

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs

San Francisco Oversight Division
120 Howard Street, Room 760
San Francisco, CA 94105-0001

Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [Appellant's name]

Agency classification: Support Services Specialist
GS-342-7

Organization: [Appellant's organization/location]
U. S. Forest Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture

OPM decision: Support Services Specialist
GS-342-7

OPM decision number: C-0342-07-01

Carlos A. Torrico
Classification Appeals Officer

January 23, 2003
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

Appellant:

[Appellant's address]

[Representative's address]

Agency:

[Appellant's servicing personnel office]
U. S. Department of Agriculture
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Introduction

On September 10, 2002, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U. S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. On October 17, 2002, the Division received the agency's complete administrative report concerning the appeal. The position is currently classified as Support Services Specialist, GS-342-7. However, she believes that it should be classified as Support Services Supervisor, GS-342, and graded at the GS-9 level. The appellant works in the [appellant's organization/location], U. S. Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

This appeal decision is based on a review of all information submitted by the appellant and her agency, including her official position description (PD) [number], and two proposed PD's. Neither the appellant nor her supervisor certified to the accuracy of the PD of record, and they have been unable to resolve this issue within the agency. In such cases it is OPM policy to decide the appeal based on the duties assigned by management and which the appellant performs. We noted that the official PD addresses extensive budget duties (30%) that the appellant no longer performs because of the implementation of a unified forest budget developed above the district level. Our fact-finding disclosed that the extent and complexity of her budget related tasks have significantly diminished and are performed for no more than 10% of her time. Therefore, the agency should amend her official PD to reflect our findings. To help decide the appeal, an Oversight Division representative conducted separate telephone interviews with the appellant and her supervisor.

General issues

The appellant makes various statements about her agency and its evaluation of her position. She also compares her position to several GS-8 and GS-9 support services positions in other districts. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding her appeal and have considered her statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

The appellant discusses the volume of work she performs and supervises, and her duties as acting District Ranger. However, these factors cannot be considered in determining the grade of a position (*The Classifier's Handbook*, chapter 5).

Position information

The appellant performs planning, advisory, oversight, and coordination responsibilities related to the provision of a variety of office services functions in the district office. These include (a) maintenance of files and records involving advising on the location, arrangement, and use of files and maintenance and disposition of records, (b) providing guidance on incoming and outgoing communications including telephonic and computerized links, advising on development of the district directories, and accounting for service costs, (c) coordinating and advising on all aspects

of mail operations covering receipt, routing, dispatch and control of such communications, (d) advising and coordinating on the management of all district property including maintenance of property records, inventory procedures, disposal of excess property, service of equipment, and accounting for lost or stolen property, (e) providing guidance and support on printing and duplicating services, and changes to organizational forms, and maintenance of stock levels, and (f) providing advisory services and coordinating the requisition, purchase and storage of office supplies and administrative equipment. The appellant also performs a variety of other duties including researching personnel administrative issues, training fee collection officers, maintaining district vehicle information, maintaining fee information, forwarding and processing river lottery application packages, forwarding lottery confirmation letters and tracking river lottery data, and tracking budget expenditures by project and job codes. She also supervises two subordinates consisting of an Office Automation Assistant, GS-326-5, and Office Automation Clerk, GS-326-4. She reports to the District Ranger, who is responsible for the management of the resources, goods, and services of the [names of districts].

The results of our interviews and other information in the record furnish more information about the appellant's duties and responsibilities and how they are carried out.

Series, title, guide and standard determination

The agency has classified the appellant's position in the Support Services Administration Series, GS-342, and titled the position Support Services Specialist. The appellant agrees with the selection of the GS-342 series but believes her position should be titled Support Services Supervisor. We concur with the agency's series and title determination. Like the appellant's job, some of the primary duties of positions in the GS-342 series are to direct, or plan and coordinate, a variety of services functions that are principally work-supporting, i.e., those functions without which the operations of an organization or services to the public would be impaired, curtailed, or stopped. Such service functions may include communications, procurement of administrative supplies and equipment, printing, reproduction, property management, space management, records management, mail service, facilities and equipment maintenance, and transportation. As previously discussed, the appellant's primary functions are to plan, coordinate, oversee and advise on such typical support services functions as files and records, communication, mail operations, property management, printing and duplication services, and procurement.

