

Environmental Scans 101: What Environmental Scans Can Look Like

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PTTC

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Environmental scans should use well-established analytical tools to ensure their effectiveness. Two of the most common tools are the PESTLE and SWOT analyses.^{1,2,3} Each analysis has a specific purpose. Completing these scans can help answer many questions that may arise during your strategic planning efforts. Below are the elements of these analyses and examples of questions they can help answer. Consider what questions you want answered when deciding what type of environmental scan to conduct.

PESTLE

PESTLE scans help explore the external environment's impact on the community

P

POLITICAL

Government policies and political issues and trends

Example: Are there city council members interested in improving the enforcement of alcohol and tobacco minimum legal purchase age statutes?

E

ECONOMIC

Income, employment, and other measures of prosperity

Example: How strong is the correlation between neighborhood economic status and substance use prevalence rates?

S

SOCIAL

Demographics, personal attitudes and beliefs, and values

Example: What are community attitudes towards substance use and addiction?

T

TECHNOLOGICAL

Innovations and their community availability and impact

Example: How widespread is broadband internet access in the community, and how does it impact participation in prevention education efforts?

L

LEGAL

Laws and regulations

Example: What is the legal status of fentanyl test strips in the state?

E

ENVIRONMENTAL

The physical environment

Example: What public spaces are available to host a parent education event?



SWOT

SWOT analyses examine how internal and external environments affect an organization

S

STRENGTHS

Internal assets and advantages

Example: How many of our staff are certified prevention specialists?

W

WEAKNESSES

Internal hurdles and disadvantages

Example: Do we lack organizational leadership that actively supports prevention services?

O

OPPORTUNITIES

External supports and facilitators

Example: What pre-existing relationships with other organizations can support new prevention initiatives?

T

THREATS

External obstacles and challenges

Example: Is there a risk of losing external funding that currently supports prevention?

NOTES

1. Washington State University. (2025). *What is a PESTEL analysis?* <https://libguides.libraries.wsu.edu/c.php?g=294263&p=4358409>
2. UNSW Sydney. (n.d.). *PESTLE analysis*. <https://subjectguides.library.unsw.edu.au/business/pestle>
3. Community Tool Box. (n.d.). *Section 14. SWOT analysis: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats*. Center for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/swot-analysis/>

