

Interpretive Guidance for IT Project Manager Positions

*Including Guidance for Classifying, Staffing,
Training, and Developing IT Project Managers*

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Definition of a Project	2
Project.....	2
Project Manager Characteristics.....	3
Project Manager Duties/Tasks.....	3
IT Project Manager Duties/Tasks	3
Project Manager Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities/Competencies	4
IT Project Manager Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities/Competencies	6
Classifying Project Manager Positions	6
Determining the Pay Category.....	7
Determining Occupational Series	7
Determining IT Project Manager Occupational Series	7
Determining Official Position Titles.....	8
Applying Grading Criteria to Project Manager Positions	8
Applying Grading Criteria to IT Project Manager Positions	9
Identifying Positions Above the GS-15 Grade Level	12
Qualifying and Ranking Applicants for Project Manager Positions.....	15
Qualifying Applicants	15
Ranking Qualified Applicants.....	16
Justification and Documentation.....	16
Considering Certification.....	16
Training and Developing Project Managers.....	16
Credentials and Academic Degrees	16
Credentials.....	17
Academic Degree Training	17
The Gov Online Learning Center.....	18
Further Guidance	18

Introduction

This interpretive guidance addresses position classification, job evaluation, staffing, qualifications, training, and development for project manager positions based on existing criteria and guidance. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is issuing this guidance to assist agencies as they:

- Identify project manager positions;
- Clarify project manager duties;
- Address related position classification issues;
- Recruit, select, train, and develop qualified project managers to meet their needs;
- Implement training, performance, and retention programs (as noted later in this document, agencies need to ensure that courses and training adhere to established procedures and guidelines, especially as the law now authorizes agencies to fund credentials and academic degree training. Agencies are reminded that they may pay for formal programs that lead to academic degrees only if the academic institution is accredited by an organization approved by the U.S. Department of Education); and
- Conduct succession planning.

The guidance addresses the above common concerns about project management issues as raised by officials and representatives from OPM, the Office of Management and Budget, the Chief Human Capital Officers Council, the Chief Information Officers Council, the Chief Financial Officers Council, the Joint Financial Management Improvement Project, the Procurement Executives Council, the Professional Council of Federal Scientists and Engineers, and other groups.

Definition of a Project

Project

Project is defined in the Project Management Institute's Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK[®], an American National Standard ANSI/PMI 99-001-2000) as:

“A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result.”

It is important to distinguish a project from a program. In contrast to a project, which has a defined beginning and end, a **program** is an ongoing operation. A project serves to develop, modify, or enhance a product, service, or system and is constrained by the relationships among scope, resources, and time. Programs, on the other hand, encompass the missions, functions, operations, activities, laws, rules, and regulations that an agency is authorized and funded by statute to administer and enforce. Programs normally provide products and/or services to the public. Agencies distribute available funding to carry out these continuing programs and any ongoing staff support they require.

IT Projects. The essential distinction between IT projects and other projects is that an IT project involves the delivery of an *information technology* product, service, or system.

Project Manager Characteristics

Project Manager Duties/Tasks

Project manager positions exist in many different disciplines. For example, an engineer or architect normally manages projects associated with designing specialized equipment or structures. Subject matter experts in fields such as IT or finance deal with developing and testing information networks and financial systems. However, regardless of the subject matter area involved, the project manager function is characterized by a *common set* of duties/tasks. A project manager generally applies all of these duties/tasks to meet project requirements, as follows:

- Determines appropriate products or services with clients or customers to define project scope, requirements, and deliverables;
- Develops, modifies, or provides input to project plans;
- Implements project plans to meet objectives;
- Coordinates and integrates project activities;
- Manages, leads, or administers project resources;
- Monitors project activities and resources to mitigate risk;
- Implements or maintains quality assurance processes;
- Makes improvements, solves problems, or takes corrective action when problems arise;
- Gives presentations or briefings on all aspects of the project;
- Participates in phase, milestone, and final project reviews;
- Identifies project documentation requirements or procedures; and
- Develops and implements product release plan.

