

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



Dallas Oversight Division  
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22  
Dallas, TX 75242-9968

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

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

**Agency classification:** Architect  
GS-0808-12

**Organization:** [appellant's activity]  
[a specific State Office]  
Rural Development  
Department of Agriculture  
[city, state]

**OPM decision:** Architect  
GS-808-12

**OPM decision number:** C-0808-12-01

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

---

Bonnie J. Brandon  
Classification Appeals Officer

December 14, 2000

---

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:**

[appellant's name and address]

**Agency:**

[servicing personnel office]

USDA-OHRM-OD  
Department of Agriculture  
J. L. Whitten Building, Room 402W  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.  
Washington, DC 20250

## **Introduction**

On August 23, 2000, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U. S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. The appellant's position is currently classified as Architect, GS-808-12. He believes it should be classified at the GS-13 grade level and that the existing classification fails to recognize the complexity of his architectural and environmental responsibilities. We decided his appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

To help decide the appeal, an OPM representative conducted an audit of the appellant's position. We used the audit findings and all information of record furnished by the appellant and his agency in reaching our decision. The appellant states that his position description of record is essentially correct, but he provided elaboration on two of the major duties in his appeal. We find the position description to accurately reflect the duties and responsibilities assigned to the appellant.

## **Position information**

Rural Development (RD) provides financial programs to improve the quality of life in rural communities. The programs are delivered through three agencies. Rural Utilities Service (RUS) assists in meeting water, sewer and waste disposal, electricity, and telecommunications needs. The Rural Housing Service (RHS) allows rural Americans to build, buy, or rent single-family and multifamily housing, as well as health facilities, fire and police stations, and other community facilities. The Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) allows businesses and cooperatives to remain viable in a changing economy.

The appellant serves as the State Architect and Environmental Coordinator for [a specific RD State Office]. As such, the appellant advises on architectural, construction, and environmental matters related to projects financed or repossessed by RD. The duties include consulting with architectural, construction, environmental, and real estate firms on various aspects of [a specific state office's] projects. The appellant reviews architectural and construction documents for functionality and regulatory compliance. He visits project sites to determine their suitability from architectural, construction, and environmental perspectives or to observe work in progress. The appellant plans, schedules, and provides training to [State Office] personnel in architectural and environmental matters. He develops and maintains guidance and policies for the [State Office]. The appellant also serves as contracting officer representative for contractors who perform environmental investigative and remediation work.

The appellant's duties and responsibilities as State Environmental Coordinator (SEC) comprise about 33 percent of his workload. The SEC duties were assigned to each state office in 1984 to ensure projects complied with state environmental requirements and to protect the agency's legal and security interests. These duties have evolved over time as environmental legislation and emphasis increased. The majority of the appellant's SEC duties involve utility projects.

### **Series and title determination**

The appellant performs duties characteristic of two series: the GS-808 Architecture Series and the GS-028 Environmental Protection Specialist Series. *The Classifier's Handbook* describes a number of factors to consider in order to determine the proper series for a position. These factors are the reason for the position's existence, the paramount knowledge required, the organizational function, and recruitment sources. The architecture duties and responsibilities serve as the primary purpose for the appellant's position, impose a professional knowledge of architecture, and clearly restrict recruitment to individuals who have fulfilled educational requirements in the field of architecture. Since the SEC duties could be assigned to someone else within the [State Office], they do not play an overriding role in recruitment. The appellant's position is properly placed in the GS-808 Architecture Series.

In accordance with titling instructions in the GS-808 Architecture Position Classification Standard, the appealed position is titled *Architect*.

### **Standard determination**

The standard for the GS-808 Architecture Series is used to determine the grade of the appellant's architectural duties. Even though the GS-808 series recognizes a relationship between architectural work and its impact on the environment, the appellant's SEC duties require a more in-depth knowledge of environmental protection programs. Therefore, the standard for the GS-028 Environmental Protection Specialist Series is referenced to assess the appellant's environmental responsibilities.

### **Grade determination**

Both the GS-808 and GS-028 standards are written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under the FES, positions are evaluated based on nine factors that define the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for each factor level description. If a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level. The total points assigned to each factor level are totaled and converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

The appellant questions the agency's evaluation of factors 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9. We carefully reviewed the agency's determinations for factors 1, 2, 3, and 6 using both standards and agree with its findings. Our evaluation addresses only those factors with which the appellant disagrees.

#### *Factor 4, Complexity*

The agency assigned Level 4-4 to this factor for both the architectural and environmental aspects of the appellant's work. The appellant believes Level 4-5 more accurately reflects the complexities of his position.

