



White Paper Guidelines

**Program
Management
Office**

Version 1.1

November 2001

**National Wildfire
Coordinating Group**

**Information Resource
Management**

This document is a publication of the NWCG IRM Program Management Office.
Questions or comments regarding this document should be directed to:

IRM Program Management Office

National Wildfire Coordinating Group

3833 S. Development Avenue

Boise, ID 83705

Barry Mathias, Program Manager

(208) 373-4075

barry_mathias@blm.gov

Allen Deitz, Repository Manager

(208) 373-4076

allen_deitz@blm.gov

Judy Crosby, Data Architect

(208) 373-4077

judy_crosby@blm.gov

Al Borup, Applications Architect

(208) 373-4074

al_borup@blm.gov

Contents

- I. What Is a White Paper?.....2
- II. Why Create a White Paper?.....2
- III. What Goes Into a White Paper?.....3
 - 1. Introduction / Background3
 - 2. Abstract / Business Case.....3
 - 3. Problem Statement / Introduction3
 - 4. Proposed Solution(s).....3
 - 4.1 Introduction of Solution.....4
 - 4.2 Application of Solution.....4
 - 5. Future Direction / Long-Term Focus.....4
 - 6. Results / Conclusion4
 - 7. Appendices.....4
 - Appendix A – Scenarios4
 - Appendix B – Options4
 - Appendix C – Authors5
 - Appendix D – References5
- IV. Tailoring the White Paper.....6
- V. Available Templates7
- VI. Bibliography7

I. What Is a White Paper?

A white paper is a short document designed for one of the following purposes:

- To state an organization's policy, position, or philosophy about a subject;
- To present a not-too-detailed technical explanation of an architecture, framework, or product technology; or
- To pose a technology-oriented problem or question and then answer that question with information or a proposed solution.

The terms *policy paper* or *position paper*, *technology paper* or *product paper*, and *issue paper* are often used in place of *white paper* for the above purposes, respectively.

Several versions of Webster's indicate that the term originated in England to distinguish short government reports from longer, more detailed ones that were bound in blue covers and referred to as "blue books". A shorter government publication providing a report or position about something was bound in the same white paper as the text – hence, a "white paper".

II. Why Create a White Paper?

A white paper can serve to transfer knowledge and understanding of a technology, provide information to aid in making a technology choice, or present a management perspective. Often, a white paper explains the results, conclusions, or construction resulting from some organized committee, research collaboration, or design and development effort.

In information technology, a white paper is often a technology or product paper written to explain the concepts and operation of a product in a marketplace or technology context.

In government, a white paper is often a policy or position paper used to explain and implement a policy or procedure.

In a collaborative organization, a white paper is often an issue paper used to help develop understanding of a problem and build support and acceptance of a proposed solution.

A white paper can focus on pre-assessment (plan), assessment (execute), or post-assessment (evaluate) of a technology issue.

- *Pre-assessment*: What is XYZ technology and what are the benefits from it's use?
- *Plan & execute*: How can an XYZ application rollout affect other deployed technologies? What pitfalls can be expected?
- *Post-assessment*: How can the effectiveness of XYZ technology be judged? Case studies?

III. What Goes Into a White Paper?

A white paper should be short and to the point. Resources (online or otherwise) should be provided and cited, accordingly. The paper should be highly structured and cleanly organized. Typically, a white paper includes the following sections:

1. Introduction / Background

Include a brief paragraph introducing the white paper and giving any relevant background regarding how/why it was formed/written.

2. Abstract / Business Case

Include a paragraph giving a very high-level overview of the content of the paper – a description of what the paper is about. Include a clear case for action in the form of a “business case. The intent is to convey to the reader why this is important. . Cover all the pertinent issues at a high level, but do not necessarily give away the details to your conclusion.

The abstract contains the purpose of the paper. Most abstracts are written in the future tense, because the reader hasn’t read the paper yet, so explain what they *will read*, not what they already know.

3. Problem Statement / Introduction

Depending on the nature of the paper, this section will either be a problem statement or a general introduction to subject of the paper. Include a description of the white paper subject with focus on the problem or issue the white paper is attempting to solve.

Include two or three paragraphs describing the problem or question to be answered. Provide background details that are required to understand the scenario. This section should also reference any operational scenarios included in the appendices. Operational scenarios are optional but can effectively help illustrate the problem and show why the problem or issue needs to be addressed.