IT Project Manager Duties/Tasks

In addition to the duties/tasks cited above that are common to most project manager positions, IT project managers perform or are responsible for managing most of the following:

- Identifies customers' information systems requirements;
- Analyzes information systems requirements or environment;
- Designs or conducts analytical studies, cost-benefit analyses, or other research;
- Evaluates, monitors, or ensures compliance with laws, regulations, policies, standards, or procedures;
- Purchases or contracts for IT services, equipment, products, supplies, property, or other items;
- Integrates information systems subsystems;
- Develops information systems testing strategies, plans, or scenarios;
- Identifies standards or requirements for infrastructure configuration or change management;
- Participates in change control (for example, reviewing configuration change requests);
- Develops or implements information systems security plans and procedures; and
- Ensures appropriate product-related training and documentation are developed and made available to customers.

Project Manager Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities/Competencies

All project managers apply common knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies, organized into three areas:

- General knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies;
- Project management knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies; and
- Technical knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies.

The specific knowledges, skills, and abilities/competencies for each functional area are as follows:

General Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities/Competencies

- **Customer Service** - Works with clients and customers (that is, any individuals who use or receive the services or products that your work unit produces, including the general public, individuals who work in the agency, other agencies, or organizations outside the Government) to assess their needs, provide information or assistance, resolve their problems, or satisfy their expectations; knows about available products and services; is committed to providing quality products and services.
- **Decision Making** - Makes sound, well-informed, and objective decisions; perceives the impact and implications of decisions; commits to action, even in uncertain situations, to accomplish organizational goals; causes change.
- **Flexibility** - Is open to change and new information; adapts behavior or work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles; effectively deals with ambiguity.
- **Interpersonal Skills** - Shows understanding, friendliness, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern, and politeness to others; develops and maintains effective relationships with others; may include effectively dealing with individuals who are difficult, hostile, or distressed; relates well to people from varied backgrounds and different situations; is sensitive to cultural diversity, race, gender, disabilities, and other individual differences.
- **Leadership** - Influences, motivates, and challenges others; adapts leadership styles to a variety of situations.
- **Legal, Government and Jurisprudence** - Knowledge of laws, legal codes, court procedures, precedents, legal practices and documents, Government regulations, Executive orders, agency rules, Government organization and functions, and the democratic political process.
- **Oral Communication** - Expresses information (for example, ideas or facts) to individuals or groups effectively, taking into account the audience and nature of the information (for example, technical, sensitive, controversial); makes clear and convincing oral presentations; listens to others, attends to nonverbal cues, and responds appropriately.
- **Organizational Awareness** - Knows the organization's mission and functions, and how its social, political, and technological systems work and operates effectively within them; this includes the programs, policies, procedures, rules, and regulations of the organization.
- **Problem Solving** - Identifies problems; determines accuracy and relevance of information; uses sound judgment to generate and evaluate alternatives, and to make recommendations.
- **Reasoning** - Identifies rules, principles, or relationships that explain facts, data, or other information; analyzes information and makes correct inferences or draws accurate conclusions.
- **Team Building** - Inspires, motivates, and guides others toward goal accomplishments. Consistently develops and sustains cooperative working relationships. Encourages and facilitates cooperation within the organization and with customer groups; fosters commitment, team spirit, pride, trust. Develops leadership in others through coaching, mentoring, rewarding and guiding employees.
- **Writing** - Recognizes or uses correct English grammar, punctuation, and spelling; communicates information (for example, facts, ideas, or messages) in a succinct and organized manner; produces written information, which may include technical material, that is appropriate for the intended audience.

Project Management Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities/Competencies

- **Business Process Reengineering** - Knowledge of methods, metrics, tools, and techniques of Business Process Reengineering.
- **Capital Planning and Investment Assessment** - Knowledge of the principles and methods of capital investment analysis or business case analysis, including return on investment analysis.
- **Contracting/Procurement** - Knowledge of various types of contracts, techniques for contracting or procurement, and contract negotiation and administration.
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis** - Knowledge of the principles and methods of cost-benefit analysis, including the time value of money, present value concepts, and quantifying tangible and intangible benefits.
- **Financial Management** - Prepares, justifies, and/or administers the budget for program areas; plans, administers, and monitors expenditures to ensure cost-effective support of programs and policies; assesses financial condition of an organization.
- **Planning and Evaluating** - Organizes work, sets priorities, and determines resource requirements; determines short- or long-term goals and strategies to achieve them; coordinates with other organizations or parts of the organization to accomplish goals; monitors progress and evaluates outcomes.
- **Project Management** - Knowledge of the principles, methods, or tools for developing, scheduling, coordinating, and managing projects and resources, including monitoring and inspecting costs, work, and contractor performance.
- **Quality Assurance** - Knowledge of the principles, methods, and tools of quality assurance and quality control used to ensure a product fulfills functional requirements and standards.
- **Requirements Analysis** - Knowledge of the principles and methods to identify, analyze, specify, design, and manage functional and infrastructure requirements; includes translating functional requirements into technical requirements used for logical design or presenting alternative technologies or approaches.
- **Risk Management** - Knowledge of methods and tools used for risk assessment and mitigation of risk.

