

## **Tualatin River Watershed Council Watershed Issue Scanning Process**

### **Introduction**

The Tualatin River Watershed Council is uniquely designed to represent a broad spectrum of interests in the watershed – economic, environmental, and social. Council members, representing their parent organizations or constituencies, are the first source of emerging issues affecting the Council and its mission. However, additional methods are needed to “sense the environment” surrounding the Council, and provide information for Council response on issues. The focus of Council issue sensing is how the mission and goals of the Council are affected. A basic process, called “environmental scanning”, is widely used to assist organizations identify issues, analyze their effect on the organization, and determine appropriate responses. We use the term “environment” in the broadest sense of the organization, not limited to the natural environment or eco-system of this river basin.

### **Context**

The Council’s mission and goals are the context for this scanning process:

#### **Mission**

To foster better community stewardship and understanding of the Tualatin River watershed resources, deal with its issues in advance of resource degradation, and ensure sustainable watershed health, functions, and uses.

#### **Goals:**

*To provide a foundation for implementing coordinated resource enhancement and restoration projects by integrating watershed information and plans.*

*To serve as a role model and forum for open discussion and collaborative resolution of watershed issues.*

*To raise awareness, and promote positive cooperative action in support of a healthy watershed by providing information to all watershed stakeholders.*

*To provide the human and financial resources to enable accomplishment of the Council’s objectives: watershed enhancement, issue forum, and education and outreach.*

### **Process**

Environmental scanning is a process of gathering, analyzing, and dispensing both factual and subjective information about events, trends, and relationships in the Council’s surroundings. The information is used either tactically or strategically in planning the organizations response. There are *four basic steps* in the process: 1) defining the Council’s surroundings, or environment, 2) gathering relevant information, 3) analyzing the information to make it useful in defining threats, opportunities, or other indicators of Council interest, and 4) identifying response options for the Council to consider.

#### **A. Defining the Environment**

A good way to sort out the scanning environment is to separate out the macro- from the micro- environments. For the Council, this may mean:

1. determining the broad level (macro-), regionally oriented economic, social, and environmental factors that affect the Council, such as listings of threatened species and the urbanization of northwest Oregon, and
2. identifying the specific (micro-) threats to a particular watershed value, such as Gales Creek and the LNG pipeline.

*Environmental scanning* may involve analyzing such factors as:

- **Economic Trends**
  - economic growth
  - industrial expansion
  - expansion or changes in urbanization patterns
  - agriculture, forestry and nursery sectors
- **Government**
  - political climate - amount of government activity
  - political stability and risk
  - agency policy making and regulation (Federal and State)
  - water treatment and wastewater facilities
  - other infrastructure, including: roads, ports, airports, rolling stock, hospitals, education, healthcare, communication, etc.
- **Legal**
  - environmental protection laws
  - Impediments to watershed protection action
- **Technology**
  - industrial productivity
  - new manufacturing processes
  - any new technology that could impact the watershed
- **Ecology**
  - ecological concerns that affect watershed values
  - ecological concerns that affect restoration efforts
  - ecological concerns that affect public perceptions of the watershed
- **Socio-Cultural**
  - demographic factors such as:
    - population size and distribution
    - age distribution
    - education levels
    - income levels
  - attitudes towards:
    - materialism, capitalism, free enterprise
    - individualism, role of family, role of government, collectivism
    - consumerism
    - environmentalism
    - importance of work, pride of accomplishment

## B. Gathering Information

There are three ways of scanning an organizations environment:

- **Ad-hoc scanning** - Short term, infrequent examinations usually initiated by a crisis
- **Regular scanning** - Studies done on a regular schedule (say, once a year)
- **Continuous scanning** - (also called continuous learning) - continuous structured data collection and processing on a broad range of environmental factors

Most commentators feel that in today's turbulent environment the best scanning method available is continuous scanning. This allows an organization to act quickly, take advantage of opportunities, and respond to environmental threats before significant damage is done.

The Council must ensure that the information they take in is pertinent and that it covers all the tracks, including information that is:

- internal and external to the Council,
- part of the Council's larger context as well as its more narrow content,
- informal and formal

The **external environments** are any of the 'outside of the Council's' conditions that happen like cultural, political, technological changes, demographic trends and patterns. Part of the external environment of the Council are organizations with similar, overlapping or adversarial mission and goals.

