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

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Supervisory Program Support Assistant GS-303-6

Organization: Medical Center Veterans Health Administration Department of Veterans Affairs [city, state]

OPM decision: GS-303-06 (Title to be determined by the agency, with the Supervisory prefix)

OPM decision number: C-0303-06-07

/s/

Virginia L. Magnuson
Classification Appeals Officer

December 2, 2002

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]

[Human Resources Office]

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Introduction

On August 8, 2002, the Atlanta Oversight Division, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted an appeal for the position of Supervisory Program Support Assistant, GS-303-6, [organization] Medical Center, Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, [location]. The appellant is requesting that her position be reclassified as Support Services Supervisor, GS-342-8. We received a complete administrative report on September 3, 2002. The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code.

The appellant submitted an appeal to her agency in January 2002, requesting that her position be classified as Supervisory Program Assistant, GS-303-7 or GS-303-8. The agency issued a decision on June 5, 2002, sustaining the existing classification. The appellant subsequently appealed to OPM.

General issues

The appellant makes various statements regarding her agency’s evaluation of the duties and responsibilities of her position. In adjudicating her appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of her position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing her 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 the agency, including information obtained from telephone interviews with the appellant and her supervisor.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description number [#]. The appellant’s supervisor, with the exception of reference to a clerical position abolished due to realignment, certified the accuracy of the position description. The appellant did not certify the accuracy of the position description. She believes that her position description and performance standards are no longer accurate due to a recent realignment that placed the organization under the [organization]. OPM considers a position description adequate for classification purposes when it is considered so by one knowledgeable of the occupational field involved and of the application of pertinent classification standards, principles, and policies, and is supplemented by otherwise accurate available, and current information on the organization, functions, programs, and procedures concerned. We find the current position description adequate.

The appellant spends 50 percent of her time engaged in program management activities and 20 percent engaged in management support activities related to the operations carried out by the three-unit [organization] Section of the [organization] Department. The [organization] Section has two physically dispersed divisions (uptown and downtown) that provide a variety of office services for the Medical Center. These services include mail management, records management, publications, reproduction and forms management, and maintenance of the Medical Center’s master reference library and policy memoranda database. The appellant is responsible for all
aspects of mail operations including receipt, dispatch and control of packages through the postal service and courier services and interdepartmental correspondence. She serves as the Contracting Officer’s Technical representative (COTR) for matters involving photocopying and mail equipment. The appellant serves as the Records Management Officer and is responsible for establishing center policies and procedures related to publications and records management and overall maintenance of records and records systems. She is responsible for maintaining the center’s master file of agency administrative publications and controlling publications for all service lines within the center. She administers the center’s electronic database of agency Medical Center Policy Memoranda and serves as the authorizing official for reproduction and distribution of these memoranda.

The remaining 30 percent of her time is spent supervising eight subordinate personnel (six Mail Clerks, GS-305-4, one Program Support Clerk, GS-303-4, and one Duplicating Equipment Operator, GS-350-4) who are assigned to and assist in accomplishing the work of the [organization] Section. She is responsible for ensuring the effective utilization of section manpower, preparing work schedules, certifying timecards, supervising work performance, reviewing work, and instructing subordinates on specific job tasks and techniques. She prepares and communicates performance ratings to subordinates, keeps subordinates informed of personnel issues or refers them to personnel specialists for in-depth information, and recommends and justifies staffing needs to higher level management.

The appellant reports to and receives general supervision from the [supervisor]. She exercises independent judgment in carrying out duties and responsibilities and has considerable latitude in implementing changes, improvements and new methods to enhance the effectiveness and/or economy of services provided. She keeps the supervisor apprised of the section’s activities. Problems and issues requiring the attention of the supervisor are presented during staff meetings. The appellant’s supervisor stated that he provides advice and guidance when it is sought, but is primarily involved with resolving and following up on “roadblock” issues which are beyond the scope of the appellant’s control or responsibilities. Review of the appellant’s work is in terms of end results and attainment of service objectives.