Technical Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities/Competencies:

- **Technical Competence** - Uses knowledge that is acquired through formal training or extensive on-the-job experience to perform one's job; works with, understands, and evaluates technical information related to the job; advises others on technical issues.

Note: Additional technical competencies should be identified based on the specific occupation -- see the IT project manager example below.

IT Project Manager Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities/Competencies

In addition to the knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies required of all project managers, IT project managers also require specific knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies in applying most of these:

- **Configuration Management** - Knowledge of the principles and methods for planning or managing the implementation, update, or integration of information systems components.
- **Data Management** - Knowledge of the principles, procedures, and tools of data management, such as modeling techniques, data backup, data recovery, data dictionaries, data warehousing, data mining, data disposal, and data standardization processes.
- **Information Management** - Identifies a need for and knows where or how to gather information; organizes and maintains information or information management systems.
- **Information Resources Strategy and Planning** - Knowledge of the principles, methods, and techniques of information technology (IT) assessment, planning, management, monitoring, and evaluation, such as IT baseline assessment, interagency functional analysis, contingency planning, and disaster recovery.
- **Information Systems/Network Security** - Knowledge of methods, tools, and procedures, including development of information security plans, to prevent information systems vulnerabilities, and provide or restore security of information systems and network services.
- **Information Technology Architecture** - Knowledge of architectural methodologies used in the design and development of information systems, including the physical structure of a system's internal operations and interactions with other systems.
- **Information Technology Performance Assessment** - Knowledge of the principles, methods, and tools (for example, surveys, system performance measures) to assess the effectiveness and practicality of information technology systems.
- **Infrastructure Design** - Knowledge of the architecture and typology of software, hardware, and networks, including LANS, WANS, and telecommunications systems, their components and associated protocols and standards, and how they operate and integrate with one another and with associated controlling software.
- **Systems Integration** - Knowledge of the principles, methods, and procedures for installing, integrating, and optimizing information systems components.
- **Systems Life Cycle** - Knowledge of systems life cycle management concepts used to plan, develop, implement, operate, and maintain information systems.
- **Technology Awareness** - Knowledge of developments and new applications of information technology (hardware, software, telecommunications), emerging technologies and their applications to business processes, and applications and implementation of information systems to meet organizational requirements.

Classifying Project Manager Positions

When you classify a position, you must determine the following:

- The proper pay category;
- The proper occupational series;
- The official position title; and
- The proper grade or level of work.

Determining the Pay Category

Project manager positions usually are General Schedule (GS) positions. However, some positions may be Senior Executive Service (SES) positions or Senior Level (SL) or Scientific/Professional (ST) positions. Guidance for identifying such positions above the GS-15 grade level can be found on pages 13-15. This guidance is not intended for Federal Wage System (FWS) positions.

Determining Occupational Series

The occupational series of a project manager position usually is apparent by reviewing the duties and responsibilities assigned to the position. In most instances, the primary work of the position, the highest level of work performed, and the paramount occupational knowledge for the project manager work dictate the appropriate series.

Users of the position classification standards normally have little trouble making the series decision by comparing the characteristics of the position in question to series definitions and occupational information in the standards. However, if the work of a project manager position falls into more than one series, the correct series is sometimes difficult to determine. If it is unclear whether a particular series predominates, consider the following to determine the correct series:

- ***Paramount occupational knowledge required.*** Although a project manager position may include several different kinds of work, most positions have a paramount occupational knowledge requirement in addition to the project management knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies. The paramount occupational knowledge is the most important subject matter knowledge or subject-related experience required to do the work.
- ***Reason for existence.*** The primary purpose of the project manager position, or management's intent in establishing the project manager position, is a positive indicator in determining the appropriate series.
- ***Organizational mission and/or function.*** Project manager positions generally align with the mission and function of the organization to which they are assigned. The organization's function often is mirrored in the organizational title and may influence the choice of appropriate series.
- ***Recruitment source.*** Supervisors and managers can help by identifying the occupational series that provides the best qualified applicants to do the project manager work. This aspect correlates with the paramount knowledge required by the project manager position.

