

The AJASN database

(This is an update of the 2017 database member instructions.)

... **Any horizon scanning process is conversational**; it triggers people to surface their spontaneous knowledge ...the purpose of a database is to act as that trigger, and a 'trip wire' once a certain number of articles have been collected.

Remember, a scanning database is not the same as an academic reference list.

The purpose of the database is to identify and record a number of curated scan hits (which members have identified). Individually, these scan hits convey the gist of an idea.

Taken as a whole, the scan hits show new possibilities (e.g. by combining two ideas or 'connecting the dots' to create a new insight; or finding a unique perspective on a subject in only one article.) The collected scan hits are distributed, individually reviewed by members, and then used to prompt collective conversations amongst members during meetings which are held 3 to 4 times a year.

When looking for early signs of change i.e. a general sense of the direction of change – as you do in horizon scanning – identifying emerging issues and anomalies ('things that don't fit' current thinking) is a more important task than unpacking the specific details of a topic.

What is a scan hit?

Horizon scanning activities are designed to collect the sort of unconnected insights and knowledge that are called *weak* signals: events we observe and that reach our consciousness because we intuit that they have some relevance to our situation.

Their weakness in this context refers to our inability to give meaning to them, in contrast to *strong* signals whose potential implications we understand clearly. We puzzle about *weak signals* as we feel that they may become important but we have few(er) clues about how or why.

Horizon scanning is one way can we get these building blocks (of *weak signals*) on the table, and link them up.

Where to find scan hits

Scan hits are not the same as evidence for policy- or decision-making. Scan hits are 'subtle pointers' that when taken together become powerful hints of things to come.

When you first start scanning, scan 'hits' can be any observation that you want to investigate further. A hit might be an event, innovation, policy decisions, social development, the way people are using technology and so on. Over time you should become better at identifying emerging issues ('weak signals'.)

Ideally, scanning should draw on a wide variety of sources, from government and scientific documents to commercial, non-profit, and grassroots information. Practically, it is important to balance comprehensiveness (breadth / depth), coherence (making sense), and relevance.

Some 'rules of thumb' are:

Read the grey literature. (These are materials produced by individuals and organisations outside of the traditional government, commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels.) Grey literature includes blogs, websites, on-line opinion and news sites, videos or podcasts and social media (Twitter, for example).

Follow key people. Pay attention to people who influence public opinion or people that express different values and ideas (e.g. artists and youth).

Track what has happened elsewhere. The future of one place is often the history of another. Conversely, it is important to find issues from places that are generally not considered leaders.

Use already aggregated information. Consider how you can tap into others who are already scanning / aggregating relevant content.

Information from literature reviews. Look for 'meta-reviews' or seminal papers in selected periodicals and in a wide(r)-range of peer-reviewed journals and in early research notification services.

How to Submit a post

1. Access the **Submit a Post** page. The page can be accessed via the Home page by clicking the **Submit a Post on AJASN link** or by accessing the **Submit a Post link** on the Recent posts page.



RECENT POSTS

View recent posts on AJASN in the table below.

You can use the search function below to search for post titles, keywords, summary and pub

If you would like to submit a post you can access the [Submit a Post page](#).

2. You will be presented with the Submit a Post form. Enter in the required data for each field. Descriptions for each field are available below to help guide you complete the form. Please note, all required fields are marked with an asterisk.

1 Title*

2 Summary*

3 Keywords* - comma delimited

4 So What?*

5 Impact Areas*
Policy design/development/ implementation

6 Source Rating*
Peer-reviewed

7 Publication*
ABC News

8 Publication Date*
dd/mm/yyyy

9 Author*

10 Category*
Political

11 URL

12 File Upload
Choose file No file chosen

13 Save

How to record a 'scan hit'

1. Title

Type the name of the article.

2. Summary

Provide a short and succinct summary of the information.

This will enable a reader to get the gist of the sources' key messages at a glance. As a guide 100-200 words is a useful limit but it depends on the article.

3. Key words

Enter some key words to help someone searching for issues.

These words might appear in other fields (e.g. Summary, Title) but remember that when looking for the upshot of an article being drafted some scanners might want to run down the key words column to look for articles on particular issues.

The search function will, however, also search post titles, summaries and publication fields.

