



Tools of the Trade

The Community Tool Box, a Comprehensive Tool and a Sample of What You Will Find There: *Community Assessment Methods - Conducting a SWOT Analysis*

By Christina Holt and Tom Wolff

The Community Tool Box, <http://ctb.ku.edu>, is a free, online resource for those working to build healthier communities and bring about social change, offering thousands of pages of tips and tools for taking action in communities. The vision behind the Community Tool Box is that people — locally and globally — are better prepared to work together to change conditions that affect their lives. The Community Tool Box covers core competencies for community practice such as community assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation, and advocacy. Under continuous development since 1994, the Community Tool Box is widely used in teaching, training, and technical support. The team's aspiration is to make it easier and more likely that people bring about change and improvement and further social justice.

Created in 1994 by partners at the University of Kansas and collaborating organizations including active members of the Society for Community Research and Action, the Community Tool Box is a free, online resource of more than 7,000 pages. With a Creative Commons license to encourage widespread use, and currently available in English, Spanish, and Arabic, the Community Tool Box contains educational modules, toolkits, troubleshooting guides, and evidence-based practices for building healthy communities and creating social change. The Community Tool Box is widely accessed, with more than five million user sessions annually from 230 countries around the world. This capacity-building resource is used by a variety of people and organizations to enhance their community psychology practice skills in community assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation, advocacy, and other competencies.

The Community Tool Box content is organized by five key functions:

1. “[Table of Contents](#)” presents content as an online book with 46 chapters and over 300 sections or lessons containing practical, step-by-step guidance. Community-building skills covered relate to different competencies, including, among others, assessment (e.g., conducting focus groups), planning (e.g., developing vision and mission statements), leadership (e.g., building commitment), advocacy (e.g., using personal testimony), and evaluation (e.g., using feedback to improve the initiative). Each section,

following a consistent format, includes detailed “how-to” descriptions, examples, points to review, and training materials.

2. “[Do the Work](#)” contains toolkits with succinct how-to outlines for 16 core competencies, including creating and maintaining coalitions, assessing community needs and resources, developing a strategic plan, developing an intervention, enhancing cultural competence, evaluating the initiative, implementing social marketing, and planning for sustainability. Each toolkit contains a checklist with just-in-time reminders of what is involved in the task, as well as real-world examples, tips and tools, and links to additional resources.
3. “[Solve a Problem](#)” features 13 troubleshooting guides that address common dilemmas faced in community work, for example: “There is not enough community participation,” “We are facing opposition or conflict,” or “There is not enough improvement in outcomes.” Each troubleshooting guide includes questions for analyzing the situation; for community participation, “Have we made the participation and involvement more rewarding or attractive?” or, for facing opposition, “Do we know what tactics they are using to oppose us?” Each guide also includes links to relevant resources for solving identified issues, such as the Community Tool Box sections on honoring community champions or learning about opposition tactics.
4. “[Use Promising Approaches](#)” provides links to databases of evidence-based practices for addressing specific community problems or goals. It links to both comprehensive databases (e.g., Centers for Disease Control’s Community Guide, Cochrane and Campbell Collaborations), as well as categorical databases for what works for addressing specific issues (e.g., child and youth development, education, health promotion, prevention of substance abuse).
5. “[Connect with Others](#)” provides ways to network with others involved in community work. It includes an “Ask an Advisor” service by which Community Tool Box users can ask specific questions of experienced community members and experts about issues relevant to their community work. Numerous members of the Society for Community Research and Action have volunteered to serve as community Advisors through “Ask an Advisor,” helping disseminate the field’s knowledge to the broader public.

Since 2007, the Community Tool Box team has used Google Analytics to provide information about site usage and to inform site design. Analytics provide information such as number of unique site users, site content viewed, and length of time spent on site. Google Analytics data show that Chapter 3, the Community Tool Box chapter on community assessment, is the most in-demand area of the site.

In this article we share the listing of these Chapter 3 resources. As you look at the sections, you may recognize many of the tools you use every day. Below are the sections/tools in Chapter 3.