Determining IT Project Manager Occupational Series

The Information Technology Management Series, GS-2210, is the proper occupational series for IT project manager positions. This series only covers General Schedule positions up to GS-15.

Determining Official Position Titles

Any position may have an organizational title or functional title, but every position must have an official title. 5 U.S.C. 5105 (a)(2) requires OPM to establish the official class titles. However, subsection 5 U.S.C. 5105(c) states that this requirement does not prevent the use of organizational or other titles for internal administration. In those instances where OPM has not prescribed an official title for a series, an agency may construct its own official title. According to the [Introduction to the Position Classification Standards](#), constructed titles should be “short,” “meaningful,” and “generally descriptive of the work performed.”

Note: IT Project Manager Official Position Title. OPM Memorandum dated August 25, 2003, Subject: Official Position Title for IT Project Manager Positions amends the Job Family Standard for Administrative Work in the Information Technology Group, GS-2200, dated May 2001, and authorizes **IT Project Manager** as the official title for this function when it is characterized by the common set of duties/tasks described on page 4.

Applying Grading Criteria to Project Manager Positions

According to the [Introduction to the Position Classification Standards](#), selecting the appropriate grade level criteria is critical for determining the proper classification of a position. If the work assigned to a project manager position is adequately covered by the grading criteria in a particular standard for a specific occupational series or job family, then evaluate the work by that occupational series or job family standard (JFS).

If the type of project manager work does not have a directly applicable occupational series, job family, or functional standard, then select a standard as similar as possible to the kind of work described. Evaluate and grade the project manager position in question by comparing it to grading criteria in the comparable standard, as it relates to:

- The kind of work processes, functions, or subject matter of the work performed;
- The qualifications required to do the work;
- The level of difficulty and responsibility necessary; and
- The combination of classification factors having the greatest influence on the grade level.

When making these determinations, we recommend referring to one of the following standards for making meaningful comparisons:

- The [JFS for Administrative Work in the Information Technology Group, GS-2200](#), to evaluate project manager positions for IT projects;
- The [JFS for Professional and Administrative Work in the Accounting and Budget Group, GS-0500](#), or the [Financial Management Series, GS-0505](#), to evaluate project manager positions for financial systems projects;
- The [Administrative Analysis Grade Evaluation Guide](#) to evaluate project manager positions for projects where a more closely related standard has not been issued; and
- Part II of the [Equipment Development Grade Evaluation Guide](#) to evaluate positions for project management engineers.

NOTE: If a project manager position exercises supervision of Federal Government employees at a level that meets the criteria indicated in the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#), be sure to U.S. Office of Personnel Management

evaluate the position's supervisory duties. Do not classify a project manager position to a lower grade on the basis of personal work accomplishment rather than the proper grade for supervising a staff of the type and level actually involved.

Applying Grading Criteria to IT Project Manager Positions

Criteria for grading project manager positions in the Information Technology Management Series, GS-2210 are in the [JFS for Administrative Work in the Information Technology Group, GS-2200](#). The grade level of an IT Project Manager, GS-2210 position will depend on the nature of the project as constrained by the relationship of its scope, resources, and timeline (e.g., its size, risk, sensitivity). Because higher grade level positions are broader in scope or involve projects that are more mission critical, they generally require greater knowledge and experience. Consequently, a position occupied by a project manager assigned to add a major enhancement to an existing IT system for a single agency might be classified at the GS-13 grade level, while a position occupied by a project manager adding major enhancements and coordinating capital planning used in a multi-agency IT system might be classified at the GS-15 grade level.

IT Project Manager functions are clearly described in the Information Technology Management Series, GS-2210 in the [JFS for Administrative Work in the Information Technology Group, GS-2200](#). The factor level descriptions (FLDs), especially those in the following three GS-2210 specialties, provide criteria for classifying IT Project Manager positions:

(Policy and Planning)	GS-13, 14, and 15	FLDs: 1-7 or 1-8, 4-5 or 4-6, 5-5 or 5-6,
(Systems Analysis)	GS-14	FLDs: 1-8, 4-5 or 4-6, 5-5 or 5-6; and
(Network Services)	GS-14	FLDs: 1-8, 4-5 or 4-6, 5-5 or 5-6.