Series determination

The agency classified the appellant’s position in the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303. The appellant believes that the work she directs significantly affects the operations of the Medical Center and services it provides and therefore warrants classification of her position in the Support Services Administration Series, GS-342.

The GS-342 series includes all positions whose primary duties involve supervising, directing, or planning and coordinating a variety of services functions that are principally work-supporting, i.e., those functions without which the operations of an organization or services to the public would be impaired, curtailed, or stopped. These service functions include (but are not limited to) communications, procurement of administrative supplies and equipment, printing, reproduction, property management, space management, records management, mail service, facilities and equipment maintenance, and transportation.

The functional statement for the [organization] Section reflects that it is responsible for providing publications, reproduction and distribution services for the entire Medical Center. The
organization’s publications responsibilities include coordinating the destruction and storage of sensitive files and data; maintaining the library of agency or organizational directives; and distributing handbooks, policies and VA regulations. Reproduction responsibilities involve reproducing, binding, cutting and hole punching documents to create booklets, forms, pamphlets and newsletters. Distribution responsibilities involve the receipt, analysis, distribution, metering, processing, bagging, loading, logging and deliverance of mail and special packages, and management of the facility’s Federal Express account.

In order to be evaluated under the GS-342 standard, a position is required to have delegated authority and responsibility for the supervision of at least three employees performing at least six of the functions described at Level A, Factor 1 (or functions of the same level of responsibility and difficulty) of the standard; and each employee must perform such functions at least 25 percent of his or her time. The functions include:

1. Screening and assembling specifically identified records and files for storage or disposal in accordance with established records control schedules.

2. Maintaining property and equipment record cards, conducting physical inventories, and adjusting route discrepancies.

3. Providing duplicating services, primarily through the use of automatic quick copy equipment.

4. Processing incoming and outgoing communications involving routing of mail by general subject matter throughout the organization, and checking outgoing materials for completeness and conformity to postal regulations and administrative guidelines for handling communications.

5. Operating small office supply and forms storerooms, reordering supplies to maintain predetermined stockage levels, and issuing materials to authorized personnel.

6. Placing routine service calls to lessors or maintenance contractors to request repair of office machines and equipment.

7. Providing typing and transcribing services where the material transcribed is primarily narrative text and does not involve highly specialized terminology.

8. Providing punched cards, usually on a production basis, for various administrative processes for offices outside the support services organization.

9. Operating a switchboard that handles routing of local and long distance calls and providing limited directory service for the organization.

10. Obtaining (or controlling the dispatch of) vehicles, such as sedans, or light trucks that are used to transport persons, mail, or supplies.
The appellant’s responsibilities include a limited number of the areas defined as typical support services functions in the GS-342 standard. The agency credited the appellant with directing five of the six required functions in the GS-342 series and we agree. These functions are:

- **Files and Records** - Plans and develops systems for control of, location, access to and disposition of records. Ensures that schedules are met on the retention, transfer and disposal of records.

- **Property and Equipment** - Maintains property and equipment records and performs physical inventories involving leased photocopying, mail metering equipment and filing systems center-wide.

- **Duplicating Services** - Provides duplication services for organizations throughout the center through use of automatic quick copy equipment.

- **Mail Processing** - Receives, controls and processes incoming and outgoing mail, packages (through the postal service and courier/delivery services) and interdepartmental correspondence. Routes and distributes mail throughout the Medical Center by general subject matter. Ensures that outgoing materials comply with all applicable postal service requirements and VA administrative guidance.

- **Equipment Service Calls** - Places service calls to private sector companies to obtain maintenance or repair services on leased office machines and equipment.

The appellant believes that the agency erred in not crediting the small office supply and forms storerooms operation and dispatch control of vehicles used to transport persons, mail, or supplies as part of her responsibilities. We concur with the agency.