Although the appellant supervises two subordinate employees consisting of an Office Automation Assistant, GS-326-5, and Office Automation Clerk, GS-326-4, we find that her supervisory duties do not fully meet the coverage requirements in the General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) for titling and evaluation as a supervisor. The GSSG states that to be covered, a position must: (1) administratively and technically direct others, (2) spend at least 25 percent of the work time performing those functions, and (3) meet at least the lowest level of Factor 3 in the Guide based on supervising Federal civilian employees, military or uniformed service employees, volunteers, or other noncontractor personnel. The position descriptions for both employees indicate that they perform routine office automation and word processing duties and apply advanced knowledge of word processing software. They are expected to be fully knowledgeable of procedural and administrative requirements and to work under only general supervision. They independently carry out their recurring duties in accordance with established

priorities and instructions, and work methods are not normally reviewed. Supervisory guidance is sought only when unfamiliar or unusual situations arise. Given the routine and procedural nature of the two employees' work, and the independent performance of their duties, we do not find that the appellant spends 25 percent of her work time administratively and technically supervising these employees. Therefore, the position does not meet that criterion for application of the GSSG and cannot be evaluated as a supervisor. Because the appellant's job primarily functions as a nonsupervisory staff position, planning, coordinating, and advising on the district's support services program covering many of the typical support services functions previously outlined, the position is titled Support Services Specialist.

In order to be evaluated using the grading criteria in the standard for the Support Services Administration Series, GS-342, a position must first meet three basic criteria: (1) there must be delegated authority and responsibility for the supervision of at least three employees who perform at least six of the functions described in Level A, Factor 1, of the standard; and each of the employees must perform such functions for 25% of his or her time; (2) the organization to which services are provided must be at least equivalent to Level A, Factor 2, Element 2; and (3) the supervisory position must have been assigned duties and responsibilities at least equivalent to those described at Level A, Factor 3. Because the appellant's position does not meet the coverage requirements for evaluation as a supervisor, we cannot use the grading criteria in the GS-342 standard to evaluate her duties. The GS-342 standard also notes that some positions covered by this series cannot be evaluated through use of classification criteria contained in the GS-342 standard. It instructs that nonsupervisory staff positions with planning, policy, or advisory responsibilities related to any of the typical support functions are classified through direct use of (or by analogy with) evaluation criteria for nonsupervisory positions in other standards (or guides). Therefore, we have applied the grading criteria in the *Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work*. That guide considers performance of various office support and miscellaneous clerical and assistance duties and provides the best match to the appellant's duties.

Grade determination

The *Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work* provides general criteria for use in determining the grade level of nonsupervisory clerical and assistance administrative support work. For purposes of applying the guide, clerical work is defined by examples such as preparing, receiving, reviewing, and verifying documents; maintaining office records; locating and compiling data or information from files; compiling information for reports; and similar clerical support work within an organization. This work requires knowledge of the clerical requirements and processes involved in maintaining the functional programs of the unit. Assistance work is defined as performing technical work to support the administration or operation of the programs of an organizational unit. Similar to the appellant's position, this work requires a working knowledge of the work processes and procedures of an administrative field and the mission and operational requirements of the unit. The guide is also appropriate for use in evaluating positions which involve the performance of technical or specialized work which also includes administrative or support duties evaluated by the criteria within. The appellant's position includes duties in typical office support services, as well as the areas of budget, personnel, purchasing, collections, and vehicles. This requires a working knowledge of procedures in these fields and how they relate to the mission of the [appellant's district]. The

guide evaluates positions in terms of two factors: (1) Nature of assignment, and (2) Level of responsibility.

