

CLD2-5



Using a SWOT Analysis

Taking a Look at Your Organization

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Introduction—What is a SWOT Analysis?

A SWOT analysis is a deliberate planning method used to evaluate the **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats** associated with a project. Projects are often used to address community issues or can be used as part of visioning or goal-setting for a group, community or organization. Community projects can include anything from creating a new community group, to bringing in an innovative community leader, to building a city park. Before you try to determine a strategy to address your community issue, you need to evaluate the factors that may affect your decision. The more thoroughly you prepare up front, the better your results will be. A SWOT analysis is used to examine the factors and help determine how you can reach your goal successfully.

The acronym SWOT stands for:

S = Strengths: Internal attributes of the organization that are helpful to achieving the goal(s)

W = Weaknesses: Internal attributes of the organization that are harmful to achieving the goal(s)

O = Opportunities: External conditions that are helpful to achieving the goal(s)

T = Threats: External conditions that could damage to the goal(s)

How to Do a SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a relatively straightforward process. In essence, it is a directed brainstorm focused on a specific topic. In pre-planning for a successful SWOT analysis, make sure the group chosen to participate is as representative as possible, including people from different levels of the organization (or different areas in the community), staff and volunteers, men and women, young and old, newcomers and long-timers, etc. Also, you will need a comfortable room set up for a discussion, a whiteboard or flip chart, markers and a video camera or tape recorder (optional).

The specific steps on how to facilitate a successful SWOT analysis are:

- **Pick your subject.** For example, your subject might be as broad as your organization overall (an “Organizational SWOT Analysis”) or something more specific such as a committee in your organization (a “Fundraising Committee SWOT Analysis”) or it could be for yourself as an individual (a “Personal SWOT Analysis”).
- **Choose your objective.** For example, if you’re doing an “Organizational SWOT Analysis,” your objective may be to double the membership within the next three years.



A SWOT analysis is used to examine the factors and help determine how you can reach your goal successfully.



What makes SWOT particularly powerful is that, with a little thought, it can help you uncover opportunities that your group can make the most of.

- **Ask the audience to brainstorm on the strengths of your subject.** As facilitator, record the thoughts on the whiteboard or flip chart. Remember to clarify that this process is a brainstorm and that quantity is more important than quality.
- **Repeat the process** in the previous step for each of the other SWOT analysis aspects, in order: **weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.** Use the matrix below to help with brainstorming.

- Once you have columns (or pages) of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, **begin to analyze them.** This can be done in front of the group (to continue the process) or can be done off-site by the facilitator with the results brought back to the group.

Note: If you are doing the analysis yourself off-site, it is important that you report back to the group to complete the process. As a back-up recording measure, you may also want to audio or video tape the session so that you can review the SWOT analysis at a later time (to clarify concepts and ideas).

| SWOT Analysis | |
|--|--|
| What are the strengths and weaknesses within our organization that could affect the objectives we seek to achieve? | What are the opportunities and threats outside our organization that could affect the objectives we seek to achieve? |
| Strengths | Opportunities |
| Weaknesses | Threats |

How do we Apply the SWOT Analysis Results?

There are several ways to proceed once you have successfully facilitated a SWOT analysis. Either the group has worked together to discover and compile the major themes within each SWOT aspect, or the facilitator has coordinated the information off-site and is coming back to report. One suggestion is to conduct a focused discussion. List the following questions on the white board and discuss according to the themes found through the SWOT analysis:

- What do these results tell us?
- What decisions need to be made?
- Are we ready to proceed? If yes, than what is our first step? If no, what needs to be done before we can proceed?

If your SWOT analysis has a specific objective, then directing the focused discussion toward this objective will help in determining an action plan. Have the group discuss the results as they relate to the overall objective and focus on each SWOT aspect: **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.**

Specifically, you'll want to ask the group the following questions:

- How can we leverage each one of our strengths?
- How can we improve upon each weakness?
- How we can capitalize on each opportunity?
- How can we minimize each threat?

Successful organizations build on their strengths, correct their weaknesses and protect against internal vulnerabilities and external threats. What makes a SWOT analysis particularly powerful is that, with a little thought, it can help you uncover opportunities that your group can make the most of. And by understanding the weaknesses of your organization, you can manage and eliminate threats that would otherwise catch you unprepared.

Conclusion

A SWOT analysis is a very useful planning tool for groups, organizations and communities. It is important to understand what a SWOT analysis is, how to successfully facilitate one and how to apply the results once the analysis is finished. When done successfully, this process can enhance any group or organization and move them toward their goals.

References

Impact Alliance (2000). User's guide for SWOT analysis. Found at: http://www.impactalliance.org/file_download.php?location=S_U&filename=10227014460SWOT_Guide.pdf.