The appellant’s section maintains, manages and stores various supplies (paper, toner, envelopes, boxes, forms, etc.) as part of carrying out its own mail and records management and reproduction responsibilities. There are no indications in the appeal record that the section has overall responsibility for operating office supply and forms storerooms for organizations throughout the Medical Center. The section is assigned one two and one-half ton truck and one electric vehicle for mail and supply transport and other internal needs of the section. The number and use of vehicles involved permit the section to carry out its operations and does not indicate the level of dispatch activity envisioned for the vehicle dispatch control function.

Since the employees supervised by the appellant do not perform at least six of the identified functions (or functions of the same level of responsibility and difficulty) at least 25 percent of their time, the appellant’s position may not be classified in the GS-342 series. The appellant directs and performs assistance work that supports the administration or operation of the programs of an organizational unit. She directs a number of support functions requiring working knowledge of the work processes, administrative procedures, instructions, regulations, directives, and the mission and operational requirements of her employing organization. The appellant’s position is properly included in the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303. This series covers positions whose duties involve the performance or supervision of clerical, assistant, or technician work that is not classifiable in any other series. The work requires a knowledge of the procedures and techniques involved in carrying out the work of an
organization. It involves application of procedures and practices within the framework of established guidelines.

**Title determination**

The agency titled the position as a Supervisory Program Support Assistant.

The GS-303 series does not specify titles. Therefore, the agency may designate an appropriate title by following the guidance in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*. The Supervisory prefix is to be included in the title.

**Standard determination**

Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, November 1979
Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work, June 1989

**Grade determination**

The GS-303 standard does not have grade level criteria. The standard instructs that positions in this series be evaluated by reference to other standards for occupations with analogous knowledge and skills. The appellant’s nonsupervisory administrative support work is best evaluated by application of the grading criteria in the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (the Guide). The General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) is used to evaluate the appellant's supervisory responsibilities.

**Evaluation using the Guide**

The Guide provides general criteria for use in determining the grade level of nonsupervisory clerical and assistance work. The Guide describes the general characteristics of each grade level from GS-1 to GS-7 and uses two criteria for grading purposes: *Nature of Assignment* (which includes knowledge required and complexity of the work) and *Level of Responsibility* (which includes supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts).

The Guide differentiates between clerical and assistance work. This position performs assistance work because it requires the incumbent to have a working knowledge of office administrative processes and procedures, and the mission and operational requirements of the unit.

**Nature of Assignment**

At the GS-6 level, the employee performs work requiring considerable evaluative judgment within well-defined, commonly occurring aspects of an administrative program or function. The work may involve providing direct assistance to specialists or analysts by performing a segment of their work, or it may involve responsibility for a stream of products or continuing processes based on direct application of established policies, practices, and criteria. Assignments involve a relatively narrow range of case situations that occur in a broad administrative program or function. This work typically involves identifying issues, problems, or conditions and seeking
alternative solutions based on evaluation of the intent of applicable rules, regulations, and procedures. Assignments requiring evaluative judgment are narrowly focused, address a single product or action, and are relatively clear cut. The employee usually deals with problems or situations that remain stable, and resemble past problems or situations. Assignments often involve problems or situations where there is not one absolutely correct solution, only a best or most appropriate one. Work requires practical knowledge of guidelines and precedent case actions relating to a particular program area equal to that acquired through considerable work experience or specialized training. The work also requires skill to recognize the dimensions of a problem and express ideas in writing.

The GS-6 level is met. Comparable to work performed at this level, the appellant must have knowledge of the technical and administrative processes of the agency to provide administrative support for the facility and its various organizational components. Her responsibilities require that she apply evaluative judgment in establishing center publications and records administrative policies and procedures as prescribed by agency directives. She also uses judgment in determining which of a number of established agency administrative procedures are most suitable in coordinating the variety of activities involved in managing incoming and outgoing mail services, controlling the storage of, access to and disposition of records, and providing publications services for the Medical Center. Much of the work involves the application of established policies and procedures to resolve issues arising during the course of the section’s operations. The appellant typically deals with recurring situations that are stable and similar to situations that have been encountered previously.

