

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



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

**Classification Appeal Decision**  
**Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code**

**Appellant:** [Appellant's name]

**Agency classification:** Engineering Technician  
GS-802-9

**Organization:** [Appellant's activity]  
Department of the Navy  
[City, state]

**OPM decision:** Engineering Technician  
GS-802-9

**OPM decision number:** C-0802-09-32

Signed by Denis J. Whitebook

Denis J. Whitebook  
Classification Appeals Officer

April 3, 1998

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, 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's name and address]

[Address of appellant's  
servicing personnel office]

Director, Plans, Programs, and Diversity  
Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary  
of the Navy (CP/EEO)  
Department of the Navy  
800 North Quincy Street  
Arlington, VA 22203-1998

Chief, Classification Branch  
Field Advisory Services Division  
Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service  
1400 Key Boulevard, Suite B-200  
Arlington, VA 22209-5144

## **Introduction**

On December 9, 1997, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. His position is currently classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-9. The appellant agrees that his position description (PD) QKB6316 is adequate and that his position is properly classified as an Engineering Technician, GS-802. However, he believes the grade level should be GS-11. He works in [his activity], Department of the Navy, [city, state]. We have accepted and decided his appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

## **General issues**

The appellant's position was downgraded from GS-11 to GS-9 as a result of a classification consistency review conducted by the Department of the Navy. The appellant does not believe his current PD was used for that review. Further, he believes that his responsibilities and trade knowledge provide justification for classifying his position at the GS-11 level. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of his position. We are required by law to make that decision solely by comparing his current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and his agency, including his official PD.

## **Position information**

The appellant is an Engineering Technician for [his activity, city, state]. He represents the Public Works Officer and the Technical Representative of the Commanding Officer in day-to-day contract matters, and provides management oversight of facilities, utilities, and structures. As a team leader, the appellant isolates, identifies, and resolves issues affecting operation of those systems. He evaluates the effectiveness of the maintenance management program, analyzes the ISO 9000 program process, develops award fee documentation, and participates in contract negotiations. In addition, he is responsible for contract specification accuracy, budget estimating, and creating/analyzing various reports and records. The appellant's official PD and other material of record furnish much more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

## **Series, title, and standard determination**

We find that the appellant's position is properly covered by the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, titled Engineering Technician, and graded using the GS-802 standard. Neither the agency nor the appellant disagrees.

## Grade determination

The engineering technician standard uses two classification factors: Nature of assignment and Level of responsibility. Our evaluation with respect to those factors follows.

### *Nature of assignment*

The appellant's assignments are best evaluated at GS-9. For example:

- GS-9 level assignments require study, analysis, and consideration of several possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs, and selection of the most appropriate. Similarly, the appellant reviews and analyzes voluminous work requests and inspection reports to recommend and provide justification to support [his activity].
- GS-9 level assignments generally require consideration of numerous precedents and some adaptation of previous plans or techniques. Similarly, the appellant prepares estimates using not only the existing Engineering Performance Standards (EPS), but also historical data, corporate knowledge, standard industry technology and manufacturers' recommendations to develop the appropriate EPS.
- At the GS-9 level changes or deviations must be made during progress of an assignment to incorporate additional factors requested after commencement of the project or to adjust to findings and conclusions which could not be predicted accurately in the original plans. Likewise, continually changing programs require decisions, actions, interpretation, and coordination between the appellant and various levels of state and Federal government, military, and contractor personnel to manage and oversee provided support services.

The appellant's assignments do not fully meet GS-11 criteria. GS-11 technicians perform work of broad scope and complexity that requires application of (1) demonstrated ability to interpret, select, adapt, and apply many guidelines, precedents, and engineering principles and practices which relate to the area of specialization; and (2) some knowledge of related scientific and engineering fields. The standard provides several illustrative assignments of work of the broad scope and complexity envisioned at the GS-11 level. The appellant's assignments do not fully meet the broad scope and complexity described in the illustrative assignments. For example:

- The first illustrative assignment describes developing cost estimates for competitive bidding for a variety of multiple-use construction projects. This includes determining (a) construction operations and methods involved and the time required to complete each phase or feature, (b) various types and capacities of construction equipment required and cost of operation and maintenance, (c) material types and quantities, and (d) overhead, tax, and other costs. While the appellant does prepare detailed cost estimates, they are normally for projects much narrower in scope and complexity than that given in the example. The cost estimates prepared by the appellant are primarily for changes to preventive maintenance actions,

repairs, modifications, alterations, alternative parts and/or materials for utility plants and systems. They generally are not for multiple-use construction projects or for other projects fully equivalent in scope and complexity.