Complexity in the GS-808 standard covers the nature and variety of tasks, steps, processes, methods, or activities in the work and the degree to which the architect must deviate or develop

new techniques, criteria, or information. The complex feature can be concerned with technical architectural work or with other aspects of architectural work, such as social, ecological, or environmental considerations, that make it necessary to analyze and weigh alternatives. The standard describes six complex features that are typical of architectural assignments, especially at the higher-grade levels. These complex features primarily impose requirements to analyze and research options, to plan and coordinate projects that pose challenges with completion dates and approval, and to modify standard methods to accommodate conflicting needs.

Assignments at Level 4-4 involve combinations of two to five complex features. The work requires application of standard architectural practices to new situations and relating work situations to precedent ones. The work also includes modifying, adapting, and making compromises with standard guidelines.

Assignments at Level 4-5 are of such breadth, diversity, and intensity that they involve many, varied complex features. An architect at this level must be especially versatile and innovative in adapting, modifying, or making compromises with standard guides and methods to originate new techniques or criteria. The benchmarks in the standard provide illustrations of assignments that meet this level of complexity. Each benchmark in which the standard credits Level 4-5 involves diverse and geographically dispersed projects and unique problems requiring unusual treatments.

The appellant stated in his appeal that he functions as a generalist and, as such, performs many varied and unrelated complex assignments simultaneously. They include approving sites, reviewing analyses, concurring with design submittals, reviewing bid and contract documents, investigating construction defects, performing cost estimates, developing interagency agreements, developing guidelines and training materials, and several more.

We do not find the appellant's architectural assignments to be as broad or intense as intended at Level 4-5. Level 4-4 fully recognizes the varied nature of the appellant's architectural responsibilities, the analyses he performs to ensure projects comply with requirements, and the modifications and adaptations he must make to protect the agency's interests. The appellant must use different approaches to resolve the variety of problems encountered, but we find no evidence that the approaches used are especially innovative or involve developing new techniques.

By reference to the GS-028 standard, specialists at Level 4-4 are responsible for one or more programs that involve a wide variety of duties involving diverse and complex technical problems and considerations. Decisions regarding what needs to be done depend on the assessment of unusual facts. The standard gives illustrations of work involving Level 4-4 complexities. One illustration depicts a specialist serving as a state coordinator tracking progress of state plans to assure compliance with agency requirements, reviewing reports, evaluating program accomplishments, and recommending adjustments or changes. Another illustration describes a specialist who conducts studies of diverse issues, recommending changes or additions to regulations, writing substantial portions of regulations, and providing guidance to regional offices on implementation. The GS-028 standard describes complexities at Level 4-5 as including a variety of duties requiring many different and unrelated processes and methods. The assignments cover a broad range of activities involving a number of facilities, sites, programs, or

intensive analysis and problem solving as a recognized expert in a program or functional area. Decisions regarding what needs to be done require an assessment of very complex and diverse circumstances. The work involves major areas of uncertainty in approach. New or unconventional methods must be developed to address unique or controversial aspects of environmental protection. The specialist at this level establishes criteria for administering or evaluating environmental programs, or develops policy guidance and procedural material for use by operating personnel. The illustrations in the standard depict a specialist who manages hazardous waste and material programs at a large military installation that impose unprecedented problems, or administers a nationwide program involving complex operational problems.

The appellant stated during the audit that one of the most complex aspects of his position is issuing policies on environmental issues. As an example, the appellant developed a *Natural Resource Management Guide* that serves as the framework for environmental standards and requirements for the [State Office]. The purpose of the *Guide* is to ensure [State Office] projects do not conflict with local, State, and Federal mandates to protect environmental resources.

While we recognize the combination of architectural and environmental assignments places extra demands on the appellant, we do not find his environmental duties to exceed Level 4-4. As with the appellant's architectural duties, the complexities associated with his environmental duties are not as broad, intense, or unique as those described at Level 4-5. He administers an environmental program for a state office that consists of numerous field offices. He issues state policies and guidance based on national office instructions, tailoring the guidance to specific [State Office] conditions. This aspect of the appellant's responsibilities was also credited under Factor 3, Guidelines. The problems the appellant encounters in administering the [State Office] environmental program do not pose the unique risks and unprecedented problems that are typical at Level 4-5.

Both the appellant's architectural and environmental responsibilities are evaluated at Level 4-4. This factor is credited with 225 points.

#### *Factor 5, Scope and effect*

The agency credited this factor at Level 5-4. The appellant believes Level 5-5, and perhaps Level 5-6, more appropriately reflects the scope and effect of his work. The appellant states in his appeal that his involvement in developing policies has agency-wide impact and establishes short- and long-term precedents.

"Scope and Effect" in the GS-808 standard covers the relationship between the nature of the work and the effect of work products both within and outside the organization. The purpose of work at Level 5-4 is to provide expertise as a specialist in a particular function by furnishing advisory, planning, or reviewing services on specific problems, projects, programs, or functions. The work may include developing criteria, procedures, or instructions for major agency activities. Work products affect a wide range of agency architectural programs. Reference to the benchmarks in the standard indicates the scope of work at this level involves major organizations or projects within an agency that affect other subject matter specialists inside and outside the agency.