The **internal environments** are those 'inside the Council' conditions that affect how the Council operates such as changes in membership, member needs or its financial condition. It is also important to review what resources the Council has and employs as part of an internal scan.

**Content scanning** happens when the Council concentrates on watching only those trends, conditions and events that directly affect its goals or the content area of the Council. **Context scanning** happens when the Council watches all the trends, conditions and events that may or may not directly affect its goals.

The differences between **informal and formal information** are as much about the type of information as where the information is gathered. Information has a six step life cycle. Ideas, issues and new information often emerge first in artistic works, in science fiction and in doctoral dissertations. Some of these ideas take on an elite awareness in scientific, technical and trade journals and intellectual magazines like Forbes. If an idea gains popular awareness it will be seen next in popular interest magazines, in opinion polls and on the Oprah show. A fourth step might be for an idea to reach government awareness through public discussion, forums, and hearings or in government-sponsored reports and studies. When information is made part of procedures and routines it will be incorporated

into government filings, professional practise and education curriculum. At the last step information is made a part of historical records of government filings or may be part of historical analysis studies.

***Gathering information itself can be quite variable, from formal means such as literature review, to informal means such as stakeholder, partner, and public consultations.***

Information about existing or emerging issues can be gathered by two basic methods: ***Information Sensing***, and ***Information Seeking***.

Information sensing is information picked up through generally informal means – consultations, participation in activities or events in which information is being shared, or by unsolicited informants.

Information seeking is for hard, formal, often quantitative data, typically from surveys, market research activities that are rigorous, objective. Some organizations have their own scanning unit whose staff systematically analyzes data to produce market forecasts, trend analysis, and intelligence reports.

The Council Coordinator actively provides both information sensing and information seeking, but her time is limited. Council members provide information in a similar manner, but it is irregular and often not timely. ***Given staff and budget limitations, information sensing is the most feasible method for gathering information for the Council.***

### **Stakeholder Consultations**

Stakeholder collaboration through consultation is important to the Council: embracing the challenges of airing diverse opinion can lead to common understanding, which is the first step in developing sustainable solutions.

### **Why consult?**

Consulting with key stakeholders is an important factor in achieving ultimate success of the Council. Here are some benefits of reaching out to stakeholders through surveys, one-on-one meetings multi-stakeholder consultations and other methods.

- **Quality input leads to quality decision-making.** A broader perspective reduces “group think”, helps to challenge traditional thinking, and sparks creativity in problem solving.
- **Greater stakeholder satisfaction with the final planning product** comes from their involvement in shaping it.
- **The chances of successful implementation increase** as more stakeholders feel committed to the plan or project’s goals and take ownership of the plan’s design.

- **Good governance, transparency and open communication** are served when the Council communicates and receives feedback from stakeholders, instead of being guided by personal agendas.

Above all, don't consult with stakeholders just to say you did. If you include them, it must be because you are willing to include their point of view and you intend consultation to result in change or a new direction.

### **What is a stakeholder?**

Stakeholders are first the delegated Council members. Groups who have an interest in an organization's work, and to whom the organization has an ethical duty are also stakeholders. Stakeholders may include related organizations, potential partners, suppliers, the public, regulatory bodies, and the government. Not-for-profits and the voluntary sector may also add clients, community groups, community leaders, volunteers, funders and donors to this list.

Think widely when considering who your stakeholders may be:	
Council members	Other members of Council organizations
Clients/customers	Issue experts
Community groups	Potential new clients or members
Community leaders	Landowners
Competitors	Partners & potential partners
Employees	Public
Donors	Regulators
Funders	Suppliers
Government	Related organizations
Investors	

### **Who to consult?**

Internal stakeholders are likely to be consulted more frequently, but don't ignore external input. Stakeholders on the periphery of the Council may bring important new points of view to planning.

With good ongoing lines of communication, it is neither practical nor necessary to consult with all stakeholders on every issue. Realistically, some may not be interested. Others may have a negative attitude towards the Council such that the difficulties of dealing with them overshadow their potential contributions. Competitors won't be consulted about our strategic plan, but we may seek their input on policy development like an industry response to new legislation. As a rule of thumb, the bigger the change contemplated, the more important broad stakeholder consultation becomes.

