organization are your internal qualities, don't overlook the perspective of people outside your group. Identify strengths and weaknesses from both your own point of view and that of others, including those you serve or deal with. Do others see problems--or assets--that you don't?

How do you get information about how outsiders perceive your strengths and weaknesses? You may know already if you've listened to those you serve. If not, this might be the time to gather that type of information. See related sections for ideas on conducting focus groups

(<http://ctb.ku.edu/http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-focus-groups/main>) , user surveys

(<http://ctb.ku.edu/http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-surveys/main>) , and listening sessions

(<http://ctb.ku.edu/http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-public-forums/main>) .

## **LISTING EXTERNAL FACTORS: OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS (O, T)**

Cast a wide net for the external part of the assessment. No organization, group, program, or neighborhood is immune to outside events and forces. Consider your connectedness, for better and worse, as you compile this part of your SWOT list.

### **Forces and facts that your group does not control include:**

- Future trends in your field or the culture
- The economy - local, national, or international
- Funding sources - foundations, donors, legislatures
- Demographics - changes in the age, race, gender, culture of those you serve or in your area
- The physical environment (Is your building in a growing part of town? Is the bus company cutting routes?)
- Legislation (Do new federal requirements make your job harder...or easier?)
- Local, national or international events

## **HOW DO YOU CREATE A SWOT ANALYSIS?**

### **WHO DEVELOPS THE SWOT?**

The most common users of a SWOT analysis are team members and project managers who are responsible for decision-making and strategic planning.

But don't overlook anyone in the creation stage!

An individual or small group can develop a SWOT analysis, but it will be more effective if you take advantage of many stakeholders. Each person or group offers a different perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of your program and has different experiences of both.

Likewise, one staff member, or volunteer or stakeholder may have information about an opportunity or threat that is essential to understanding your position and determining your future.

### **WHEN AND WHERE DO YOU DEVELOP A SWOT ANALYSIS?**

A SWOT analysis is often created during a retreat or planning session that allows several hours for brainstorming and analysis. The best results come when the process is collaborative and inclusive.

When creating the analysis, people are asked to pool their individual and shared knowledge and experience. The more relaxed, friendly and constructive the setting, the more truthful, comprehensive, insightful, and useful your analysis will be.

### **HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A SWOT ANALYSIS?**

#### **Steps for conducting a SWOT analysis:**

- Designate a leader or group facilitator who has good listening and group process skills, and who can keep things moving and on track.
- Designate a recorder to back up the leader if your group is large. Use newsprint on a flip chart or a large board to record the analysis and discussion points. You can record later in a more polished fashion to share with stakeholders and to update.
- Introduce the SWOT method and its purpose in your organization. This can be as simple as asking, "Where are we, where can we go?" If you have time, you could run through a quick example based on a shared experience or well-known public issue.
- Depending on the nature of your group and the time available, let all participants introduce themselves. Then divide your stakeholders into smaller groups. If your retreat or meeting draws several groups of stakeholders together, make sure you mix the small groups to get a range of perspectives, and give them a chance to introduce themselves.
  - The size of these depends on the size of your entire group – breakout groups can range from three to ten. If the size gets much larger, some members may not participate.
- Have each group designate a recorder, and provide each with newsprint or dry-erase board. Direct them to create a SWOT analysis in the format you choose—a chart, columns, a matrix, or even a page for each quality.
  - Give the groups 20-30 minutes to brainstorm and fill out their own strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats chart for your program, initiative or effort. Encourage them not to rule out any ideas at this stage, or the next.

- Remind groups that the way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas. Refinement can come later. In this way, the SWOT analysis also supports valuable discussion within your group or organization as you honestly assess.
- It helps to generate lots of comments about your organization and your program, and even to put them in multiple categories if that provokes thought.
- Once a list has been generated, it helps to refine it to the best 10 or fewer points so that the analysis can be truly helpful.
- Reconvene the group at the agreed-upon time to share results. Gather information from the groups, recording on the flip-chart or board. Collect and organize the differing groups' ideas and perceptions.
  - Proceed in S-W-O-T order, recording strengths first, weaknesses second, etc.
  - Or you can begin by calling for the top priorities in each category -the strongest strength, most dangerous weakness, biggest opportunity, worst threat--and continue to work across each category.
  - Ask one group at a time to report ("Group A, what do you see as strengths?") You can vary which group begins the report so a certain group isn't always left "bringing up the end" and repeating points made by others. ("Group B, let's start with you for weaknesses.")
  - Or, you can open the floor to all groups ("What strengths have you noted?") for each category until all have contributed what they think is needed.
- Discuss and record the results. Depending on your time frame and purpose:
  - Come to some consensus about the most important items in each category
  - Relate the analysis to your vision, mission, and goals
  - Translate the analysis to action plans and strategies
- If appropriate, prepare a written summary of the SWOT analysis to share with participants for continued use in planning and implementation.

More ideas on conducting successful meetings can be found in Community Tool Box resources on conducting public forums and listening sessions (<http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-public-forums/main>), conducting focus groups (<http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-focus-groups/main>), and organizing a retreat (<http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/training-and-technical-assistance/retreats/main>).

## HOW DO YOU USE YOUR SWOT ANALYSIS?

Better understanding the factors affecting your initiative put you in a better position for action. This understanding helps as you:

- Identify the issues or problems you intend to change
- Set or reaffirm goals
- Create an action plan



As you consider your analysis, be open to the possibilities that exist within a weakness or threat. Likewise, recognize that an opportunity can become a threat if everyone else sees the opportunity and plans to take advantage of it as well, thereby increasing your competition.

Finally, during your assessment and planning, you might keep an image in mind to help you make the most of a SWOT analysis: *Look for a "stretch," not just a "fit."* As Radha Balamuralikrishna and John C. Dugger of Iowa State University point out, SWOT usually reflects your current position or situation. Therefore one drawback is that it might not encourage openness to new possibilities. You can use SWOT to justify a course that has already been decided upon, but if your goal is to grow or improve, you will want to keep this in mind.

## IN SUMMARY

A realistic recognition of the weaknesses and threats that exist for your effort is the first step to countering them with a robust set of strategies that build upon strengths and opportunities. A SWOT analysis identifies your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to assist you in making strategic plans and decisions.

### Contributor

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### Online Resources

**Coalition Vision, Mission, and Goals** (<http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://coalitionswork.com/wp-content/uploads/COALITION-VISION-MISSION-GOALS.pdf>) defines SWOT Analysis, coalition vision and mission statements, and goals and strategies.

**The Essential Guide to SWOT Analysis** ([http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://aea365.org/blog/jackson-hille-on-the-essential-guide-to-swot-analysis/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+aea365+%28AEA365%29](http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://aea365.org/blog/jackson-hille-on-the-essential-guide-to-swot-analysis/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+aea365+%28AEA365%29)) from Jackson Hille, content associate for FormSwift, a SF-based startup that helps organizations, entrepreneurs, and businesses go paperless.

**Mind Tools: SWOT Analysis** ([http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC\\_05.htm](http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm)) provides a quick overview of SWOT

**Quality Guide: SWOT Analysis** (<http://ctb.ku.eduhttp://erc.msh.org/quality/ittools/itswot.cfm>) is a helpful guide from Management Sciences for Health and United Nations Children's Fund.

### Print Resources

David, F. (1993). *Strategic Management*, 4th Ed. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Jones, B. (1990). *Neighborhood Planning: A Guide for Citizens and Planners*. Chicago and Washington, DC: Planners Press, American Planning Association.

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