- The second illustrative assignment envisions preparing designs and specifications for various interrelated utility systems such as heating, plumbing, air conditioning, ventilating, pumping, gas supply, and pneumatic control systems. The assignment typically involves these systems within complex or nonconventional office buildings, technical laboratories, experimental buildings, or equivalent facilities. The record indicates that the appellant works with many utility systems such as compressed air, pure and chilled water, steam production and distribution, sewage collection and disposal, ship overboard discharge, and heat/ventilation and air conditioning. These systems support the [unique equipment] and other structures and facilities dealt with by the appellant. However, the record indicates that the appellant typically deals with one or a few systems at a time, for instance, when one of them must be repaired, replaced, or modified. His regular assignments are not fully equivalent in scope and complexity to preparing designs and specifications for various interrelated utility systems, where all these systems and their interrelationships must be considered simultaneously in creating the designs and specifications, and where the systems are within complex or nonconventional facilities such as technical laboratories or experimental buildings.

The appellant's engineering support duties (which include performing technical review of project drawings and specifications, and developing layouts and baseline drawings) occupy about 5 percent of his time. Since, only duties that occupy at least 25 percent of an employee's time can affect the grade of a position (Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, section III.J), these duties cannot be used to evaluate his position regardless of the complexity or nature of the buildings and facilities.

- The final illustrative assignment given in the standard describes planning the approach and details and conducting various experimental projects to develop electrical circuitry equipment or breadboards of systems characterized by (a) performance requirements that are somewhat difficult to achieve because of combinations of conflicting characteristics such as versatility, reliability, size, ease of operation, and maintenance; or (b) required use of techniques or components in combinations or applications differing from previous usage. The appellant's assignments do not regularly include these or fully equivalent experimental projects. Rather, the appellant's assignments generally include day-to-day contract matters, and management oversight of facilities, utilities, and structures involving work identification, scheduling, and accomplishment of the operation, maintenance and repair functions for [his activity].

Further, GS-11 technicians plan and accomplish complete projects or studies of conventional nature requiring the independent adaptation of a general fund of background data and information and interpretation and use of precedents. They are typically confronted with a variety of complex problems in which considerable judgment is needed to make sound engineering compromises and decisions. We realize that, as is typical at GS-9, the appellant must adapt or modify standard

principles and practices for repair or modification to existing systems, or for connecting existing systems to new construction. We also realize that the appellant confronts various problems in his work. However, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, his assignments have less scope and complexity than intended at GS-11 and so fall short of that level.

As discussed above, the appellant's generally meet GS-9 criteria for Nature of assignment but fall short of GS-11 criteria. Therefore, the appellant's assignments are best evaluated at GS-9 for Nature of assignment.

### *Level of responsibility*

The appellant's level of responsibility is best evaluated at GS-9. For example:

- At the GS-9 level the supervisor is available for consultation and advice where significant deviations from standard engineering practices must be made and he gives more detailed instructions when distinctly new criteria or new techniques are involved. Similarly, the appellant's supervisor identifies known or anticipated controversial or complex issues, and is available to discuss highly controversial problems, recommendations or alternate solutions.
- At the GS-9 level the work is reviewed for adequacy and for conformance with established policies, precedents, and sound engineering concepts and usage. Likewise, the appellant's work is reviewed for adherence to key principles of management and soundness of conclusions.

The appellant's responsibilities do not fully meet GS-11 criteria. The appellant's level of responsibility has some similarities to GS-11 criteria in that he has considerable freedom in planning and carrying out the work, and there is little supervisory review during the progress of projects. However, careful reading of the engineering technician standard and other OPM guidelines indicates that for a person's level of responsibility to truly meet GS-11 criteria, those responsibilities should be exercised within the context of GS-11 assignments. In discussing the first classification factor, Nature of assignments, we have found that the appellant's assignments are best evaluated at GS-9. As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, his responsibilities are most similar to GS-9 responsibilities and on balance fall short of GS-11 criteria. Therefore, the Level of responsibility must be evaluated at GS-9.

### *Summary*

In sum, the appellant's position is properly evaluated at GS-9 for both Nature of assignment and Level of responsibility.

### **Decision**

The appellant's position is properly classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.