The example on the following page illustrates how Factor 1 (Knowledge Required by the Position) applies to the duties of a particular IT Project Manager, GS-2210-13 position. The factor level descriptions (FLDs) are excerpted directly from the [JFS for Administrative Work in the Information Technology Group, GS-2200](#).

Example: IT Project Manager, GS-2210	Excerpts from Level 1-7 FLDs
<p>Sample Duties</p> <div data-bbox="256 302 570 993" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>1) Works with proponents and sponsors to <u>develop a business case that highlights the costs and benefits of the proposed project</u> for presentation to upper level management and for review and approval of the National Information Investment Board. Directs a team of subject matter experts, technical specialists, and support staff <u>to produce a business plan</u> in conformance with established <u>capital planning</u> procedures and agency guidance.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="592 373 855 590" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-left: 20px;"> <p>2200 JFS FLD 1-7 – Common to All Positions FLD 1-7 (Policy and Planning) FLD 1-7 (Systems Analysis)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="592 680 855 800" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-left: 20px;"> <p>2200 JFS FLD 1-7 (Systems Analysis)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="592 919 855 1039" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-left: 20px;"> <p>2200 JFS FLD 1-7 (Policy and Planning)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="256 1205 570 1661" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>2) <u>Prepares, implements, monitors, and updates the project plan. Coordinates with the system's owner and upper level management</u> to ensure the actions are consistent with the approved plan. <u>Oversees the design, construction, testing, and implementation of the system.</u></p> </div> <div data-bbox="592 1157 855 1276" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-left: 20px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>2200 JFS FLD 1-7 (Policy and Planning)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="592 1423 855 1543" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-left: 20px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>2200 JFS FLD 1-7 (Systems Analysis)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="592 1690 855 1810" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-left: 20px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>2200 JFS FLD 1-7 (Network Services)</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="906 264 1382 527" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Common to All Positions – Knowledge of, and skill in applying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cost-benefit analysis principles and methods • project management principles and methods <p>sufficient to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plan and carry out difficult and complex assignments and develop new methods, approaches and procedures • interpret policies, standards, and guidelines </div> <div data-bbox="906 541 1382 947" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Policy and Planning – Knowledge of, and skill in applying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the organization's policy and planning formulation process • capital investment planning principles and methods • the organization's enterprise IT goals and objectives • IT metrics methods and concepts <p>sufficient to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • draft IT policies and plans • participate in the IT capital planning process • develop and monitor metrics used in evaluating the accomplishment of IT goals and objectives </div> <div data-bbox="906 961 1382 1493" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Systems Analysis – Knowledge of, and skill in applying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • systems design tools, methods, and techniques, including automated systems analysis and design tools • systems design standards, policies, and authorized approaches • systems design precedents or alternative approaches • structured analysis principles and methods • business processes and operations of customer organizations <p>sufficient to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop requirements and specifications for systems that meet business requirements • advise on the merits of proposed systems development projects • apply a structured systems analysis approach to the design and development of new or enhanced applications </div> <div data-bbox="906 1507 1382 1864" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Network Services – Knowledge of, and skill in applying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • network systems design, development, testing, installation, operations, management, and maintenance concepts and methods • the organization's network architecture, topology, and protocols <p>sufficient to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide network services that support business requirements • plan, design, develop, and integrate network systems consistent with existing or planned network infrastructures </div>

Using the GS-2200 JFS to evaluate the duties listed on the previous page could develop as follows across all nine factors in the Factor Evaluation System and result in classifying the position as an IT Project Manager, GS-2210-13:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge Required	1-7	1,250
2. Supervisory Controls	2-5	650
3. Guidelines	3-4	450
4. Complexity	4-5	325
5. Scope & Effect	5-5	325
6 & 7. Contacts & Purpose	3-C	180
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
Total Points		3,190
Conversion		GS-13

Evaluating an IT Project Manager, GS-2210-14 position could develop as follows across all nine factors:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge Required	1-8	1,550
2. Supervisory Controls	2-5	650
3. Guidelines	3-5	650
4. Complexity	4-5	325
5. Scope & Effect	5-5	325
6 & 7. Contacts & Purpose	3-D	280
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
Total Points		3,790
Conversion		GS-14

