

# JOB AID

## How to Write an SOP

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A standard operating procedure<sup>1</sup>, or SOP, is used in business and government to ensure consistency and efficiency in the day-to-day completion of certain tasks or functions that are repetitive or routine in nature. A well-written SOP avoids the need to reinvent the wheel each time a process is performed. Good standard operating procedures should be clear, concise, and easy to follow by any employee who is qualified to do the task described.

A good SOP is a management tool, and when kept current and utilized during execution has the following benefits:

1. **documents key processes**, an important internal control
2. supports **knowledge transfer** and **succession planning**
3. allows a team to **add improvements to processes** to ensure **consistent** and **acceptable** results
4. helps get **new team members up to speed quickly**
5. **reduces the time required for follow-ups** and **meetings**
6. **simplifies** and **clarifies individual roles** and responsibilities
7. can be referenced in **performance documents** to help members of an organization or team understand expectations

### Guidelines

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SOPs should be written in a concise, step-by-step, easy-to-read format. The information presented should be straightforward and not overly complicated. The active voice and present verb tense should be used. The term "you" should not be used, but implied. The document should not be wordy, redundant, or overly lengthy. Information should be conveyed clearly and explicitly to remove any doubt as to what is required. Also, use attachments (e.g. sample letters, correspondence, screenshots) to help the reader better visualize parts of a process.

Preferably, those who serve as subject-matter experts that actually perform the work and are knowledgeable about the process will write the SOP. A best practice when writing an SOP is to create a draft by capturing the process as one actually does the work. In this way, the step-by-step processes are documented, as well as the rationale for performing each step.

A team approach can be followed, especially for processes that involve multiple tasks and where the experiences of a number of individuals are critical. This

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from [How to Write an SOP | eHow.com](http://www.ehow.com/how_5164029_write-sop.html#ixzz29kldMNq) [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_5164029\\_write-sop.html#ixzz29kldMNq](http://www.ehow.com/how_5164029_write-sop.html#ixzz29kldMNq)

promotes inclusion and encourages those involved in its production to take ownership of the final document.

When the SOP is complete, it will serve as a guide for those who play a role in future iterations of the process, and should be used to execute the process each time.

## Checklist

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### Developing the SOP

1. **Library Staff Member/Supervisor:** Identify and make a list of important processes that must be done correctly each time without fail. These processes will ultimately become SOPs or sections within SOPs. Decide who needs to be on the SOP Team and invite them to participate in the development and review of the new document. The Supervisor will assign the writing of the SOP to a team member.
2. **SOP Team & Supervisor:** Define the process to be captured in an SOP **before any writing begins.** The SOP Writer along with the SOP Team and/or Supervisor should clarify the topic for the SOP and discuss the necessary outcome, along with how the SOP will be used. The SOP Writer should be a person who does the job or task, or one that is responsible for leading and/or training those employees who do the job. Others will review and contribute to the SOP, but only one person should be responsible for writing it.
3. **SOP Team & Supervisor:** Discuss and agree to determine the scope or boundaries of the SOP. Which aspects of the process will be included? Which aspects are to be excluded? Write this information in the "Scope" section of the SOP template. Refer to this section frequently as it will help keep the SOP development on track and in-scope.
4. **SOP Team & Supervisor:** Discuss and determine any laws, LCRs or guidance memos that are relevant to the process.
5. **SOP Writer:** Be explicit in capturing each step. Write the SOP thoroughly, carefully listing each detail necessary to complete the task at hand. Provide rationale for the steps as necessary. This will help anyone using the SOP to know why the steps, along with any nuances, are important. Review the draft SOP and be sure to include the steps that improve the quality or decrease the risk inherent in the task. Identify forms, checklists and examples that are required or that will assist in the completion of the task should be attached and referenced.
6. **SOP Team:** Review the SOP draft as a team and meet to add any additional changes needed. Get input and tips for improving accuracy and clarity from key stakeholders. Update the revision number/date.
7. **SOP Writer:** Make edits to the final draft.

