The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) environmental process emphasizes collaboration as a means of assuring quality and avoiding errors. Development of a project scope is the first step in the process and is critical for setting the project up for success. Procedural requirements and standards emphasize the documentation of the project scope; however, the discussions that occur during development are at least as important for a successful project scope as the outcomes.

The paper or electronic project scope provides basic project information, establishes a list of tasks that need to be done, and assigns anticipated dates to those tasks. However, the purpose of a project scope is also to establish mutual expectations. Scope development is an opportunity for the core team members and project sponsor to ensure they are starting off with a mutual understanding of the project, what work is needed, and expectations for deliverables.

The project sponsor drafts the initial project scope, and should base the draft project scope on appropriate background information and discussion with subject matter experts (SMEs). Scope development occurs when only limited information is available. However, the more information available, the more reliable the project scope will be. Before developing the project scope, the project sponsor should check all readily available information, conduct a brief field visit, and identify known constraints and issues of concern. It can be helpful to make some assumptions in developing the project scope, as long as the project sponsor and core team understand the assumptions involved and are prepared to modify the scope if the assumptions eventually prove to be false.

After the project sponsor gathers the preliminary information, the core team should begin working together to negotiate the details of the scope. This can occur in several ways. The project sponsor may elect to draft a preliminary version of the scope for discussion purposes and to send it to the core team for discussion purposes or for informal review. The core team, and project sponsor if applicable, may exchange drafts and comments or may discuss the draft on the phone or in a physical or virtual meeting. The project sponsor also may elect to gather preliminary information, arrange a time with the core team, and work through the information to develop the project scope together. Meetings and/or phone calls are recommended.

The core team, and project sponsor if applicable, should discuss the methods to be used for tasks and the deliverables expected. Both members of the core team, and the project sponsor if applicable, should confer with SMEs as appropriate regarding technical issues. The extent of these discussions should be based on the complexity of the project, the relative importance of the task, and the extent to which methods are standardized. For example, analysis of indirect impacts is a very context-sensitive subject and generally requires substantial discussions to establish project-specific expectations. By contrast, a wetland delineation is a very standardized practice and is unlikely to require any discussion beyond identification and scheduling. Tasks related to a given topic would require more discussion on a project for which that topic is a major issue affecting the selection of alternatives than on a different project where it is unlikely to influence alternatives.

The project sponsor is encouraged to work with the core team prior to submitting its proposed project scope to the department delegate for formal review. The actual submission of the project sponsor’s proposed project scope for review is a critical milestone, because the department delegate must determine the classification within 30 days of the submission. Whether the sponsor is TxDOT or a local government, it is the sponsor that determines when the clock begins. Informal exchanges of information are encouraged, but must clearly be distinguished from the formal submittal.
If a local government project sponsor chooses to submit scope development materials (including an unsigned project scope form) informally for collaboration purposes, they must clearly identify their intent to submit informally. Otherwise, any receipt of the project scope form must be considered a formal submission. Informal exchanges should occur through e-mail or other means, and only the formal submittal should be uploaded into the Environmental Compliance Oversight System (ECOS) as a partially executed project scope form.

When TxDOT is the project sponsor, identifying the formal submittal of the project scope is simpler. A TxDOT project sponsor submits the project scope by assigning the Scope Review Task in ECOS. For TxDOT-sponsored projects, collaboration should generally occur up front. The Scope Review Task for a TxDOT-sponsored project should not be initiated until the project sponsor and department delegate are substantially in agreement.

Once the core team has reached agreement on the project scope, and the project scope has been approved, the environmental process may proceed as described in the scope. Each time the core team discusses the project status, it should also discuss whether the approved project scope is accurate. As the project progresses, the project scope should be amended as needed to reflect new information or changing assumptions. Any amendments must be agreed to by the project sponsor and the department delegate.

**Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ECOS  Environmental Compliance Oversight System
SME  Subject Matter Expert
TxDOT  Texas Department of Transportation
The following table shows the revision history for this document.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Date Month, Year</th>
<th>Reason for and Description of Change</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 2015</td>
<td>Version 1 was released.</td>
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