This is one of the most important sections – work to clearly convey thoughts and issues. Do not include specific solutions at this point. One helpful question to ask is, “Why?” Why is the desired or proposed solution needed or required?

4. Proposed Solution(s)

This section, consisting of the introduction and application of the solution, will probably be the longest sections in the paper.

Often, a proposed solution will consist of several options with varying degrees of complexity or sophistication. Group the proposed solutions by category and attempt to

stay at a higher level than individual enhancements. Graphics, figures, or screen snapshots are helpful to convey any user interface thoughts or ideas.

4.1 Introduction of Solution

Introduce the proposed solution by describing the technology, by showing graphs or charts of comparative technology, or by other means. Explain how it works in general, not how it solves the specific problem.

4.2 Application of Solution

Describe how the solution solves the problem identified in the problem statement. Include any proofs that the solution works, any comparisons or case studies, identify the success factors, etc. This is the evidence that the solution will solve the problem.

5. Future Direction / Long-Term Focus

The intent of this section is to provide some thoughts regarding the overall future direction of the problem and solution. It will probably be somewhat philosophical or “blue sky” and may describe, “This is what the users would really want if everything were perfect.” Any pictures or descriptions of how the solution integrates or works with the business process and other solutions should be included here. This section may also include any lower priority items or wild ideas that may need more thought or work.

6. Results / Conclusion

Conclude gracefully. If applicable, make a recommendation of one solution over another to solve the problem. Explain succinctly why this solution is being recommended.

7. Appendices

Authors and References are mandatory. Scenarios, Options, and other appendices are optional, depending on the content of preceding sections.

Appendix A – Scenarios

This appendix is optional. If applicable, include any detailed operational scenarios that were referenced in the problem statement (Section 3, above).

Appendix B – Options

This appendix is optional. If applicable, include a compiled list of enhancements applicable to the white paper which could be resolved if the white paper were completely implemented. These enhancements should be referenced in the proposed solution (Section 4, above) or the long-term focus (Section 5, above).

Appendix C – Authors

This appendix is mandatory. Include a list of the primary author(s) and contributors with names, agency affiliations, and e-mail addresses. This list will enable readers to give feedback regarding this white paper.

Appendix D – References

This appendix is mandatory. Include a bibliography of resources used during the preparation of the paper. Be sure to cite references used in the paper.

For WWW sites, include the author or organization name, page titles if relevant, the URL(s) for the site and pages, and the dates of the reference.

If the white paper was prepared without the use of references, indicate “No References Used”.

IV. Tailoring the White Paper

Optional and mandatory sections/paragraphs:

Type of White Paper	Issue Paper	Position Paper	Technology Paper
Purpose	<i>Identify problem & propose solution</i>	<i>State a position, policy, or philosophy</i>	<i>Explain or describe a technology or product</i>
Sections (M=mandatory; R=recommended; O=optional)			
1. Introduction / Background	(M) Introduction	(M) Background	(O) Background
2. Abstract / Business Case	(M) Business Case	(M) Abstract	(M) Abstract
3. Problem Statement / Introduction	(M) Problem Statement	(R) Introduction	(O) Introduction
4. Proposed Solution	(M) Proposed Solution	(M) Position Statement	(M) Product Description
5. Future Direction / Long-Term Focus	(O)	(O)	(O)
6. Results / Conclusion	(M) Recommendation	(R)	(O)
7. Appendices (M=mandatory; R=recommended; O=optional; NA=not applicable)			
Appendix A – Scenarios	(R)	(O)	(O)
Appendix B – Options	(R)	NA	(O)
Appendix C – Authors	(M)	(O)	(M)
Appendix D – References	(M)	(R)	(M)
Appendix E, F, G...	As needed	As needed	As needed

Section headers can be customized to fit the context of the paper, or use the above headers.

Numbering (numbers or letters) of sections is recommended, but not necessary. Section numbers can add clarity and facilitate comments and feedback on the document.

V. Available Templates

Two template documents for white papers are available from the NWCG IRM-PMO. Both templates are Microsoft Word documents.

White Paper Template - long.doc is a template designed for longer, detailed white papers. It includes a separate title page, a table of contents, section numbering, and a page header.

White Paper Template – short.doc is a template designed for short white papers. It does not contain a title page, table of contents, or section numbering.

VI. Bibliography

Lowell Thing, Editor. Whatis?com web page. <http://whatis.techtarget.com>, August 2001.

Megan Conklin. *White Paper Guidelines*. North Carolina Wesleyan College, 2000.