At the GS-7 level, work consists of specialized duties with continuing responsibility for projects, questions, or problems that arise within an area of a program or functional specialty as defined by management. Work assignments involve a wide variety of problems or situations common to the segment of the program or function for which the employee is responsible. Each assignment typically consists of a series of related actions or decisions prior to final completion. Decisions or recommendations are based on the development and evaluation of information that comes from various sources. The work involves identifying and studying factors or conditions and determining their interrelationships as appropriate to the defined area of work. The employee must be concerned about taking or recommending actions that are consistent with the objectives and requirements of the program or functions. The work requires knowledge and skill to recognize the dimensions of the problems involved, collect the necessary information, establish the facts, and take or recommend actions based upon application or interpretation of established guidelines. The work also requires practical knowledge, developed through increasingly difficult, on-the-job training or experience dealing with the operations, regulations, principles, and peculiarities of the assigned program, function, or activity.

The GS-7 level is not met. The work performed by the appellant does not require a comprehensive knowledge of special and complex subjects typical of the GS-7 level. The majority of the appellant’s activities involve processes and procedures that are carried out on a daily basis and do not require that she identify and study factors or conditions and determine their interrelationships and impact on services her section provides. Each assignment does not normally entail a series of related actions or decisions prior to final completion.

This factor is properly evaluated at the GS-6 level.
Level of Responsibility

At the GS-6 level, the supervisor assists the employee with precedent assignments by providing an interpretation of policy or the concepts and theories of the occupation. Completed work is evaluated for appropriateness and effectiveness in meeting goals. Guidelines such as regulations, instructions, evaluation criteria, and prior case or action files are available, but they are often not completely applicable to the assignment or have gaps in specificity. The employee uses judgment in interpreting and adapting guidelines for application to specific cases or problems. At this level, the employee bases decisions and recommendations on facts and conventional interpretations of guidelines rather than on theory or opinion. The employee contacts employees or managers either within or outside the agency, to provide, receive, or develop information in order to identify problems, needs, or issues, and/or to coordinate work efforts or resolve problems.

The GS-6 level is met. The appellant receives direction from the supervisor for unusual problems that do not have clear precedents. Review of the appellant’s work is in terms of end results, attainment of service objectives and conformance with applicable local and agency administrative rules, regulation, policies and guidelines. She independently manages the day-to-day activities of the section based on established policies and procedures for her operations. Decisions and recommendations made regarding the operations of the section are based on facts and conventional interpretations of available guidelines rather than theory or opinion.

At the GS-7 level, the supervisor makes assignments in terms of objectives, priorities and deadlines. The employee independently completes assignments in accordance with accepted practices, resolving most conflicts that arise. Completed work is evaluated for appropriateness and conformance to policy. Guidelines for the work are more complex than at the next lower grade because the employee encounters a wider variety of problems and situations that require choosing alternative responses. Guides, such as regulations, policy statements, and precedent cases, tend to be general and descriptive of intent, but do not specifically cover all aspects of the assignments. Guidelines apply less to specific actions and more to the operational characteristics and procedural requirements of the program or function. The employee must use significant judgment and interpretation to apply the guides to specific cases and adapt or improvise procedures to accommodate unusual or one-of-a-kind situations. The contacts and purpose of contacts are usually the same as at the next lower level. The GS-7 employee, however, serves as a central point of contact to provide authoritative explanations of requirements, regulations, and procedures, and to resolve operational problems or disagreements affecting assigned areas.

The GS-7 level is not met. Although the appellant works independently and work is evaluated for appropriateness and conformance to policy, the supervisor provides guidance for unusual technical matters. Guidelines are available and generally cover most aspects of the work the appellant performs. They are specific enough that significant judgment and interpretation are not required. Instances requiring deviation from established procedures are rather infrequent and are covered by local or agency guidance or are referred to her supervisor for authoritative resolution.

This factor is properly evaluated at the GS-6 level.
Summary

Both the nature of the appellant’s assignments and her level of responsibility meet the GS-6 grade level.

