

Environmental Scans 101: Understanding Their Importance to Prevention

Published on June 9, 2025



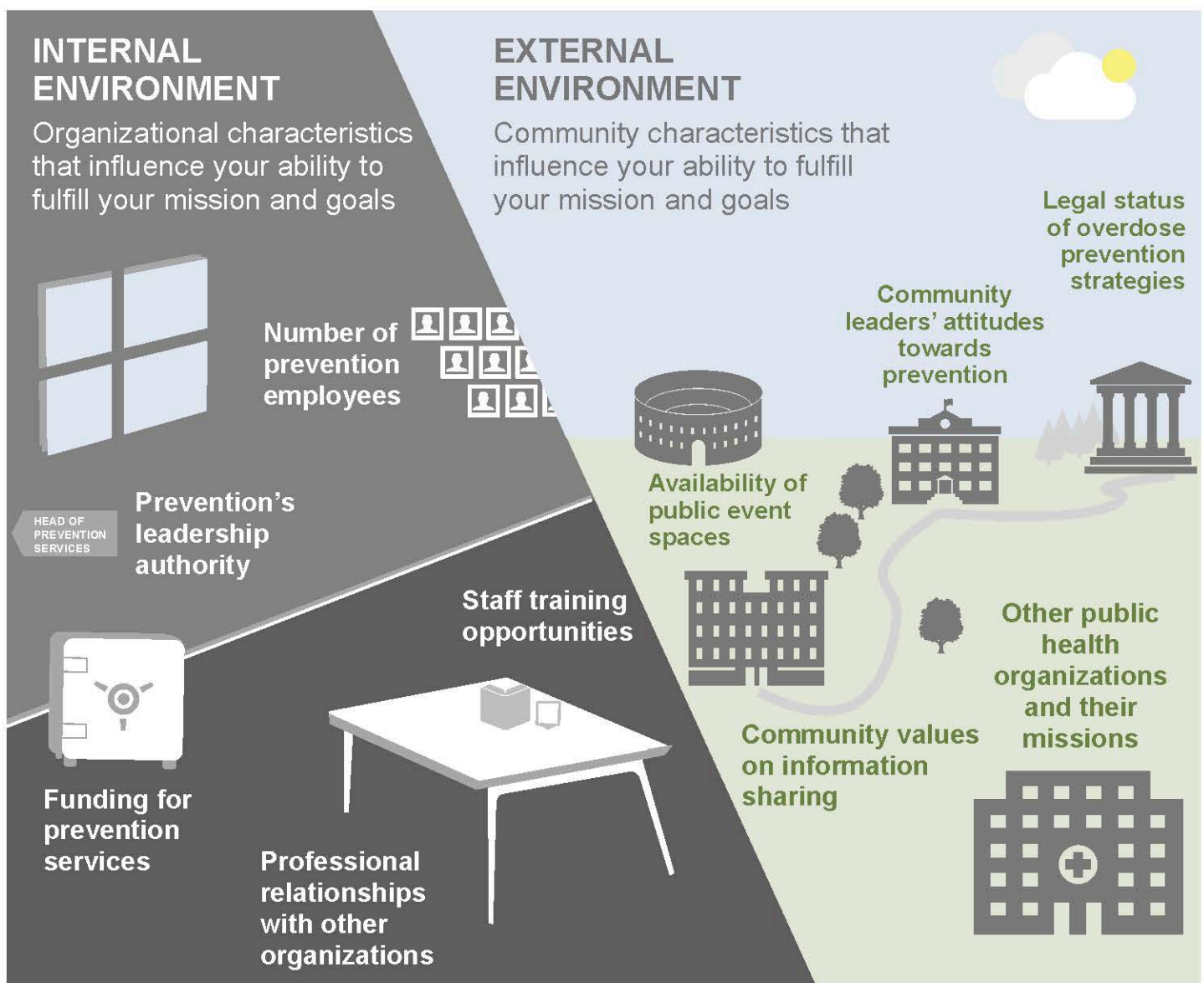
Central East (HHS Region 3)

PTTC

Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Environmental scans are processes for collecting and analyzing data about the context in which your organization operates. This context includes the challenges, supports, and other characteristics that influence service delivery both **internally** and **externally** to your organization. The term “environmental scan” may be unfamiliar,¹ but you are likely already collecting some of the data that go into one as part of your needs assessment.² Effective use of environmental scans can help you better determine priorities and make informed planning decisions.

WHAT DO ENVIRONMENTAL SCANS LOOK AT?¹



SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

HOW ENVIRONMENTAL SCANS CAN IMPROVE STRATEGIC PLANNING¹

Effective strategic planning, such as using SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) relies on comprehensive, reliable data. Environmental scan findings can support the development of your needs assessment. They can also inform many other SPF activities, such as:



Determining how best to focus



Developing evaluation research questions



Identifying which service gaps should be prioritized



Establishing processes for improving intra-organization teamwork



Deciding what prevention services can be supported by existing funding

NOTES

1. Charlton, P. et al. (2021). Use of environmental scans in health services delivery research: A scoping review. *BMJ Open*, 11(11), e050284. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8587593/>
2. Colorado State University. (n.d.). *Environmental scan & needs assessment*. <https://extension.colostate.edu/docs/staffres/program/Environmental-Scan-and-Needs-Assessment.pdf>

