

HOW TO DO YOUR OWN SCANNING PROJECT
Martha Gadberry, Gadberry & Associates
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Introduction to Scanning

Likely you have been operating an unofficial scanning operations already. Companies, businesses, local government officials, special interest groups, school, civic and community organizations, and academic circles based their focus, behavior and activity choices on what they are reading. Whenever your group of interest develops a new project it is usually based on information you have secured from somewhere.

Scanning can be made more effective if an organized group commits themselves to reading and reporting on their reading, meeting often to discuss it and identifying whether actions are needed.

The purpose of the environmental scan is to review literature, conference proceedings, conversations with leaders, and other sources of information that will tell you what trends are developing.

The Nebraska Horizons Scanners, 2006, recommended that their sponsor, the University of Nebraska Rural Initiative, provide a model for intentional scanning. These pages will provide you with a guide for initiating your own intentional scanning group.

One of the scanners, Lance Hedquist, City Administrator, City of South Sioux City, Nebraska said, *“To build a brighter future for our state we must constantly refocus our priorities based on local, state and national trends. This process enables us do bring about a redirection based upon the views of Nebraskans with diverse backgrounds”*.

1. Goals

A. Determine what your scanning goals are. They can be as specific as entrepreneurial development activities in small towns, the impact of methamphetamine on rural families, or as broad as the impacts of global warming on farming practices.

B. Determine your scope of influence. Do you want to impact local, regional or state practices?

2. Duration

Determine how long you will commit to the project and each other. Start with a short period of time, say 3 months. If interest and commitment continue, extend the time for the scanning project.



Martha Gadberry • Gadberry & Associates • Communication Consultants

1530 Janssen Drive • Lincoln, NE 68506 • 402-489-2667
Home 488-0990 Fax: 402-489-2808 • E-mail: mgadberry@neb.rr.com

3. Recruit scanners

A. Scanners should be individuals who

- will be interested and committed to the project;
- read outside materials as part of their professional life;
- are able to see a rural perspective;
- express curiosity about the future;
- seem comfortable with ambiguity;
- have a tendency to do big picture thinking;
- have experience with taking separate bits of information and connecting them in interesting ways.

B. Benefits to participants include

- Exposure to the voices of rural Nebraska;
- An organized opportunity to discuss issues of emerging importance with others;
- Information to share with their own professional networks; and
- Establishing new relationships with others interested in the future.

C. Contact individuals

- Send letters to a selected list, follow with e-mail and phone calls to recruit individuals.
- Try to find persons from occupations in all parts of your region that you want to include. Ask them to suggest other names and substitutes if they can't participate. Try to secure persons of color, geographical and occupational distribution, gender and age balance. The scanner group should be large enough to represent points of view and small enough to be able to meet regularly. Optimum size ranges from 7 to 20.

4. Set up a simple, memorable system for tracking and organizing scans so summaries and conclusions can be written. Determine who will record all the scans and provide printed reports periodically.

Decide on a scan identifier:

One option: Use their initial, the scanning period, and assign scan numbers in chronological sequence. For example: In the third week of scanning Martha submitted her 5th scan. The scan identifier would be MG -3-5. Organize the scans according to topic if there is no need to track scans by individuals. For example, if the scan above concerned capacity building, the scan identifier might be CB – MG – 3 -5

5. Train Scanners

Scan and Discuss

Scanners submit a target number of scans per week, meet to review scans worthy of pursuing more information and go home and scan some more. Each meeting would increase competence for this newly acquired skill and build information databases of trends. Based



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on comments of scanners at periodic meetings, reports should be planned and recipients identified.

Options for Topics

Ask scanners to look for changes in culture, political, financial, demographics, mobility patterns, and other aspects of daily personal and business life that affect their goals. Forces, behaviors and changes could be identified locally, regionally or statewide, nationally and globally.

One example of ways topics could be organized follows.

Agriculture

Crop and livestock production, value-added agriculture, specialty crops, market access and development, sustainable agriculture

Capacity Building

New models of leadership and service delivery, social entrepreneurship, social capital, leadership development

Economic Development

Small business; business entrepreneurship; job creation and retention; wealth creation, retention and transfer; employment and labor; population growth and retention; housing

Education

Pre-kindergarten – high school, postsecondary education, adult and continuing education and training, distance learning

Health and Health Care

Recruitment and retention of professionals, access and delivery, cost, quality, mental health, training for health professions

Infrastructure

Streets, roads, highways, curbs and gutters, bridges, buildings, water and wastewater systems, utilities, Internet access

Law Enforcement and Justice

Access to legal services; prisons, jails and detention centers; community-based solutions; policing; alternative sentencing

Natural Resources and Environment

Water, ecosystems, energy, conservation, weather, land use

Quality of Life

Parks and recreation, arts and culture, spiritual and religious life, entertainment, information exchange/communication, safety, access to child



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Where to Look

Websites

- www.fastcompany.com
- www.trendwatching.com
- www.springspotters.com

Books and Resources

- *If Disney Ran Your Hospital* by Fred Lee
- “Washington Monthly” – an “ornery magazine”
- “Ode” magazine for intelligent optimists

- *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Malcolm Gladwell, (2000) A staff writer for New Yorker Magazine, Gladwell, writes a fascinating study of human behavior patterns, and shows where the smallest things can trigger an epidemic of change.

- *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, Malcolm Gladwell, (2005). *Blink* is about the first two seconds of looking--the decisive glance that knows in an instant. Gladwell, the best-selling author of *The Tipping Point*, campaigns for snap judgments and mind reading with a gift for translating research into splendid storytelling. Gladwell persuades readers to think small and focus on the meaning of "thin slices" of behavior. The key is to rely on our "adaptive unconscious"--a 24/7 mental valet--that provides us with instant and sophisticated information to warn of danger, read a stranger, or react to a new idea.

- *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, Thomas Friedman (2005). Award-winning *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman works to make sense of the often bewildering global scene unfolding before our eyes. *The World Is Flat* is a timely and essential update on globalization explaining what it means to countries, companies, communities, and individuals; and how governments and societies can, and must, adapt.

- *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, Jared Diamond (2004)
From the publisher: In his runaway bestseller *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Jared Diamond brilliantly examined the circumstances that allowed Western civilizations to dominate much of the world. Now he probes the other side of the equation: What caused some of the great civilizations of the past to fall into ruin, and what can we learn from their fates? Using a vast historical and geographical perspective ranging from Easter Island and the Maya to Viking Greenland and modern Montana, Diamond traces a fundamental pattern of environmental catastrophe - one whose warning signs can be seen in our modern world and that we ignore at our peril. Blending the most recent scientific advances into a

narrative that is impossible to put down, *Collapse* exposes the deepest mysteries of the past even as it offers hope for the future.

- *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Margaret Wheatley (2006) Based on new science theories, this innovative management book sheds light on the issues that affect organizations most--order and change, autonomy and control, structure and flexibility, planning and innovation.
Annotation from Book News, Inc.: Wheatley runs a research foundation that explores new structures for organizations.
- *Inspiration* Software – one can diagram many ideas on the same page.

Encourage scanners' efforts

Thank them appropriately when it is completed.



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