



Choosing a Project Description

Statement of objectives, performance work statement or statement of work?

Solicitation

It is important to be able to describe the requirements you have for the procurement so that prospective vendors can adequately describe the products and/or services they believe will meet your needs. But not all projects are created equal; sometimes you know precisely how you want to complete your project, and sometimes your notion of how a solution might look is more open-ended. Depending upon the templates used in your jurisdiction, you may be developing one of three different types of project descriptions. Here is a brief summary of the characteristics of each:

Approach/template	Key attributes
Statement of objectives (SOO) <i>Most high-level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on overall objectives and results rather than specific requirements. • Can be used for acquisition of both products and services. • Best used when you want to avoid being prescriptive, encourage maximum flexibility in solutions to be offered, or maximize innovation and competition. • Is usually part of an RFP but not part of a resulting contract. • Can be supplemented by an SOW or PWS, whose major elements can be traced back to entries in the SOO (this is a jurisdictional policy choice). Alternatively, the SOW can be provided by the bidders.
Performance work statement (PWS) <i>Moderately to very detailed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes requirements for a procurement with greater emphasis on the tasks and <i>what</i> is to be done rather than <i>how</i> it is to be done. • Is best used when a project is well defined, but you wish to allow some flexibility in how requirements are met by a vendor. • Can be used for acquisition of both products and services. • Is often part of an RFP, and is then also incorporated in some form in the resulting contract.
Statement of work (SOW) <i>Moderately to very detailed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes in detail what specifically is to be accomplished by the vendor in measurable terms, often stipulating <i>how</i> the work should proceed. (Note: Because the jurisdiction is more prescriptive in <i>how</i> to do the work, it may also bear more responsibility for any project failures.) • Is best used when the work is well understood and can be described in very specific terms, such as when there is only one technical solution. • Can be used for acquisition of both products and services. • Is often part of an RFP, and is then also incorporated in some form in the resulting contract.

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The most advisable course of action is to work with your procurement staff on which templates/approach best fits your needs and goals. For instance, if you are open to either enhancement of your current system *or* implementation of a new system, an SOO enables you to describe your overall objectives and solicit different approaches to achieve those objectives. If, on the other hand, you are seeking ongoing maintenance of an existing system, an SOW containing the specific tasks to perform may be more appropriate. And a system replacement might best be achieved with a PWS indicating specific performance metrics for the resulting system or activity.

Sources:

Naval Air Systems Command, "[Guidance for the Development of Statement Of Objectives \(SOO\)](#)," August 2018.

Defense Acquisition University, "[Statement of Work- Performance Work Statement- Statement of Objectives](#)," December 2019.