

## What is a good SOW?

There's no standard format for an SOW. They may differ significantly from one organization to another, or from project to project. However, they all have a few foundational pieces of content in common.

- **Deliverables:** What work is being done, and what things are being created as a result of this project? When the project is complete, what are you expected to deliver to the stakeholders? Be specific here. Will you collect data for this project? How much, or for how long?

Avoid vague statements. For example, "fixing traffic problems" doesn't specify the scope. This could mean anything from filling in a few potholes to building a new overpass. Be specific! Use numbers and aim for hard, measurable goals and objectives. For example: "Identify top 10 issues with traffic patterns within the city limits, and identify the top 3 solutions that are most cost-effective for reducing traffic congestion."

- **Milestones:** This is closely related to your timeline. What are the major milestones for progress in your project? How do you know when a given part of the project is considered complete?

Milestones can be identified by you, by stakeholders, or by other team members such as the Project Manager. Smaller examples might include incremental steps in a larger project like "Collect and process 50% of required data (100 survey responses)", but may also be larger examples like "complete initial data analysis report" or "deliver completed dashboard visualizations and analysis reports to stakeholders".

- **Timeline:** Your timeline will be closely tied to the milestones you create for your project. The timeline is a way of mapping expectations for how long each step of the process should take. The timeline should be specific enough to help all involved decide if a project is on schedule. When will the deliverables be completed? How long do you expect the project will take to complete? If all goes as planned, how long do you expect each component of the project will take? When can we expect to reach each milestone?
- **Reports:** Good SOWs also set boundaries for how and when you'll give status updates to stakeholders. How will you communicate progress with stakeholders and sponsors, and how often? Will progress be reported weekly? Monthly? When milestones are completed? What information will status reports contain?

At a minimum, any SOW should answer all the relevant questions in the above areas. Note that these areas may differ depending on the project. But at their core, the SOW document should always serve the same purpose by containing information that is specific, relevant, and accurate. If something changes in the project, your SOW should reflect those changes.