Nature of assignment

At the GS-6 level, technical or assistance work requires considerable evaluative judgment within well defined, commonly occurring aspects of an administrative program or function. The work may involve assistance to specialists or analysts or responsibility for continuing processes based on direct application of established policies, practices, and criteria. Assignments involve a relatively narrow range of case situations; identification of issues, problems, or conditions and seeking alternative solutions; and problems or situations that remain stable. The work requires practical knowledge of guidelines and precedent case actions, skill in recognizing the dimensions of a problem, and the ability to express ideas in writing.

At the GS-7 level, which is the highest level for this factor described in the guide, the work consists of specialized duties with continuing responsibility for projects, questions, or problems that arise within an area of a program. Work assignments involve a wide variety of problems or situations common to the segment of the program or function for which the employee is responsible. Decisions or recommendations are based on the development and evaluation of information that comes from various sources. The work involves identifying and studying factors or conditions and determining their interrelationships as appropriate to the defined area of work. The work requires knowledge and skill to recognize the dimensions and take or recommend action based upon application or interpretation of established guidelines.

The nature of the appellant's assignments exceeds the GS-6 level and meets but does not exceed the GS-7 level. Like the GS-7 level, the appellant's assignments involve continuing responsibility for overseeing and providing guidance, advice, assistance, training, and/or recommendations relating to the [appellant's district] office services program, responding to its budget and personnel administrative issues, and administering the vehicle fleet and collections. She regularly collects and evaluates necessary information, establishes facts, and takes or recommends action based upon application or interpretation of established guidelines.

For example, the appellant annually develops information on the district's property and equipment by consulting with project managers and evaluating the existing equipment's age and replacement schedule. She uses this information to evaluate the district's equipment needs for the next fiscal year and projects budget requirements to fulfill those needs. After recommending the amounts for the projected equipment needed to the District Ranger, the appellant represents the district at budget meetings at the Forest Supervisor's Office, where final decisions are reached. Once the budget is finalized, the appellant tracks expenditures for project managers and informs them monthly of their remaining project budget, ensuring that they do not exceed their allotted funds.

Regarding her procurement and purchasing responsibilities for office supplies and administrative equipment, project managers submit purchasing requisitions to the appellant. She researches appropriate guidance to ensure the purchase is legal. If the purchase is within her authority (\$2500 or less), she approves the requisition, completes the purchase, and pays the vendor's

invoice. If the purchase is outside her authority, she coordinates the action with the Forest Supervisor's Office. In carrying out her procurement tasks, she applies knowledge of governing procurement laws and Federal contract award regulations (e.g., Sections 8 and 15 of the Small Business Act) and takes action based upon interpretation of agency purchasing regulations. Prior to making a purchase, the appellant refers to the project's remaining budget and recommends to the project manager whether the purchase should be charged against a forest-wide cost pool or a specific project job code.

Concerning the appellant's responsibilities for oversight and maintenance of the district's files and records, like the GS-7 level her tasks consist of a series of related actions and decisions to ensure that the proper filing system is established for control and arrangement of district documents covering all resource areas, e.g., timber sale, silviculture, cultural, fire, fish and wildlife, recreation, watershed. Decisions on filing, maintenance, and disposal are based on application and evaluation of information from various sources and schedules.

The appellant is also responsible for the district's collection program and financial billing. She trains all collection officers annually. When collection officers submit information on their collection activity, the appellant conducts an audit requiring reference to the Collections Officers' Handbook and information she has on maps sold, outfitters, launches, etc. Like the GS-7 level, this requires the appellant to gather information from several program sources, such as the fee demo and river lottery. If a discrepancy surfaces during the audit, the appellant is responsible for contacting the collection officer and resolving the problem.

Level of responsibility

At the GS-6 level, the supervisor assists the technician or assistant with precedent assignments by providing an interpretation of policy. Completed work is evaluated for appropriateness and effectiveness in meeting goals. Guidelines are available, but they are often not completely applicable to the assignment or have gaps in specificity. The employee uses judgment in interpreting and adapting guidelines for application to specific cases or problems. The employee bases decisions and recommendations on facts and conventional interpretations of guidelines. Personal contacts are with employees in the agency, in other agencies, or with management or users or providers of agency services. The purpose of these contacts is to provide, receive, or develop information in order to identify problems, needs, or issues and/or to coordinate work efforts or resolve problems.