8. **SOP Team & Supervisor:** Meet to review the final draft and make final revisions.
9. **SOP Writer:** Send final copies electronically to each individual listed in the Roles section, along with the **Supervisor**. The Supervisor should ensure that the SOP is filed in a place where everyone can access it such as a wiki.

### Using the SOP and Making Revisions

When a team needs to execute a process, each member should review the SOP before the first meeting.

1. **Supervisor or designee:** Determine if any of the specific people performing the roles have changed. If so, the **supervisor or designee** should identify new people to fill those roles, advise them, and send the new team member a copy of the SOP.
2. **Supervisor or designee:** Set up regular meetings with the team. Once a team has completed the process a few times, meetings can be fairly short and simply used to update each other. Each team member should read the SOP before the meeting, take appropriate action, and bring their copy of the SOP to meetings. The team can use the SOP to status process steps.
3. **All:** Execute the tasks as laid out in the SOP. If improvements need to be made to the process, the **SOP Writer** should note them along the way and make changes at the end of the process. All team members should determine if the SOP was helpful and adequately described the work to be performed.
4. **SOP Writer or designee:** Edit the SOP document in MS Word using the Track Changes tool. Meet with other stakeholders to make sure that the revisions are accepted by all. Schedule meeting to discuss with Supervisor and get final approvals.
5. **SOP Writer:** Send final copies electronically to all listed in the Roles section, and the **Supervisor**. The Supervisor should ensure that the SOP is filed in a place where everyone can access it.

### Attachments:

- (1) SOP Template
- (2) Sample SOP: Communication Plan

## Attachment 1: Template

 <p>LIBRARY OF CONGRESS</p>	<p><b>Enter SU/Department/Division Name Here</b></p> <p><b>Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)</b></p> <p>Procedure Name: <b>Enter name here</b></p>
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### Summary

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{Insert basic text that describes the purpose of this SOP in plain English}

### Effective Date

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{Insert date that this SOP goes into effect}

### Scope

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{Describe what specifically this SOP covers and what it does not!}

### Guidelines/Authority

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{Provide the actual authority or reference a law or guideline, if applicable e.g., Library of Congress Regulation: LCR 1620 – Information Technology Security Policy of the Library of Congress}

### To Be Used By

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{Identify the roles or general staff who will use this SOP (e.g. "Performance Management Specialist")}

### Checklist/Procedures

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{Provide step by step instructions here. Each step should be clear and logical. After stating the step, feel free to identify the reason in another sentence. **Be specific about time frames, who does something (refer to them by title or role, not by name) and when they do it.** Separate parts of a process with headings (e.g. " Planning the Project," "Closing the Project," etc.). Write the title in bold print so it is easy to identify the person involved in a step. Use the active voice when describing the steps.}

Sample:

1. In October, **the Supervisor Development Program Manager** identifies dates of federal holidays, HRS events, and known Supervisor training dates. This avoids conflicts for the targeted participants.
2. {See attachment for additional steps}

## **Attachments:**

{List any attachments referenced in the SOP. Samples of actual e-mails, correspondence or examples are helpful to orient anyone reading the document.}

## **Approving Authority/Revision Information**

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**SOP Sponsor Name/Position:** {This is the person who has the authority to approve the SOP for use.}

**SOP Owner Name/Position:** {This is the person who is responsible for writing and updating the SOP.}

**Revision Date:** {List the date the SOP was started or revised.}

**Next Review/Revision Date:** {Typically, this is a year from the revision date listed above.}

 <p data-bbox="185 422 464 506">LIBRARY OF CONGRESS</p>	<p data-bbox="534 247 1208 331"><b>Office of Workforce Performance and Development</b></p> <p data-bbox="753 401 1417 443"><b>Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)</b></p> <p data-bbox="857 485 1417 516"><b>Procedure Name: Communication Plan</b></p>
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### Summary

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In order to communicate strategically, an organization needs a communications plan. A good plan identifies the key audiences, determines the information they need, and describes the best way to adapt the messages appropriately for each group. Basically it answers questions such as: why, who, when and how.

Depending upon the scope of the project, it may be good to get top management buy-in before you begin implementing your communication plan. At minimum your immediate supervisor and managers should be aware of and approve the plan.

