

# BUSINESS PLANNING: SWOT ANALYSIS

A successful program structure for an association is flexible enough to meet member need as it changes over time. With the introduction of topical interest networks, AAMFT is embracing this concept to benefit our profession's continued growth and development. The key is determining what those needs are.

This can be done in several ways.

Surveys are an often used tool that can sometimes be helpful but the reality is members at large typically want more than the association can support - and rarely understand the true costs behind many of the programs and services offered. Utilizing data to determine member interest can be another good way. Identifying gaps where there's a need in the field that is not being met are often a good determiner of how successful an activity will be.

A SWOT analysis is a great way to organize all of these different types of factors to determine long-term viability and sustainability of an idea. In their heralded books "The Road to Relevance" and "The Race for Relevance", association experts Harrison Coever and Mary Byers indicate that high-performing associations no longer focus on being the end-all and be-all for members but rather focusing on doing one or two functions exceedingly well for members.

The challenge lies in figuring out what those one or two things are. Surveys to members can sometimes be helpful but the reality is members at large typically want more than the association can support – and rarely understand the true costs behind many of the programs and services offered. Often a more effective tool that your Board can use is conducting a SWOT analysis.

## What is a SWOT Analysis?

A SWOT analysis is a simple tool used in business planning that assess your group's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It is a very easy process that can often offer powerful insights into the potential and the critical issues facing you.

The SWOT analysis begins by conducting a review of internal strengths and weaknesses. Don't be concerned about elaborating on these topics at this stage; bullet points are likely best. But do be critical – a program that may be highly valued but is tremendously expensive may be both a strength and a weakness. A program that is less utilized because it is newer but offers more potential growth may be an opportunity.

The primary purpose of the SWOT analysis is to identify and assign each significant factor, positive and negative, to one of the four categories allowing you to take an objective look at your business idea. It will ultimately be a helpful tool in developing your goals and deciding on your future strategy.



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## Strengths

Strengths describe the positive attributes, tangible and intangible, that are internal to your group. They are the things that are within your control. What do you do well? What resources do you have? What advantages do you have over other groups? Strengths capture the positive aspect internal to your business that add value or offer you a competitive advantage.

*Areas you may want to consider:*

- Membership numbers or trends to indicate strong participation
- Programs with a lot of engagement opportunity
- Strong potential financial position (products, services, trainings are a possibility)
- A pool of dedicated and committed leadership
- Large concentrations of MFTs in the target market

## Weaknesses

Weaknesses are factors that are within your control that detract from your ability to obtain or maintain a competitive edge. They may include a lack of expertise, limited resources, or lack of access to skills or technology. Weaknesses capture the negative aspects internal to your business that detract from the value you offer, or place you at a disadvantage. The more accurately you identify your weaknesses, the more valuable the SWOT will be for your assessment.

*Areas you may want to consider:*

- Low response to interest reach outs
- High start-up costs
- Limited pool of potential interested members
- Heavily developed area of interest/not much room to move the needle forward on the topic

## Opportunities

Opportunities assess the external attractive factors that represent the reason for your group to exist and prosper. These are external to your business. What opportunities exist in your market, or in the environment, from which you hope to benefit? It is important to consider if these are ongoing opportunities or if there is a limited window of time for it. Remember, opportunities are external to your business – if you have identified “internal” opportunities, they are actually strengths and should be classified there.



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*Areas you may want to consider:*

- Large concentrations of non-member MFTs show interest
- Student-feeder programs focused on the topic
- Advocacy or regulatory opportunities
- Environmental/market focuses which create specialty opportunities
- High value of/opportunity for therapists in your market
- Emerging market (new advances, new area of specialty)

## Threats

Threats include factors beyond your control that could place your marketing strategy or the business itself at risk. These are also external – you have no control over them – but you may benefit by having contingency plans to address them. It may be helpful to classify your threats by “seriousness” and the “probability of occurrence”.

*Areas you may want to consider for your division:*

- Competition among other mental health licenses and associations
- Negative value of/opportunity for therapists in your market
- Lack of non-member MFTs in your focus area
- High barriers to success
- Well established market already exists

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

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*As your business picture begins to emerge and your plans develop, you may want to consider asking yourself the knowledge based questions. These are utilized by association leaders when making decisions to ensure that they are considering all options.*

- What do we know about our stakeholders- needs, wants, and preferences, that is relevant this decision?
- What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of our environment that is relevant to this decision?
- What do we know about the “capacity” and “strategic position” of our organization that is relevant to this decision?
- What are the ethical implications?
- What do we wish we knew, but don't?