Evaluation using the GSSG

The GSSG uses a point-factor approach with six evaluation factors designed specifically for supervisory positions. Under each factor there are several factor level definitions which are assigned specific point values. The appellant contests the agency’s assessment of Factors 1 and 6. We agree with the agency’s assessment of Factors 2, 3, 4A, 4B and 5. We will only address the factors contested by the appellant.

Factor 1 - Program Scope and Effect

This factor assesses the general complexity, breadth, and impact of the program areas and work directed, including its organizational and geographic coverage. It also assesses the impact of the work both within and outside the immediate organization. To credit a particular factor level, the criteria for both scope and effect must be met. The agency credited Level 1-1 for this factor. The appellant believes that Level 1-2 should be credited.

Scope - This addresses the general complexity and breadth of: (1) the program (or program segment) directed; and (2) the work directed, the products produced, or the services delivered. The geographic and organizational coverage of the program (or program segment) within the agency structure is included under this element.

At Level 1-1, the work directed is procedural, routine, and typically provides services or products to specific persons or small, local organizations.

Level 1-1 is met. The appellant supervises a subordinate staff of eight providing a variety of support services to a two-division, 440 bed Medical Center. The work directed is procedural and repetitive in nature and requires a working knowledge of administrative instructions, regulations, procedures, methods, requirements, etc., applicable to the operations of the organization. The illustration for work at this level identifies direction of clerical work below GS-5.

At Level 1-2, the program segment or work directed is administrative, technical, complex clerical, or comparable in nature. The functions, activities, or services provided have limited geographic coverage and support most of the activities comprising a typical agency field office, an area office, a small to medium military center, or comparable activities within agency program segments.

Level 1-2 is not met. The work directed by the appellant is not of the degree of complexity typical of this level. The majority of the work performed by her subordinates requires knowledge of a body of standardized regulations, policies, procedures, or operations related to mail operations, records management and reproduction services for the Medical Center. The support services provided by the appellant’s organization also do not have the geographical coverage or provide support for activities of a level comparable to those of a typical agency field office, area office, or those of a small to medium sized military center. The impact of the support provided by her unit is limited to the various organizations within the Medical Center.
**Effect** - This addresses the impact of the work, the products, and/or the programs described under "Scope" on the mission and programs of the customer(s), the activity, other activities in or out of government, the agency, other agencies, the general public, or others.

At Level 1-1, work directed facilitates the work of others in the immediate organizational unit, responds to specific requests or needs of individuals, or affects only localized functions.

Level 1-1 is met. The work directed by the appellant facilitates the work performed by the staff of the various organizations comprising the 440 bed Medical Center. The services provided by her organization affect only the operations of the center.

At Level 1-2, the services or products support and significantly affect center level, area office level, or field office operations and objectives, or comparable program segments; or provide services to a moderate, local or limited population of clients or users comparable to a major portion of a small city or rural county.

Level 1-2 is not met. The services provided by the appellant’s organization support, but do not significantly affect, the operations of the facility to the degree envisioned at this level. The primary mission of the Medical Center is to provide health care services for veterans. The services of the [organization] Section support the Medical Center’s primary mission and operations. The population of service users is not comparable to the major portion of a small city or rural county.

Level 1-1 is credited for 175 points.

**Factor 6 – Other Conditions**

This factor measures the extent to which various conditions contribute to the difficulty and complexity of carrying out supervisory duties, authorities, and responsibilities. Conditions affecting work for which the supervisor is responsible (whether performed by Federal employees, assigned military, contractors, volunteers, or others) may be considered if they increase the difficulty of carrying out assigned supervisory or managerial duties and authorities. When Level 6-1, 6-2 or 6-3 are credited for Factor 6, the GSSG requires further consideration of identified Special Situations which may increase the difficulty and responsibility of the position. If a position meets 3 or more of these situations, a single level is added to the factor level. For example, if the highest factor level that the position meets is 6-3, and the position also meets three of the Special Situations, the position would be credited with Level 6-4 for Factor 6.