At the GS-7 level, which is the highest level for this factor described in the guide, the supervisor makes assignments in terms of objectives, priorities, and deadlines. The employee independently completes assignments in accordance with accepted practices, resolving most conflicts that arise. Completed work is evaluated for appropriateness and conformance to policy. Guidelines for the work are more complex than at the GS-6 level because the employee encounters a wider variety of problems and situations which require choosing alternative responses. Guidelines apply less to specific actions and more to the operational characteristics and procedural requirements of the program or function. They tend to be general and descriptive of intent but do not specifically cover all aspects of the assignments. Thus employees must use significant judgment and interpretation to apply the guides to specific cases and adapt or improvise procedures to

accommodate unusual situations. The contacts and purpose of contacts are generally the same as at the GS-6 level. However, to a greater degree, the employee serves as a central point of contact to provide authoritative explanations of requirements, regulations, and procedures and resolve operational problems or disagreements affecting assigned areas.

The appellant's level of responsibility exceeds the GS-6 level and meets but does not exceed the GS-7 level. She receives little, if any, instruction when receiving assignments, and completed work is evaluated only when the District Ranger suspects a problem. The appellant refers to a wider variety of guidelines than detailed at the GS-6 level. The purpose of her contacts also exceeds merely developing information to identify problems, needs, or issues and/or to coordinate work efforts or resolve problems.

Like the GS-7 level, the appellant receives little instruction, even when the District Ranger assigns her a new project. The District Ranger provides the appellant with the project's objectives, allowing the appellant to decide how to meet those objectives. The appellant is expected to resolve problems encountered, consulting with her supervisor only when a discussion is needed to mutually select the best solution among options developed by the appellant. Regarding ongoing projects and office services functions, the District Ranger does not provide guidance; she allows the appellant to complete the work independently. For example, the Forest Supervisor's Office forwards written budget instructions to the District Ranger annually. The District Ranger passes the instructions on to the appellant without any further instruction. The District Ranger does not specifically evaluate the appellant's projects upon completion. She receives feedback from the Forest Supervisor's Office on the appellant's work and, based on that information, only reviews completed work as necessary. The appellant coordinates her budget, purchasing, fleet, and collection work with the Forest Supervisor's Office.

The appellant uses guidelines for a wide variety of programs such as office services, budget, collections, personnel, purchasing, fleet, and the river lottery. For example, she is responsible for remaining current on personnel regulations in order to advise employees, complete the appropriate paperwork for all personnel actions in the district, including new employees, and coordinate personnel issues with the Forest Supervisor's Office. The river lottery program, which creates a high volume of work during a couple of months each year, has procedures that were developed during the 1980's. Annually, the appellant reviews those procedures and adapts them to account for program changes. Like the GS-7 level, the guidelines governing office services are complex and cover a wide variety of procedures and actions. For instance, in carrying out her procurement and purchasing duties, she must select the most appropriate purchasing method from several alternatives so that both Forest Service and Federal government procurement requirements are met. Because the guidelines frequently do not cover all aspects of the assignment, the appellant must use considerable judgment and interpretation to determine the appropriate procurement method.

The appellant's contacts include personnel at all levels within the [appellant's district], technical staff at the Forest Supervisor's Office and the [servicing personnel office], vendors, river and land outfitters, and the general public. The appellant serves as the central point of contact for office services, personnel, budget, fleet, and purchasing issues for the district, as well as the fee demo and river lottery programs. As expected at the GS-7 level, she provides explanations of

requirements, regulations, and procedures in these areas and resolves operational problems or disagreements. For example, the [servicing personnel office] advised the appellant to process lump sum payments for WAE employees' annual leave. The appellant researched this issue, determined that the lump sum payments were inappropriate, and resolved the disagreement with the personnel office.

Summary

By application of the grade level criteria in the *Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work*, we find that the appellant's nature of assignments and level of responsibility fully meet but do not exceed the GS-7 level. Therefore, the appellant's duties are properly graded at the GS-7 level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Support Services Specialist, GS-342-7.