4. So what?

This is where you give your opinion of what this article (or other information source) might mean.

The 'so what' sometimes emerges from discussion at the AJASN meetings; or, in other cases, it emerges from the connections between multiple scans rather than an individual scan.

Explain – write a sentence on **why you flagged this**:

- Does it confirm trends we already suspect are emerging?
- Does it suggest a possible new trend? Or a counter-trend?
- Does it challenge current ideas or assumptions?
- Is it the first time something has been reported or suggested?
- Does it suggest multiple drivers are increasing the likelihood or impact of a trend?
- Does it identify some alternative futures that we could be watching?
- Is it an old idea appearing in a new place (e.g. a group writing about a particular issue who previously had not)?

Describe – in a sentence – how this might affect your organisations. It sometimes helps to think of questions when describing the 'so what' – for example – 'Is this about pursuing a set goal *or* maximising adaptation to change?' A few additional questions relevant to 'So what?' are listed below:

› **what challenge (or opportunity) is this addressing?**

Is this a problem? What type of problem? What part of the problem should we work on?

- Problems of deficit and excess (... 'too much' or 'too little') ...
- Problems of invention (... find a way to ...)
- Problems of choice [decision] (... do this or do that)

› **what does this mean for what we do now? in the future?**

Does this change the answer to any of these questions?

- How do we believe we can make a difference?
- What role should we play?
- Where will we focus our efforts?
- What actions, adaptations and economic model are required?
- What skills and abilities will we need, individually and collectively, to create the impact we've set out to achieve?
- How will we measure our success?

› in terms of the impact

- What are the positive and negative effects (for instance on people, institutions, and communities)? Does the program generate better results for a particular group?
- Are there particular conditions or program components that disproportionately drive results?
- Does this have a multiplying effect on a current problem or opportunity?

5. Impact areas

This explores areas in which this scan might have impact in our agencies (e.g. the design and delivery of policy, services or programs). Some articles might be useful mainly because they add to our knowledge base from which we can discern possible trends, but others might have immediate impacts on areas like policy development. Select an appropriate impact area from the options available in the drop list.

6. Source rating

This field enables you to indicate what authority is behind the article. It is important when scanning to look in both the "expert", peer-reviewed literature and in grey and fringe literature. Select one of the following items from the available drop list.

- Peer reviewed – e.g. journal articles that have been reviewed by other scientists
- Credible – Articles that are not peer-reviewed but have been written by people who are credible (e.g. well-respected journalists, experts giving opinions in the media, politicians talking about their own areas of expertise without applying undue "spin")
- Speculative – Ideas by people who are speculating about what might happen in the future but their credibility is unclear, wither because of who they are or the fact that they are projecting too far into the future for anyone to be confident about predictions.

7. Publications

Use the drop down list to select a publication.

There is a drop down list of publications that are frequently used. If your publication is not available in the list, **select "Other"** and **add it to the keywords field**. If you would like to add the publication as a frequently accessed publication, please contact Kate to add it to the list.

8. Publication date

The database will not let you complete your entry if you do not enter a complete date. These details are important for people trying to find the article. Some articles have a day, month and year publication date, but others only have month and year or just year. A proxy date can be used in these cases. **Date must be entered in the format of DD/MM/YYYY. If only the year is available, you might use 1 January (e.g. 01/01/2017) for that year or use "00" for Day and/or Month (e.g. 00/00/2017).**

9. Author

Identify the authors of the article.

If there are several authors use the first named author and 'et al.'

10. Category

Use the drop down list to select a category.

There is a drop down list of previously used categories. At the moment you can only choose one category and there is not a facility to add a new one. If you want to flag additional categories, use the key words field.

11. URL (or DOI)

Wherever possible provide a URL so that users of the database can find articles or web sites that are available electronically.

Journal articles can be located by a DOI number.

12. Upload file

If appropriate you can upload a pdf version of the article. (If it is likely to be a short-lived resource (e.g. newspaper, government website) consider loading the resource.)

You don't want to upload everything. As a guideline for when to upload, you are free to upload anything or you can choose to only upload articles that will be hard for people to find (later).

13. Save

Select the **Save button** to save your entry into the AJASN Database.

Contact

If you have any questions please contact: Kate Delaney kdel1473@bigpond.net.au or kate.delaney@jrsc.net.au