



Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, U.S. Code

Appellant: [the appellants].

Position: Engineering Technician
GS-802-9

Organization: Naval Air Station
[city, state]

Decision: Engineering Technician
GS-802-9

OPM decision number: C-0802-09-03

Signed by Denis J. Whitebook _____
DENIS J. WHITEBOOK
CLASSIFICATION APPEALS OFFICER

August 12, 1997 _____
DATE

Introduction

On May 14, 1997, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellants]. Their positions are currently classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-9. The appellants believe their position should be classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, or Facility Manager, GS-1640-11. They work at the Naval Air Station, [city, state]. We have accepted and decided their appeal under 5 U.S. Code 5112.

The appellants state that comparable work requires comparable pay. They compare their duties to those of other positions to show that they are not receiving such pay. We agree with the principle of equal pay for substantially equal work, which is discussed in 5 U.S.C. chapter 51. However, chapter 51 establishes the classification system as its means of achieving that goal. The chapter indicates that OPM must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines. Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare appellants' duties to those of other positions as a basis for deciding their appeal.

The appellants make various statements about their agency and its evaluation of their positions. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of their positions. As indicated above, we are required by law to make that decision solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines. Therefore, we have considered the appellants' statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

The appellants indicate that standards used to classify their positions are outdated. However, the adequacy of grade-level criteria in OPM standards is not appealable (section 511.607 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations).

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information of record furnished by the appellants and their agency, including their official position descriptions [PD number 1], [PD number 2], and [PD number 3].

Position information

The appellants work in the [the installation]. They are each assigned specific organizational customers at the Naval Air Station for which they are responsible for all public works related facility projects. The major duties include planning and writing detailed job specifications (Scope of Work) and cost estimates for alteration, repair, and renovation work not covered by the existing contract. This requires discussing the needs with the customer, analyzing work to be accomplished, writing specifications, preparing sketches as needed, determining the type and amount of materials required and estimating those costs, and estimating labor costs using engineered performance standards or other guides. As most of the work is accomplished by a contractor, this input goes into a contract for work which will be performed by the base contractor's workforce. The appellants phase the work of the trades to accomplish work, and observe the work in progress but they do not direct the contractor during the progress of the project. Modifications to the project can be accomplished by submitting modifications to the Scope of Work. The appellants also perform regularly scheduled or requested inspections of real property facilities and utility systems and prepare written reports of their

findings. Depending upon the appellant, this major duty occupies from 60 to 80 percent of their time, as is specified in their PD's.

The appellants also perform two other common assignments. One is characterized in their PD's as engineering services and takes 15 percent of each appellant's time. This includes work such as reviewing technical specifications and drawings for completeness, accuracy, and feasibility of construction, providing technical and trade information, and developing and providing EPS work performance standards in compliance with the Base Operating Service Contract utilizing trade knowledge and input from the Engineering Division for preparation and for reviewing designs, modifications, and/or alterations of grounds, facilities, utilities, special studies, and evaluations.

The other common assignment is characterized as financial management and takes 5 percent of each appellant's time. This duty includes working with [the agency] to properly categorize work requests.

Two appellants whose time is not fully taken by the above work have other duties. [The appellant] spends the 20 percent of his time not covered on the above work on assignments labeled in his PD as Additional duties and responsibilities. These additional duties primarily include those related to serving as technical representative of the Commanding Officer, with responsibility for Annexes 17 and 18 of the Base Operating Services Contract. [The appellant] spends the remaining 15 percent of his time on duties related to having responsibilities for 35 GSA leased vehicles. This includes ensuring preventive maintenance is accomplished, arranging for maintenance and repairs, maintaining history jackets, and reviewing bills sent by GSA. 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, page 23). Therefore, we will not evaluate the appellants' other duties in this decision.

The appellants' PD's and the other material of record furnish much more information about their duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellants believe their positions should be classified either in the Facility Management Series, GS-1640, or the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802. The Facility Management Series "...covers positions that involve managing the operation and maintenance of buildings, grounds, and other facilities such as posts, camps, depots, power plants, parks, forests, and roadways. Such work requires (1) administrative and managerial skills and abilities and (2) broad technical knowledge of the operating capabilities and maintenance requirements of various kinds of physical plants and equipment. While positions in this series typically involve directing work performed by a variety of trades and labor employees and require specialized knowledge of such work, they do not have as a paramount qualification an intensive knowledge of specific trade skills utilized." As described in the Explanatory Statement for the series definition (page 1 of the standard), facility management work involves planning and directing *comprehensive* programs for the operation, maintenance, repair, and improvement of Government installations. For a position to be included in this series it must include a significant responsibility for the following functions: Maintenance program planning, Facility planning and control, and Facility requirements planning. The appellants' positions do not meet these criteria. For instance, under Financial planning and control, they do not determine (generally several years in advance) funding requirements for facility operation and maintenance, justify budget requests

to higher headquarters and control all program expenditures, as described on page 2 of the standard. In addition, under Facility requirements planning, they do not evaluate present use patterns of building, equipment, and other facilities, and project future requirements in terms of expanding or changing agency requirements, as described on page 2 of the standard.

The Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, includes positions that do not require professional knowledges and abilities for full performance, and includes technical positions that require primarily application of a practical knowledge of (a) the methods and techniques of engineering or architecture and (b) construction, application, properties, operation, and limitations of engineering systems, processes, structures, machinery, devices, and materials.