The agency credited Level 6-1 and credited only Physical Dispersion for Special Situations. We agree. The appellant does not contest the Level 6-1 and Physical Dispersion determinations, but believes an additional level should be credited based on the presence of the following other Special Situations: Variety of Work, Fluctuating Workforce or Constantly Changing Deadlines, Special Staffing Situations, Changing Technology and Special Hazard and Safety Conditions.
Variety of Work

This situation is credited when more than one kind of work, each kind representing a requirement for a distinctly different additional body of knowledge on the part of the supervisor, is present in the work of the unit. A "kind of work" usually will be the equivalent of a classification series. Each "kind of work" requires substantially full qualification in distinctly separate areas, or full knowledge and understanding of rules, regulations, procedures, and subject matter of a distinctly separate area of work.

This situation is not credited. The appellant does not supervise a variety of positions at different grade levels requiring her to have a distinctly different additional knowledge. She supervises eight subordinate positions (six GS-305-4, one GS-303-4 and one GS-350-4) performing procedural work that is classified to the GS-300 family. There is no indication that the work performed is distinctly different to the extent that it requires the appellant be substantially fully qualified in or possess knowledge or understanding of the rules, regulations, procedures or subject matter of distinctly separate areas.

Fluctuating Workforce or Constantly Changing Deadlines

Fluctuating Workforce is credited when the workforce supervised by the position has large fluctuations in size (e.g., when there are significant seasonal variations in staff) and these fluctuations impose on the supervisor a substantially greater responsibility for training, adjusting assignments, or maintaining a smooth flow of work while absorbing and releasing employees.

Constantly Changing Deadlines is credited when frequent, abrupt, and unexpected changes in work assignments, goals, and deadlines require the supervisor to constantly adjust operations under the pressure of continuously changing and unpredictable conditions.

This situation is not credited. There are no indications that the organization directed by the appellant is subjected to significant fluctuations in size or frequent and unexpected changes in work assignments or deadlines. The need to change duty assignments or work schedules due to normal absences, training, vacancies or workload surges cited by the appellant do not meet the intent of this situation.

Special Staffing Situations

This situation is credited when: (1) a substantial portion of the workforce is regularly involved in special employment programs; or in similar situations which require involvement with employee representatives to resolve difficult or complex human resources management issues and problems; (2) requirements for counseling and motivational activities are regular and recurring; and (3) job assignments, work tasks, working conditions, and/or training must be tailored to fit the special circumstances.

This situation is not credited. There are no indications that the organization’s workforce consists of individuals who were employed through special programs (persons with physical or mental disabilities, etc.) and present difficult human resources issues/problems, require regular and recurring counseling, or tailored training, work assignments or conditions.
Changing Technology

This situation is credited when work processes and procedures vary constantly because of the impact of changing technology, creating a requirement for extensive training and guidance of the subordinate staff.

This situation is not credited. There are no indications that the work performed by the organization is affected by constant technological changes that require extensive training and guidance of subordinates.

Special Hazard and Safety Conditions

This situation is credited when the supervisory position is regularly made more difficult by the need to make provision for significant unsafe or hazardous conditions occurring during performance of the work of the organization.

The work is performed in a Medical Center where there is a certain degree of exposure to the hazards normal to that environment (contagious diseases, hazardous materials, etc.). There are no indications, however, of the need for precautions beyond those normally found in this type of setting.

Level 6-1 is credited for 310 points. No additional level is warranted for Special Situations.

Summary applying the GSSG

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<th>Points</th>
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<td>Organizational Setting</td>
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A total of 1320 points is in the 1105 to 1350 point range and converts to GS-6 according to the point-to-grade conversion chart in the GSSG.

Summary

Assistance program responsibilities equate to GS-6 and supervisory responsibilities equate to GS-6. Therefore, the appropriate grade for the appellant’s position is GS-6.

Decision

The appellant’s position is properly classified as GS-303-6. Selection of an appropriate title is at the agency’s discretion, with the Supervisory prefix added.