Evaluating an IT Project Manager, GS-2210-15 position could develop as follows across all nine factors:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge Required	1–9	1,850
2. Supervisory Controls	2–5	650
3. Guidelines	3–5	650
4. Complexity	4–6	450
5. Scope & Effect	5–6	450
6 & 7. Contacts & Purpose	4–D	330
8. Physical Demands	8–1	5
9. Work Environment	9–1	5
Total Points		4,390
Conversion		GS-15

Identifying Positions Above the GS-15 Grade Level

Agencies are responsible for managing their executive resources and deciding how to organize functions and structure positions, including project manager positions, in a manner that best meets the organization's mission requirements. This includes deciding whether positions meet the Senior Executive Service (SES) criteria or the Senior Level (SL) or Scientific/Professional (ST) criteria and establishing individual SES, SL, and ST positions within the agency's executive resource allocation as authorized by OPM.

The law and OPM regulations clearly state that SES, SL, and ST positions must be classifiable **above the GS-15 grade level**. Positions at the GS-15 grade level as described in statute clearly cover a broad range of work: *Grade GS-15 includes those classes of positions the duties of which are to perform, under general administrative direction, with very wide latitude for the exercise of independent judgment, work of outstanding difficulty and responsibility along special technical, supervisory, or administrative lines which has demonstrated leadership and exceptional attainments* (5 U.S.C. 5104(15)). Do not assume a project manager position is above the GS-15 grade level simply because it has a somewhat larger scope or requires more knowledge and skill than another project manager position that is already classified at GS-15.

Distinctions among the SES, SL, and ST positions are not always clear. The following information provides general guidance to help agencies identify SES, SL, and ST positions; maintain an agency's flexibility to manage its executive resources; and contribute to intra- and inter-agency consistency in establishing SES, SL, and ST positions.

General Information - Unless an agency is excluded from the SES by statute or by the President of the United States, any position that is classifiable above the GS-15 grade level **and** which meets the functional executive criteria set forth in 5 U.S.C. 3132(a)(2) may be placed in the SES.

Positions that are classifiable above the GS-15 grade level that do **not** meet the executive criteria and involve the performance of high-level research and development in the physical, biological, medical, or engineering sciences are more appropriately placed in the ST system. The SL system includes any other positions that are classifiable above the GS-15 grade level and do **not** meet the executive criteria and do **not** involve the fundamental research and development responsibilities characteristic of ST positions.

SES Criteria - 5 U.S.C. 3132(a)(2) sets forth the criteria that characterize SES positions. SES positions must be classifiable **above the GS-15 grade level**, or equivalent, based on the duties, responsibilities, and qualifications required by the position. In addition, the incumbent **must** engage in one of the following activities:

- Direct the work of an organizational unit;
- Be accountable for the success of one or more specific programs or projects;
- Monitor progress toward organizational goals and periodically evaluate and make appropriate adjustments to such goals;
- Supervise the work of employees (other than personal assistants); or
- Otherwise exercise important policy-making, policy-determining, or other executive functions.

Directing the work of an organizational unit to manage a project includes responsibility for:

- Assessing policy, program, and project feasibility;
- Determining program goals and developing implementation tools;
- Designing an organizational structure to promote effective work accomplishment; and
- Setting effectiveness, efficiency, productivity, and management/internal control standards.

Being accountable for the success of a program or project encompasses responsibility for the full range of factors that affect program/project accomplishment. This includes:

- Obtaining the resources necessary to achieve the desired project objective;
- Assuming responsibility for the effective use of government resources; and
- Dealing with key officials both within and outside the organization to gain understanding and support for the project.

Monitoring progress toward organizational goals and making appropriate adjustments is an extension of an individual's responsibility for directing the work of an organizational unit. It includes:

- Monitoring work status through formal and informal means to evaluate progress toward objectives;
- Assessing overall effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity of the organization;
- Identifying, diagnosing and consulting on problem areas related to implementation and goal achievement; and
- Making decisions regarding alternative courses of action.

Supervising the work of employees should be credited only if the project manager position meets the minimum requirements for coverage under OPM's [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#). Specifically, the project manager position's supervisory responsibilities must:

- Require accomplishment of work through the combined technical and administrative direction of others;
- Constitute a major duty occupying at least 25 percent of the incumbent's time; and
- Meet at least the lowest level of Factor 3 in the guide based on supervision of non-contractor personnel. (Work performed by contractors is considered in applying the grading criteria within each factor of the supervisory guide, provided the position first meets the coverage requirements above based on supervision of non-contractor personnel).

