



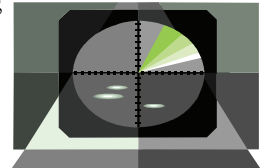
**THE INDICATOR .**  
A NEWSLETTER FROM THE TRANSPARENCY  
AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

"Spectacular achievement is always preceded by unspectacular preparation." Robert Schuller

## PLANNING to PLAN

As mentioned in our Fall 2009 issue, the Introductory and Pre-planning phases of the Plan development process are important to inform and update entities on the planning requirements under the *Transparency and Accountability Act*, and to begin the planning process. As most Coordinators realize, 2010-11 will be an extremely busy year from both a planning and reporting perspective. In this issue we have decided to focus on two key pre-planning components: Environmental Scanning and the development of Strategic Directions. As usual, there is much more to be said about each topic and the Transparency and Accountability Office remains available to you for further discussion, and to answer any questions and concerns you may have in carrying out suggested activities.

### WOTS UP? (Environmental Scanning is time well spent)



Planning approaches sometimes lack the flexibility to deal with unexpected changes in the external environment, neglect to include any processes for systematically exploring possible futures for an organization, and may miss potential innovation and strategic options because they don't challenge organizational assumptions and ideologies .

And, all too often planners don't include any systematic processes for listening to the views of staff, before a plan is written. [www.thinkingfutures.net](http://www.thinkingfutures.net)

An environment scan is an invaluable pre-planning activity; it is *the art of systematically exploring and interpreting the environment to better understand the nature of trends and drivers of change and their potential future impact on your organization.*

Environmental scanning allows for strategic thinking and helps to ensure that your plan is truly forward-looking.

WOTS- UP is just a new twist on an old formula for compiling and analyzing information gathered in an organization's environmental scan (*aka* SWOT analysis) This reconfigured acronym, **Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats and Strengths (Underlying) Planning**, gets at the purpose for carrying out this activity. Good plans have solid foundations based on current realities and future possibilities. To develop goals and objectives without an informed view of the environment puts an organization at risk of being out of touch with the expectations of its clients and stakeholders; being blindsided by foreseeable threats and losing opportunities to capitalize and build on its strengths. The overarching risk is that potentially legitimate strategic issues may be missed.

*The aim of scanning work is to provide robust information (trends and emerging issues) to enable you to build a long term context for your strategic planning today. (continued )*

## Environment Scanning (cont.)

As government entities go into a new round of planning, particularly as it relates to the development of new missions, goals and objectives, this is a critical consideration.

Using a WOTS-UP and/or other scanning methods allows the planner to filter the information gathered so that current conditions are considered, but in consideration (within the context) of the future.

While some might suggest the environmental scan should address only factors *external* to the organization (e.g. markets, legislation and government actions, demographics, etc), we suggest that you also conduct an INTERNAL scan.

An internal environmental scan involves looking at the present capabilities and challenges (perceived weaknesses) of the organization in terms of infrastructure, human resource capabilities, policies and processes, financial capacity, etc) and then comparing that information to what the organization will need in the future to address emerging issues and to achieve its strategic goals.

*Not all data is important data.*

The objective of environmental scanning is to focus on the issues and not immediately on the answers. The ultimate questions in scanning then are, “What is important?”, and “How do we know that it is important?”

Scans should include, where possible and appropriate, both quantitative and qualitative data.

Observation and trend spotting is only so helpful. Information must be given meaning within the unique context of the entity.

The value of any environmental scanning exercise is in the application/analysis of the information.

As we uncover various (current) realities and (future) possibilities we need to apply critical thinking about what the data may mean specifically for our organization.

“Is the information important?” is a relative question. Will the entity be expected to react in response to the information gathered? Is there a mandate to address or alter a predicted course of events? If so, does the entity have enough influence to change it? What can the entity realistically hope to achieve? Does it have the resources to change it? Is it consistent with the entity’s values and vision?

There are several types of scanning activities which may be used to collect environmental data: literature reviews, statistical research, focus groups, questionnaires and surveys, and facilitated group process. It’s up to the entity to decide which method/s best match the organization’s commitment to scanning, its resources and its time. There is one certainty: environmental scanning is time well spent.

Staff of the TAO can help you to think strategically about environmental factors and provide you with assistance (methods and resources) to use in your scanning activities; to interpret this information in terms of potential issues; to separate the strategic from the operational; and to find out *WOTS-UP*.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Like environment scanning, the determination of Strategic Directions (SDs) is an essential part of the planning process for each entity categorized under the *Transparency and Accountability Act*. Entities are required to develop their plans in consideration of government’s Strategic Directions which are, essentially, a summary of government’s commitments to the people of the province. They are drawn from multiple sources including government’s election platform (e.g. Blue Book), the Throne and Budget Speeches, press releases, etc.

Strategic Directions are developed at the sector level (e.g. Education) and normally require action by multiple entities. They are written as outcome statements (e.g. improved post-secondary opportunities programs and services) which are subsequently broken down into *components* so that they may be more specifically directed. There is one set of SDs per minister and each minister is responsible for communicating them to entities reporting to him/her. These entities will then be required to review the Strategic Directions and identify, through their own planning processes, if these directions apply and, if so, how they will be addressed. SDs may be addressed through one or more of an entity’s Strategic/Business Activity Plan, Operational Plan or Work Plans. Once indicated in its plan, each entity is then required to report on the portion of the strategic direction that relates to them. Accountability Coordinators play an essential role in the development of the Strategic Directions for their respective ministers. The Transparency and Accountability Office suggests a multi-step process to compile, assess, draft, seek ministerial approval and disseminate Strategic Directions; and provides assistance to Accountability Coordinators as they work through this process.

For further information or comments on this newsletter, please contact:

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