

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO IMPROVING PROCUREMENT OUTCOMES WITH THE RIGHT REQUIREMENTS DOCUMENT

Effective communication with industry requires building the right requirements document for each procurement. Understanding when to use a Statement of Work (SOW), Performance Work Statement (PWS), or Statement of Objectives (SOO) is key to optimizing outcomes. The Government, and specifically Program Managers and Requirement Owners, must understand the requirements and craft the requirements document to meet specific needs, ensuring the desired outcome before contract award. Your contracting officer is the best resource for guidance.

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOWs, PWSs, AND SOOs:

STATEMENT OF WORK (SOW)

A SOW prescribes the tasks and output required from the contractor during the performance period. It is best used when the Government understands, and has a precise need, and the work integrates with other Government or contractor activities.



✓ A WELL-ALIGNED SOW:

ADHERES TO THE GOVERNMENT PROCESS

A SOW allows the Government to provide detailed instructions on task performance, specify deliverables, and establish objective measures for task completion.

DEFINES ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Government provides clear definitions of tasks, assigns responsibilities, and sets milestones for review and acceptance.

PERFORMANCE WORK STATEMENT (PWS)

A PWS specifies the desired outcomes, performance standards, and quality levels for a service or product. Unlike a SOW, which prescribes processes and methods, a PWS focuses on performance outcomes and provides the foundation for monitoring and evaluating contractor performance.



✓ A WELL-ALIGNED PWS:

PROMOTES COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

By focusing on measurable outcomes and results rather than processes, a PWS encourages vendors to offer innovative solutions that meet desired program objectives, potentially at a lower cost.

FOCUSSES ON RESULTS

A PWS shifts risk to the contractor by delegating "how to" decisions, which maximizes their control over work processes and allows them to focus on results rather than activities.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES (SOO)

A SOO is a clear, concise document that outlines the specific goals and requirements of a contract. It provides a foundation for planning, execution, and assessment, often including measurable outcomes to evaluate progress and success.



✓ A WELL-ALIGNED SOO:

ENCOURAGES MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY

A well-structured SOO avoids detailed instructions on the approach and focuses instead on the desired goals and outcomes to provide flexibility for offerors to propose the method to meet the Government's needs. Although there is no prescribed length for the SOO, the document should be succinct and contain appropriate information based on the nature of the Government's requirement.

Note: Even with the use of a SOO, the Government must still have a clear understanding of its needs and the desired outcomes.

PROMOTES INNOVATION

The focus of offerors is on finding solutions to the problem instead of following prescriptive methods established by the Government. This may result in innovative approaches to satisfy the objectives of the project.



WHEN TO USE a SOW, PWS, or SOO:

BEST FOR	USE WHEN
Statement of Work (SOW) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Requirements that must be done in a specific manner or integrated with other work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The project scope, tasks, and deliverables are well-defined and require strict adherence.Vendor performance must be measured against specific activities and milestones.There is little room for deviation from the outlined processes.
Performance Work Statement (PWS) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Service contracts focused on outcomes and performance standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The objective is on the results and quality of service rather than the methods used.Clear performance standards and metrics are necessary to evaluate contractor success.Flexibility in how services are delivered is acceptable, as long as performance metrics are met.
Statement of Objectives (SOO) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Requirements where the Government is seeking innovative solutions and flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The end goals and objectives are clear, but the methods to achieve them can vary.<ul style="list-style-type: none">TIP: Be careful not to over-prescribe what is required as you may unintentionally limit industry's ability to provide innovative solutions or approaches in their response.To increase offeror creativity.Rapid technological changes or complex problems necessitate adaptable approaches. <p>Note: The SOO does not become a part of the contract. The solicitation may allow the offerors to respond to the SOO with a draft PWS, which the Government is responsible for reviewing if the proposed PWS is included in the contract. The Government may also independently craft the requirements document for the contract.</p>

Not sure which document to use? Consult your Contracting Officer!

Tips for Creating Successful Requirements Documents

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Review past government contracts to assess and glean insights into best practices and lessons learned on the procurement methods used and relevant performance outcomes that are aligned with your desired solution.2 Allow sufficient time to conduct extensive market research to understand what capabilities are available to support your needs and how the marketplace is evolving.3 Engage with industry early to leverage their expertise and insights when developing requirements. Industry can help you understand current or future advances in the market to minimize knowledge gaps and identify key considerations when refining requirements.4 Actively seek input from end-users and your contracting office during requirements development to minimize problems after contract award.5 Prior to creating the requirements document, the Contracting Officer should be consulted on the most appropriate approach (SOW, PWS, or SOO) to satisfy your needs. Once a requirements document is created, seek guidance and assistance from the Contracting Officer on the best way to obtain input from industry and other internal/external stake-holders to avoid organizational conflicts of interest during the procurement process.6 Document everything you learn for future use and to help others build on your prior work.
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