Scope of Work (SOW)

What is the purpose of a scope of work (SOW)?

It is the investigator(s) opportunity to convince members of the scientific community that the investigators have identified a scientific problem along with scientific objectives and a methodological approach to solving a problem. The SOW must also reflect that the scientific problem can be solved using a reasonable amount of time and funding.

A scope of work includes:

What the project hopes to accomplish
Where the work will take place
Timeline for accomplishments & progress
Minimum standards for reports and/or meetings
Deliverable(s)
Equipment, facilities and other resources
Unique skills needed to perform research
Data Management Plan

Key Process Elements:

1. Reason for writing: What is the importance of the research? Why would a reader be interested in the larger work?
2. Problem: What problem does this work attempt to solve? What is the scope of the project? What is the main argument or thesis?
3. Methodology: An abstract of scientific work may include specific models or approaches used in the larger studies.
4. Results: An abstract of scientific work may include specific data that indicates the results of the project.
5. Implications: What changes should be implemented based on the findings of the work? How does this work add to the body of knowledge on the topic?
6. Describe the measurable activities and tasks: should be defined in a level of detail such that one can easily determine if the objectives are met.

Project Schedules:

- Make realistic and attainable estimates of how long it will take to perform each activity.
- Specify the order in which objectives are to be performed.
- Include the following three elements:

    1. Activities: Work to be undertaken.

2. Duration: Time necessary to complete an activity.
3. Milestones: Specific events marking the culmination of activities.

Best Practices:

Don't use ambiguous statements or words, such as adequate or average.
Don't repeat requirements described in other parts of the contract/subcontract and don't include unnecessary narrative.
Don't use "catch-all" phrases such as, "as applicable".
Don't infer a requirement or state a requirement as an adjunct to another requirement. The reader may overlook the inference or true objective.
Don't include any terms and conditions in the SOW; this should be limited to the actual contract document.
Don't assign any intellectual property rights to the deliverable in the SOW.
Do use mandatory language when stating a firm statement (i.e. shall).
Do describe the work and associated requirements as clearly as possible, but don't over specify.
Do use the same descriptive terminology each time a part, component, or item is referenced.
Do include illustrations, diagrams, charts, and tables if they assist in describing the work.
Do have the SOW critiqued by others.
Do use language that everyone can understand. The SOW will need to be reasonably interpreted by non-experts in the scientific field.