Policy-making or policy-determining functions include responsibility for reviewing staff recommendations on policies developed to affect the organization's mission; considering political, social, economic, technical, and administrative factors with potential impact on recommended policies; and approving those policies.

It would be unusual to find a project manager position that entails making major policy decisions.

Distinguishing Between SES and SL/ST Positions – Positions that are properly classified above the grade GS-15 grade level, and do **not** meet the functional executive criteria, are more appropriately placed in the Senior Level (SL) or Scientific/Professional (ST) systems. The nature of a position's work determines which system is most appropriate.

- ***Senior Level (SL) Positions.*** SL positions are classifiable **above the GS-15 grade level**, but do **not** meet the executive criteria characteristic of the SES, nor do they involve the fundamental research and development responsibilities characteristic of ST positions. SL positions may include some supervisory and related managerial duties, provided these duties occupy less than 25 percent of the position's time.

NOTE: In some instances, the SL system is used for positions that meet the SES executive criteria in agencies that have been excluded from the SES.

- ***Scientific/Professional (ST) Positions.*** ST positions are classifiable **above the GS-15 grade level** and involve the performance of high-level research and development in the physical, biological, medical, or engineering sciences (or closely related field). ST positions may include some supervisory and related managerial duties, provided these duties occupy less than 25 percent of the position's time. Given the characteristics of project manager work, it is unlikely to occur in ST positions.

Qualifying and Ranking Applicants for Project Manager Positions

Qualifying Applicants

Governmentwide minimum qualification standards are published in OPM's [Operating Manual Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#). Because project manager positions usually require knowledge of a specific administrative, scientific, or engineering field, agencies must determine the paramount occupational knowledge for each position to identify the appropriate qualification standard. The same occupational knowledge that determines the series of a position for classification purposes (see pages 6 and 7) also determines the qualification standard used to select an individual to fill the position. For minimum qualifications, use the qualification standard appropriate for the occupational series.

Agencies may supplement minimum qualifications with additional knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) or competencies identified through job analysis. Job analysis is a systematic method of studying a job to identify the tasks performed and link them to the KSAs/ competencies required to perform these tasks. Where appropriate, and supported by job analysis, agencies may use the project management competency as a selective factor or quality ranking factor. For additional information on conducting a job analysis and establishing selective and quality ranking factors, agencies may consult OPM's Delegated Examining Operations Handbook on our website at <http://www.opm.gov/deu/index.asp>.

Selective factors become part of the minimum requirements for a position. A selective factor is a "screen out" (i.e., if an applicant does not meet a selective factor he/she is ineligible for further consideration).

Selective factors:

- Are essential for successful performance on the job (i.e., if individuals do not have the selective factor, they cannot perform the job);
- Are almost always geared toward a specific technical KSA/competency;
- Require extensive training or experience to develop; and
- Cannot be learned on the job in a reasonable amount of time.

Selective factors cannot be so narrow that they preclude from consideration applicants who could perform the duties of the position. Agencies may not use selective factors that could be learned readily during the normal period of orientation to the position. Nor should agencies use selective factors that are so agency specific that they exclude from consideration applicants without prior Federal service or preclude selection of applicants from priority placement lists established to assist in the placement of employees affected by reductions in force. Examples of KSAs/competencies that should not be used as selective factors include knowledge of:

- An organization's policies and planning processes; and
- An agency's rules, regulations, policies, and guidance.

NOTE: When using a selective factor, you must specify the required proficiency level.

Ranking Qualified Applicants

Quality ranking factors are KSAs/competencies that significantly enhance performance in a position, but, unlike selective factors, are not essential for satisfactory performance. Agencies should rank applicants with higher proficiency levels on a quality ranking factor above those with lower proficiency levels. Agencies may not rate qualified candidates ineligible solely for failure to possess a quality ranking factor. With quality ranking factors, the focus is on the level of proficiency the candidate brings to the job.

Justification and Documentation

Agencies must document both selective factors and quality ranking factors through job analysis by identifying the:

- KSAs/competencies basic to and essential for satisfactory job performance;
- Duties/tasks the incumbent will perform that require possessing the required KSAs/competencies; and
- Education, experience, or other qualifications that provide evidence of the possession of the required KSAs/competencies.