**When to consult?**

Nothing beats regular two-way communication, but focussed consultation with stakeholders is appropriate for gathering data as a prelude to planning and in strategy and objective setting stages.

**Three options for stakeholder consultation**

- **Surveys** are a cost-efficient way to gain input from a large number of people. On-line surveys will even tabulate themselves these days. Make sure you are asking the right questions to get at the information you need, and that respondents are representative. When the Director’s Guild surveyed its 3,800 members, it entered every respondent in a draw for free annual dues in their region. This incentive ensured a large sample size and a truer understanding of the grassroots. Surveys are a low-risk, low-cost starting point, and are best followed up with mechanisms for dialog, creativity and consensus building.
- **One-on-one meetings** are an excellent way to build personal relationships while gathering data. It’s important to set expectations with participants on how the information will be used and the range of other people to be consulted, so no one is disappointed if all of their ideas are not reflected. Above all, make sure the information gathered is accessible to the larger decision-making group. Interviewers sometimes return after extensive one-on-one meetings and discover they are too far behind in their “day jobs” to generate more than a bare bones summary.
- **Multi-stakeholder consultations** bring together various stakeholders in a neutral forum, and are powerful tools for sharing ideas, building consensus and developing commitment to the end product. As the Roman philosopher Seneca said around 2000 years ago, the best ideas are common property. Often annual conventions allow time for policy or strategy development workshops. The key is to structure these sessions so they are not a series of speeches representing entrenched positions, but genuine workshops. An independent facilitator will create a comfort zone and process for constructive contribution. Keep in mind: don’t ask people what they think unless you’re prepared to think about and act on what they say.

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>One on one meetings</b>	<b>Multi-stakeholder consultation</b>
A range of inputs is gathered	√	√	√
Increased stakeholder satisfaction with end result	√	√	√
Opportunity for		√	√

real dialog			
Opportunity to build consensus			√
Opportunity to build ownership in the plan and its goals		√	√
Diverging participants learn from one another			√
Efficient use of time	√		√
Inexpensive if travel required	√		

**Think of stakeholder consultation as insurance**

There are four common reasons for not consulting stakeholders at the outset of major planning or policy development exercises:

1. You know what’s best for them and, frankly, they don’t.
2. Their input won’t change how the organization conducts business. There is too much invested in current programs to change priorities, and too few resources to add new ones.
3. You don’t want to expose divisions of opinion through a public airing of major issues. Dissent could get out of control.
4. You can’t afford the time or expense.

This kind of thinking is a severe handicap to successful planning and sustainable implementation. It sows the seeds of organizational obsolescence.

Stakeholder consultation is important insurance for the long-term effectiveness of an organization and enabling it to build sustainable new directions. Results may be quick or they may be slow and steady.

**C. Analyzing Information – Identifying Issues**

Once sufficient information is gathered, the process of analysis begins. The goal is to identify potential issues, determine their significance to the Council (priority), and prepare options for response that the Council may consider.

Analyzing the information that is received is the step that can be the most difficult for the Council. If there is not a concerted effort to come to a decision on which pieces of information are most important and which pieces of information are not the Council can end up with just a lot of unusable information.

What is needed is a **dynamic filter** to screen out unwanted material. Richard Slaughter calls this a ‘scanning frame - a device for paring away 99.99% of reality in order to focus on the signals and processes that have a direct bearing on the present and future functioning of the organization’. A process is needed in which all of the information is prioritized and the resulting scanning frame is then used to guide decision making. *The Council may need to develop this scanning frame to use in filtering out pertinent issue information. The following series of questions can assist in this filtering process.*

### **Basics of Identifying Issues**

Sorting through information to identify issues can be done by staff, hired consultants, Council appointed committees, or even the Council itself – though in the latter case only certain high profile situations may warrant the entire Council’s effort.

Using a series of “leading questions” is a useful way to sort out information and identify pertinent issues:

1. Identify issues by addressing questions such as:

- a) “What external changes could effect the organization?” Consider, e.g.,
  - changing demographics of stakeholders, including number, values, resources, power, etc.;
  - changing rules and regulations; expectations and resources from members and partners, vendors, etc.;
  - expected shifts in resource threats and opportunities; availability of leadership and staffing; and
  - what other current or new organizations provide similar services?
- b) “What could be the effects of these changes in terms of threats or opportunities?”
- c) “What changes must we make to address the threats?”
- d) “What strengths can we build on to take advantage of the opportunities?”  
(If planners seem reluctant to address these questions, allocate half an hour for a highly focused discussion around their reasons for not addressing these questions.)