Level 5-5 involves work to resolve critical problems or to develop new approaches or methods for use by other architectural specialists. The architect at this level provides expert advice and guidance to officials, managers, and other architects within or outside the agency covering a broad range of architectural activities. The work affects other architectural experts both within and outside the agency or the development of major aspects of agency architectural programs. The benchmarks in the standard illustrate the nature of work at this level is typically agency-wide in scope affecting a wide range of specialists or experts within and outside the agency.

We find the scope and effect of the appellant's architectural work to meet Level 5-4. The purpose of the appellant's position is to plan, organize, oversee, coordinate, review, and facilitate the design and construction of [State Office] projects for the RUS, RHS, and RBS programs. The appellant resolves critical administrative and technical problems that could cause unnecessary delays and increased costs if not corrected. The appellant develops policies and procedures for [State Office] field office staff. The appellant provides advice to the RD national office and serves on national task forces that establish agency policy. The appellant's work impacts architects, engineers, developers, contractors, and lenders within the [State Office] jurisdiction, both internal and external to the agency. The scope of the appellant's architectural duties, however, is not as broad as the agency-wide level intended at Level 5-5. Likewise, the appellant's work does not impact as wide an audience as the architect at Level 5-5. The appellant's participative role in developing agency policy is taken into account at Level 5-4, which credits developing policy for *agency* activities, i.e., at the national level.

The GS-028 standard states the purpose of work at Level 5-4 is to plan and carry out a variety of important project or program activities. The work involves establishing criteria, formulating projects, assessing program effectiveness, analyzing a variety of unusual conditions, or providing advice to regional and operating personnel, state and local officials, industry representatives, and others on specific programs. This is a precise match with the appellant's role as SEC, the purpose of which is to provide advice and oversight to field personnel and program managers. The appellant's work affects architects, developers, utility districts, contractors, lenders, Indian tribes, citizens, and agency staff within the [State Office].

Level 5-5 in the GS-028 standard is not met. The purpose of work at this level is to carry out major environmental projects or programs. The work involves determining the soundness of agency-wide programs and plans or developing new approaches and methods for operating personnel. Also included is resolving problems that are critical to important agency objectives, providing authoritative advice to Federal, State, and local officials, or developing regulations or standards that affect a large segment of the regulated community. The work affects the development of major aspects of an agency's environmental protection program, the work of State and local officials, top-level managers of the agency, important national goals and programs, or the well being of substantial numbers of people. The appellant is responsible for implementing a national environmental program within the [State Office], but he is not responsible for the overall program itself, nor is he responsible for developing environmental regulations. The problems he resolves are not as critical as the examples provided in the GS-028 standard at Level 5-5, e.g., removal activities at cleanup sites or an immediate, widespread threat to public health.

The appellant's architectural and environmental duties are both evaluated at Level 5-4 and credited with 225 points.

*Factor 7, Purpose of contacts*

The agency credited Level 7-3 for the appellant's architectural duties. The appellant believes that Level 7-3 is probably correct, but that certain aspects of Level 7-4 are occasionally encountered. He describes these aspects as influencing and negotiating with architects, developers, contractors, consultants, [State Office] officials and peers, and other parties regarding projects and programs.

We find that Level 7-3 fully captures the nature of the appellant's contacts. The GS-808 standard describes the purpose of contacts at this level as influencing or persuading other architects or subject matter specialists to adopt technical points about which there are conflicts. Also addressed at this level is negotiating agreements with agencies and contractors where there are conflicting interests and opinions among experts in the field.

The purpose of contacts at Level 7-4 is to justify, defend, negotiate, or settle highly significant or controversial architectural matters. Architects at this level represent their agencies in professional conferences or on committees to plan extensive and long-range architectural programs and to develop standards and guides for broad activities. We find no evidence that the appellant must justify and defend the agency's position on sensitive architectural matters. The appellant attends conferences or interagency meetings, but he does so regarding [State Office] architectural matters and not RD national-level issues.

Level 7-3 is assigned to this factor regarding the appellant's architectural duties, and 120 points are credited.

The agency did not assign factor levels to either Factor 6, Personal contacts, or Factor 7, Purpose of contacts, with respect to the appellant's environmental duties. The appellant's contacts as SEC are essentially the same as those associated with his architectural duties. We have assigned Level 3 to Factor 6, the highest level described in the GS-028 standard, to the appellant's SEC duties. Persons contacted at this level are outside the employing agency in a moderately unstructured setting. They include contractors, inspectors, attorneys, company executives, community leaders, elected officials, representatives of Federal or State regulatory agencies, professional organizations, the news media, or public action groups.