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### Effective Date

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March 6, 2015

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### Scope

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The SOP will be reviewed periodically by the Director and Management and Program Analyst to insure that all information remains current. Those creating a communication plan can work with the Management and Program Analyst on guidance.

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### Guidelines/Authority

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None

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### To Be Used By

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These procedures are to be used by staff in the Office of Workforce Performance and Development.

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### Checklist/Procedures

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1. **Define the objectives.** What is the overall purpose for creating the communication plan? What are the results that should be achieved with the plan? Briefly summarize this information at the beginning of the plan.
2. **Identify the resources available to execute the plan** in terms of budget, staff etc.
3. **Define the communication goals.** Understand the expectations of the supervisor and program/project manager and what their picture of success looks like as a result of this plan.
4. **Create the key message points.** Brainstorm potential ideas with colleagues. Identify the key points the audience should know about the program or project addressed in the communication plan.
5. **Brainstorm a list of stakeholders.** This is one of the most important aspects of communications planning. Stakeholders are those who care about or will be impacted by the initiative. Each of these people/groups will become a target audience in your communications plan later on in the process.

6. **Determine the best way to reach these stakeholders.** How do THEY prefer to receive information? Memo, briefing, e-mail? Think about existing channels of communication and current messages. Leverage what's already in place. For example, if you need to reach the unions, you may want to present at their weekly meeting with HRS/Workforce Management. If the target audience is "all staff" maybe the Gazette and flyers is the best way to share information.

Decide which tools are available to use -- and affordable -- to achieve the goals and get your points across. Brainstorm ideas with team members. Craft the message to the audience's level with the appropriate amount of detail. Tools can include:

- a. Email announcements
  - b. Memos
  - c. Briefings
  - d. Electronic surveys
  - e. Web sites
  - f. Flyers near the elevators
  - g. Gazette articles
  - h. Written talking points to be used by team members to articulate the message
  - i. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): A list of potential questions and answers that might come up as a result of the presentation. Focus on making the points clear and concise. Double check that facts and data are correct.
7. **Determine the order for sharing information.** Who needs to know sooner? Who needs to know first in order for this to be successful?
  8. **Draft the communications plan by filling in the attached template.**
  9. **Share copies of the draft communication plan with supervisor and program/project manager for feedback, edits and approval.**
  10. **Put the plan into action!** Update it as items are completed and things change. Change the version number each time.
  11. **Do a lessons learned exercise.** Did the plan work? Why or why not? Any surprises? What would you do differently next time? Briefly write up the results and share with team at a staff meeting.

**Attachments:**

1. Communication Strategy – Action Plan (sample)
2. Communications Plan Template

**Approving Authority/Revision Information**

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**SOP Sponsor Name/Position:** Director, WPD

**SOP Owner Name/Position:** Management and Program Analyst

**Revision Date:** 3/6/15

**Next Review/Revision Date:** 3/6/16

## Attachment #1: SAMPLE COMMUNICATION PLAN

### Communication Strategy

The following table summarizes the key communication strategies that will be implemented to share information about this effort.

	Purpose of Message	Audience	Modes	Target Timeframe	Who is Responsible	Status/Notes
1	Provide draft Plan	COO	Via briefing and Microsoft Word document of the draft plan	1/14	Director	
2	Provide draft Plan for review, comment, and approval	TDAB	Via electronic mail and document of the draft plan	1/14	Director	
3	Notice of Plan completion	Managers and Supervisors  Labor union Presidents	Memorandum via e-mail  Briefing	2/14	Management Analyst	
4	Create authoritative source for likely questions from staff regarding plan	All employees	Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)	3/14	Management Analyst	
5	Dissemination of plan agency-wide	All employees	Staff Intranet posting  HRS Intranet Posting	3/14	HRS Staff	

**Attachment #2: Communication Plan Template**

Project/Initiative Name:  
Communication Plan Owner:  
Date Created/Updated:

The following table summarizes the key communication strategies that will be implemented to share information about this effort.

	Purpose of Message	Audience	Modes	Target Timeframe	Who is Responsible	Status/Notes
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						