2. Use a round-robin technique to collect and organize members’ input.

3. Visit with each issue, whether it’s “important” or “urgent.” Often, issues seem very important when they’re only urgent, for example, changing a flat tire is an urgent issue -- but you’d never put “changing a tire” in your strategic plan. Attend only to the important issues and not the urgent issues.

4. Facilitate to gain consensus on the top three to five issues and goals, and then prioritize them.

5. Issues and goals usually come from strengths to be built on, weaknesses to be strengthened, opportunities to be taken, and threats to be avoided.

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6. Many issues are based on gut feeling or intuition, rather than on extensive external and internal assessments.

7. Issues that are too narrow do not warrant planning and issues that are too broad will bog you down.

8. Deal with issues that you can do something about.

9. Help planners realize they can overcome pending issues. Too often, because of shortage of resources, planners tend to be highly reactive, rather than proactive.

10. Issues should be clearly articulated so that another outside of the organization can understand the description of the issue.

11. It helps to temper ideas, i.e., verify them against reality by having someone in the group assigned to be the “devil’s advocate.” Their role is to ask straightforward questions in an effort to get group members to adequately examine the current suggestion or idea before accepting it.

12. Be careful not to ignore current major issues in the interest of pursuing more creative and forward-looking goals. Many organizations have faltered because their planning focused too far down the road and they ended up falling over their feet.

13. Have someone reword issues to goals. Note that goals should be worded such that, when they are reached, they will have addressed an issue. Planning members should review wording of the goals to ensure all members understand the goals and that the goals, when reached, will address each issue.

### **SWOT Analysis**

SWOT analysis is a tool for analyzing an organization and its environment. It can be used as a *second filter* to help focus on key issues. SWOT stands for *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats*. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, and opportunities and threats are external factors. Basically, SWOT entails identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from the information and analysis done previously, and building a matrix (as below) that can be used in determining Council response.

A word of caution: SWOT analysis can be very subjective. Do not rely on SWOT too much. Two people rarely come up with the same final version of SWOT, so use SWOT as a guide and not a prescription.



***Simple Rules for Successful SWOT analysis:***

- Be realistic about the strengths and weaknesses of your organization when conducting SWOT
- SWOT analysis should distinguish between where your organization is today, and where it could be in the future
- SWOT should always be specific. Avoid gray areas.
- Always apply SWOT in a relative sense, rather than absolute.
- Keep your SWOT short and simple. Avoid complexity and over-analysis
- SWOT is subjective.

**D. Responding To Issues**

The last step is the use of the information that you have gained. Knowing what is an important piece of information and acting upon this are sometimes far apart. How many associations have known for many years now that there is an aging population, including their membership, yet continue to publish a newsletter with a 10-point font? If an association does not analyze and act upon the information that it gathers it may as well not bother with the gathering.

***There are generally six ways of responding to issues:***

- ***opposition strategy - try to influence the environmental forces so as to negate their impact - this is only successful where you have some control over the environmental variable in question***
- ***adaptation strategy - adapt your responses and strategic plan to the new environmental conditions***
- ***offensive strategy - try to turn the new influence into an advantage - quick response can give you a competitive advantage***

- *redployment strategy - redeploy your assets into another avenue*
- *contingency strategies - determine a broad range of possible reactions - find substitutes*
- *passive strategy - no response - study the situation further*

### *The Last Word*

The Tualatin River Watershed Council can purposefully use environmental scanning to maintain an ongoing status of being ‘in synch’ with the outer world and the assurance of being ‘on track’ with its members. Environmental scanning is a form of protection from anticipated dangers and provides ways to see new areas of opportunity as well as the threats. The Council can use environmental scanning to have an information consciousness and an intelligence that will keep them thriving.

Environmental scanning when done consistently; analyzed through the right filters; and purposefully used toward the work of the Council can be an invaluable way to ‘look out!’ for the association. There is no single way to do environmental scanning; the Council can use some of the techniques and processes described above, but will have to determine its own “right way”.