The purpose of contacts at Level c, the highest level described in the GS-028 standard, is to influence, motivate, or persuade individuals or groups who are typically skeptical and uncooperative to obtain the desired effect. Examples provided include negotiating compliance requirements, representing the office on committees, working with Indian tribal leaders to modify plans to accommodate conflicting requirements, or justifying the feasibility of plans. This level matches the purpose of the appellant's contacts as SEC. Contacts as SEC are made for the purpose of motivating and influencing contractors, consultants, and other parties to resolve difficult problems. The appellant acts as a negotiator and mediator for the more difficult



problems that arise within the [State Office]. The appellant represents the [State Office] at professional conferences and interagency meetings.

Using the GS-808 standard, we find that the personal contacts and purpose of contacts for the appellant's architectural duties meet Level 6-3 (60 points) and Level 7-3 (120 points) for a total of 180 points. By application of the GS-028 standard, we assign Levels 3 and c for a combined total of 180 points for the contacts associated with the appellant's environmental duties. Consequently, the total points assigned for personal contacts and purpose of contacts for the appellant's position is 180.

#### *Factor 8, Physical demands*

The agency credited Level 8-1 for both the appellant's architectural and SEC duties. The appellant believes Level 8-2 is warranted. He provided information in his appeal concerning time spent inspecting facilities and activities performed during the inspections.

With respect to the appellant's architectural duties, the GS-808 standard describes work at Level 8-1 as primarily sedentary, with some walking or bending during activities such as inspections of construction or field visits. Work at Level 8-2 requires regular and recurring construction or field inspections in which there is considerable walking, stooping, bending, and climbing. The *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, Chapter 3, defines regular and recurring duties as those duties that become a regular part of a job and recur with a somewhat anticipated frequency.

We find the appellant's architectural work to meet Level 8-2, the highest level described in the standard. While much of the work is completed in an office setting, the appellant routinely inspects construction facilities containing attics, crawl spaces, boiler rooms, bridges, and culverts. The appellant must crawl, bend, stoop, climb, or walk over rugged terrain during these inspections. The architectural duties are evaluated at Level 8-2 and credited with 20 points.

The appellant acknowledges in his appeal that facility inspections for environmental concerns have been limited. Because his SEC duties do not impose unusual physical demands on a regular and recurring basis, we assign Level 8-1 to the appellant's environmental work, for a total of 5 points.

#### *Factor 9, Work environment*

The agency assigned Level 9-1 to both aspects of the appellant's work. The appellant believes Level 9-2 or 9-3 is more appropriate.

According to the GS-808 standard, work at Level 9-1 is usually performed in an office setting, with occasional exposure to conditions in buildings or other structures under construction. The work at Level 9-2 involves regular and recurring exposure to moderate discomforts such as high noise levels, high or low temperatures, or adverse weather conditions. Level 9-3 work involves regular and recurring exposure to potentially dangerous or hazardous situations such as working

at heights of 100 or more feet above ground with potential weather extremes, terminal winds, or thunder showers.

The appellant routinely performs facility inspections during which he is exposed to adverse weather conditions, hot or cold temperatures, and high noise levels. This compares favorably with Level 9-2. Level 9-3 is not met since the work does not subject the appellant to potentially dangerous or hazardous situations on a regular and recurring basis. Level 9-2 is assigned to the appellant's architectural work, and 20 points are assigned.

The appellant states that his SEC site visits have been minimal this past year. Consequently, we assigned Level 9-1 to the appellant's environmental work and credited 5 points.

#### *Summary of factor levels*

The following table summarizes the factor levels assigned to the appellant's architectural duties by application of the GS-808 standard.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Points</b>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-7	1250
2. Supervisory controls	2-5	650
3. Guidelines	3-4	450
4. Complexity	4-4	225
5. Scope and effect	5-4	225
6. Personal contacts	6-3	60
7. Purpose of contacts	7-3	120
8. Physical demands	8-2	20
9. Work environment	9-2	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>3020</b>

According to the grade conversion table in the GS-808 standard, a total of 3020 points falls within the range of 2755 to 3150 points and converts to a grade of GS-12.

The following table summarizes the factor levels assigned to the appellant's environmental duties by application of the GS-028 standard.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Points</b>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-7	1250
2. Supervisory controls	2-5	650
3. Guidelines	3-4	450
4. Complexity	4-4	225
5. Scope and effect	5-4	225
6. Personal contacts and 7. Purpose of contacts	3c	180
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>2990</b>

According to the grade conversion table in the GS-028 standard, a total of 2990 points falls within the range of 2755 to 3150 points and converts to a grade of GS-12.

Since both the appellant's architectural and environmental duties are properly graded at the GS-12 level, this position is graded at the GS-12 level.

**Decision**

The appealed position is classified as Architect, GS-808-12.