Considering Certification

OPM has not established certification requirements for Project Manager positions. However, agencies may specify a particular type of certification (or equivalency) in establishing selective criteria or in defining quality ranking factors. Subject matter experts must determine that the certification is necessary for satisfactory job performance (i.e., the certification is related to the duties/tasks and required KSAs/competencies of the job). The certification may then be used as evidence that a person has the KSAs/competencies needed to perform project management work at a satisfactory level.

Training and Developing Project Managers

Credentials and Academic Degrees

Agencies may establish career development programs in which employees can move through a series of increasingly more responsible project management assignments. Sometimes these career programs include opportunities for rotational assignments that help broaden the employee's perspective. In addition, formal training (both Government-sponsored and commercial courses) may cover aspects of project management. Individual courses may be organized into formal programs that lead to academic degrees or that help employees become eligible for a specific credential. In any instance, agencies need to ensure that courses and training adhere to established procedures and guidelines, especially as the law now authorizes agencies to fund credentials and academic degree training. **Agencies are reminded that they may pay for formal programs that lead to academic degrees only if the academic institution is accredited by an organization approved by the U.S. Department of Education.**

Credentials

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002 enacted into law changes in chapter 57 of title 5, United States Code. Now, 5 U.S.C. 5757 provides that an agency may pay for “(1) expenses for employees to obtain professional credentials, including expenses for professional accreditation, State-imposed and professional licenses, and professional certification; and (2) examinations to obtain such credentials.”

This law goes on to require that this authority “may not be exercised on behalf of any employee occupying or seeking to qualify for appointment to any position that is excepted from the competitive service because of the confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character of the position.”

Academic Degree Training

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 expanded agency authority to pay for academic degree training. Now, 5 U.S.C. 4107 provides that “An agency may select and assign an employee to academic degree training and may pay or reimburse the costs of academic degree training from appropriated or other available funds if such training:

- Contributes significantly to (A) meeting an identified agency training need; (B) resolving an identified agency staffing problem; or (C) accomplishing goals in the strategic plan of the agency;
- Is part of a planned, systemic, and coordinated agency employee development program linked to accomplishing the strategic goals of the agency; and
- Is accredited and is provided by a college or university that is accredited by a nationally recognized body.

The new 5 U.S.C. 4107 goes on to require that the agency:

- Consistent with the merit system principles set forth in paragraphs (2) and (7) of section 2301(b), take into consideration the need to (A) maintain a balanced workforce in which women, members of racial and ethnic minority groups, and persons with disabilities are appropriately represented in Government service; and (B) provide employees effective education and training to improve organizational and individual performance;
- Assure that the training is not for the sole purpose of providing an employee an opportunity to obtain an academic degree or qualify for appointment to a particular position for which the academic degree is a basic requirement;
- Assure that no authority under this subsection is exercised on behalf of any employee occupying or seeking to qualify for (A) a noncareer appointment in the Senior Executive Service; or (B) appointment to any position that is excepted from the competitive service because of its confidential policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character; and
- To the greatest extent practicable, facilitate the use of online degree training.

The Gov Online Learning Center

The Gov Online Learning Center (<http://www.golearn.gov>) is a Governmentwide e-Training site dedicated to one-stop access to high quality e-Training courses, tools, and services to the Federal workforce. The Gov Online Learning Center is a one-stop portal leading to many tools and resources that can assist in developing an IT Project Manager. Many of these resources are available at no cost to Federal IT employees and provide continuous learning and resources for developing basic IT Project Manager competencies. You can access the Gov Online Learning Center at <http://www.golearn.gov>, explore the site, and register to take courses.

A future enhancement, the Gov Online Learning Center's Competency Management Center will provide employees with tools to help manage their career development and will help supervisors and managers with the strategic development of human capital. The first career path in the Competency Management Center will be the IT function and the GS-2210 occupational series. This is the result of a joint development effort with the Chief Information Officers Council (<http://www.cio.gov>). Persons interested in the IT profession will be able to review competencies identified for a variety of recognized career paths, assess their proficiencies in these competencies, and identify appropriate training and development opportunities to develop the needed competencies. In addition, the tool allows the user to select a third party to provide an independent assessment of proficiency in relevant competencies.

Further Guidance

This guidance will help you classify and fill project manager positions, as well as develop project managers. If you have questions about this guide, contact the appropriate OPM office as follows:

- Position classification matters at fedclass@opm.gov
- Employment or staffing issues at questions@opm.gov
- Training and employee development topics at questions@opm.gov