We find that the appellant's positions are properly covered by the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, titled Engineering Technician, and graded using the GS-802 standard.

Grade determination

As noted earlier, by law we must classify positions by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines. OPM guidelines and previous decisions show that current duties ordinarily are those that have occurred in about the past year.

We will evaluate appellants' duties using the GS-802 standard. That standard uses two classification factors: Nature of assignment and Level of responsibility. Our evaluation with respect to those factors follows.

Nature of assignment

The appellants perform a variety of assignments related to providing facility operating services, maintenance and repair, construction, alterations, improvements, and the planning and estimating for contract submittal. More recent examples of the types of assignments worked on by the appellants are in the material of record. These examples include installing a scoreboard for ballfield, replacing building structure, installing conduit and boxes, repairing a heating system, expanding a kitchen, painting the "top gun" hangar, providing power to hazmat vans, rehabilitating planning rooms, replacing/installing a football irrigation system, installing a fire door, constructing an ATM office within the base exchange, building two new bathrooms, connecting water and sewer lines, installing a rolling counter door for the pharmacy, replacing a chlorine system, making repairs to a boiler, installing air conditioning for the photo lab, as well as various other structure modifications and range of maintenance work.

Most of the examples generally meet the GS-9 criteria for Nature of assignment on pages 28-32 of the standard. For instance, similar to GS-9 work, most of the appellants' tasks require applying a considerable number of different methods, procedures, and techniques. Also similar to GS-9 assignments, most of the tasks require studying, analyzing, and considering various possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs, and selecting the most appropriate. As discussed at GS-9, most of the appellants' tasks require consideration of many precedents and some adaptation of previous plans or techniques. As is typical at GS-9, the appellants must sometimes make changes or deviations during an assignment to incorporate additional factors requested after starting the

project, or to adjust to findings and conclusions that could not be predicted accurately in the original plans.

The projects described in the material of record fall short of GS-11 criteria. GS-11 projects are of broad scope and complexity and require 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. Technicians at this level are typically confronted with a variety of complex problems. Page 34 shows that an example of a project this broad might involve preparing designs and specifications for various utility systems including heating, plumbing, air conditioning, ventilating, pumping, gas supply, *and* pneumatic control systems for a technical laboratory or experimental building whose complexity or nonconventional nature entails design problems requiring considerable adaptation of precedents. Information in the record indicates some of the appellants' projects may have had unusual or complicating features. However, none of the projects cited are as broad in scope as the GS-11 example on page 34. Further, GS-11 projects require initiative, resourcefulness, and sound judgment in planning and coordinating their phases. Because appellants' projects are narrower in scope than envisioned at GS-11, they do not have phases requiring planning and coordination to the extent intended at that level. Complications in projects cited in the PD's related to the age of the facilities and to the desert environment do not compensate for the lack of scope in projects.

As discussed above, most tasks performed by the appellants generally meet GS-9 criteria for Nature of assignment.

Level of responsibility

The appellants' level of responsibility meets some of criteria of the GS-9 level on pages 32 and 33 of the standard. For instance, as described at that level, contacts include contractors and are to resolve mutual problems and coordinate work. In some respects, the appellants' level of responsibility exceeds GS-9 criteria. For example, the appellants' supervisor furnishes fewer instructions on priorities than envisioned at GS-9. In addition, their supervisor provides less review during the progress and at the completion of assignments than envisioned at that level. Unlike GS-9 contacts, the appellants' are delegated authority to directly make contacts outside the agency that have not been arranged under supervisory guidance.

The appellants' level of responsibility has some similarities to GS-11 criteria on page 35 of the standard. For instance, as discussed at GS-11, they have considerable freedom in planning and carrying out project work. Similar to GS-11 technicians, the appellants have discussed project work with their supervisor but rarely seek or need technical supervisory assistance, although assistance and guidance is available from [the agency]. As mentioned above, and as described at GS-11, there has been little supervisory review during the progress or at the completion of projects. However, their level of responsibility falls short of GS-11 criteria in at least one critical respect. The last paragraph on page 35 of the standard shows that these GS-11 responsibilities are expected to be exercised within the context of GS-11 assignments of broad scope. As discussed under Nature of assignment, the appellants' tasks are narrower in scope than envisioned at GS-11 and are evaluated at GS-9. Consequently, appellants' responsibilities are not carried out as intended at the GS-11 level, i.e., they

are not carried out against projects of the scope or complexity described at the GS-11 level and so do not involve the equivalent level of responsibility as if applied to GS-11 level projects.

As discussed above, the appellants' level of responsibility on tasks performed exceed GS-9 criteria in some respects, but do not fully meet GS-11 criteria. Level of responsibility is evaluated at GS-9.

Summary

Since Nature of assignment and Level of responsibility are both evaluated at GS-9, the appellants' positions are properly graded at GS-9 overall.

We note that even if the appellants' positions had been evaluated at GS-10 with respect to Level of responsibility, they still would have been properly classified at GS-9 overall. This because OPM guidelines and previous decisions indicate that if a position is evaluated one grade higher for one classification factor than for the other, the lower of the two grade levels controls the grade of the position as a whole.

Decision

The appellants' positions are properly classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.