[Chapter 3: Assessing Community Needs and Resources](#)

- [Section 1. Developing a Plan for Assessing Local Needs and Resources](#)
- [Section 2. Understanding and Describing the Community](#)
- [Section 3. Conducting Public Forums and Listening Sessions](#)
- [Section 4. Collecting Information About the Problem](#)
- [Section 5. Analyzing Community Problems](#)
- [Section 6. Conducting Focus Groups](#)
- [Section 7. Conducting Needs Assessment Surveys](#)
- [Section 8. Identifying Community Assets and Resources](#)
- [Section 9. Developing Baseline Measures of Behavior](#)
- [Section 10. Conducting Concerns Surveys](#)
- [Section 11. Determining Service Utilization](#)
- [Section 12. Conducting Interviews](#)
- [Section 13. Conducting Surveys](#)
- [Section 14. SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats](#)
- [Section 15. Qualitative Methods to Assess Community Issues](#)
- [Section 16. Geographic Information Systems: Tools for Community Mapping](#)
- [Section 17. Leading a Community Dialogue on Building a Healthy Community](#)
- [Section 18. Creating and Using Community Report Cards](#)
- [Section 19. Using Public Records and Archival Data](#)
- [Section 20. Implementing Photovoice in Your Community](#)
- [Section 21. Windshield and Walking Surveys](#)
- [Section 22. Using Small Area Analysis to Uncover Disparities](#)
- [Section 23. Developing and Using Criteria and Processes to Set Priorities](#)

Within Chapter 3, one of the most popular assessment resources covers how to conduct a SWOT Analysis. Below, we share “how-to” information for conducting a SWOT Analysis as it appears in the Community Tool Box. For additional details, examples, and a free downloadable and adaptable PowerPoint presentation, please see <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/swot-analysis/main>.

From [Community Tool Box Chapter 3, Section 14: SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, 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**ppportunity, **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](#) 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"> • Strengths • Assets • Resources • Opportunities • Prospects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaknesses • Limitations • Restrictions • Threats • Challenges

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.

	STRENGTHS 1. 2. 3. 4.	WEAKNESSES 1. 2. 3. 4.
OPPORTUNITIES 1. 2. 3. 4.	Opportunity-Strength (OS) Strategies Use the strengths to take advantage of opportunities 1. 2.	Opportunity-Weakness (OW) Strategies Overcome weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities 1. 2.
THREATS 1. 2. 3.	Threat-Strength (TS) Strategies Use strengths to avoid threats 1. 2.	Threat-Weakness (TW) Strategies Minimize weaknesses and avoid threats 1.

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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. 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](#), [surveys](#), and [listening sessions](#).

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](#), [conducting focus groups](#), and [organizing a retreat](#).

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.

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.

Resources

KU Work Group for Community Health and Development. (2015). Chapter 3: Assessing Community Needs and Resources. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas. Retrieved April 14, 2015 from the Community Tool Box: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources>

KU Work Group for Community Health and Development. (2015). Chapter 3, Section 14: SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas. Retrieved April 14, 2015 from the Community Tool Box: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/swot-analysis/main>

Quality Guide: SWOT Analysis is a helpful guide from Management Sciences for Health and United Nations Children's Fund.

Mind Tools: SWOT Analysis provides a quick overview of SWOT

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.

Acknowledgments

Continuous work on the Community Tool Box (from 1994 to present) has been sustained by funding and support from many dedicated groups and individuals, including funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Kansas Health Foundation, and ongoing support from the KU Work Group. The Community Tool Box is a public service of the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas <http://communityhealth.ku.edu/>.

The authors would also like to acknowledge the contributions of our many partners and colleagues, including those at the KU Work Group and throughout the world, who have helped to build and sustain the Community Tool Box. Community Tool Box Team Members include: Stephen Fawcett, Ph.D. , Kansas Health Foundation Professor, Applied Behavioral Science and Director, Work Group for Community Health and Development; Jerry Schultz, PhD; Co-Director, Work Group for Community Health and Development; Christina Holt, MA; Associate Director, Community Toolbox Services; Vincent Francisco, PhD; Associate Professor, Dept of Public Health Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; Tom Wolff, PhD, President, Tom Wolff & Associates; and Bill Berkowitz, PhD, Associate Professor of Psychology, University of Massachusetts Lowell.