

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Division for Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability
Classification Appeals Program

San Francisco Field Services Group
120 Howard Street, Room 760
San Francisco, CA 94105-0001

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

Appellant: [Appellant's name]

Agency classification: Electronics Engineer
GS-855-11

Organization: [Appellant's organization/location]
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Department of the Interior

OPM decision: Electronics Engineer
GS-855-11

OPM decision number: C-0855-11-01

Carlos A. Torrico
Classification Appeals Officer

June 27, 2003
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[Appellant's address]

[Appellant's servicing human resources office]

Bureau of Reclamation

U.S. Department of the Interior

[Name and address of union representative]

Bureau of Reclamation

U.S. Department of the Interior

Director, Human Resources

Attention: D-4200

Reclamation Service Center

P.O. Box 25007

Denver Federal Center

Denver, Colorado 80225-0007

Director of Personnel

U.S. Department of the Interior

Mail Stop 5221

1849 C Street, NW.

Washington, DC 20240

Introduction

On February 10, 2003, the San Francisco Oversight Division, now the San Francisco Field Services Group, of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [name of appellant]. On February 26, 2003, the Division received the agency's complete administrative report concerning the appeal. The appellant's position is currently classified as Electronics Engineer, GS-855-11. However, he believes his position should be graded at the GS-12 level. The position is assigned to [appellant's organization/location], Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Department of the Interior. We have accepted and decided his appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.)

This decision is based on a thorough review of all information submitted by the appellant and his agency. In addition, an OPM representative conducted telephone interviews with the appellant, his current and previous supervisors, and the Reclamation Radio Liaison Officer (RRLO).

General issues

The appellant contends that his position description, (PD) [number], does not adequately describe his duties and responsibilities, and commented on the classification review process conducted by his agency. A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position or job by an official with the authority to assign work. A position is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by the employee. Classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the actual duties and responsibilities currently assigned by management and performed by the employee. An OPM appeal decision classifies a real operating position, and not simply the PD. This decision is based on the work currently assigned to and performed by the appellant and sets aside any previous agency decision. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM position classification standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, the classification practices used by the appellant's agency in classifying his position are not germane to the classification appeal process.

The appellant compares his position to that of the former Electronics Engineer who was a GS-855-12, and therefore believes that his position warrants that grade level. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of his position. Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding his appeal, and have considered his statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

Position information

The appellant performs a variety of professional and technical duties as a member of the [appellant's organization]. As the Regional Radio Engineer/Coordinator, he spends most of his time performing electronics engineering services. He is responsible for coordinating, providing technical service and support, and performing a liaison function between the Area Office Radio Coordinators and the RRLO in [name of city] for technical matters pertaining to radio

communications and frequency management. He also spends a small amount of time providing electronics engineering support to the information technology communications program.

The radio communications system encompasses approximately three hundred seventy-four frequency authorizations for microwave, VHF, hydro meteorological, and geosynchronous orbital environmental satellite transmitters located at sites widely dispersed throughout [names of three states]. The appellant's work requires considerable coordination with electrical engineering, computer programming and specialists in other related fields. Projects may involve all the electronic features associated with the communications equipment. In addition to engineering tasks, the appellant also performs related administrative tasks in his capacity as program manager for the regional design team including processing radio licenses, writing contract specifications, budgeting, and coordinating purchases. These administrative support duties are ancillary to his work and occupy too small a portion of his time to affect the classification of the position. Therefore, we have not evaluated them in this decision.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellant's agency has classified his position to the Electronics Engineering Series, GS-855, and titled it as Electronics Engineer. The appellant does not disagree, and we concur. The standard for the Electronics Engineering Series, GS-855, provides directly applicable evaluation criteria that we have applied to the appellant's position as discussed below.

Grade determination

The standard for the GS-855 series uses two classification factors: Nature of assignment and Level of responsibility. Our evaluation with respect to those factors follows.

Nature of assignment

This factor deals with the nature, variety, and purpose of duties performed; scope and difficulty of the assignments; knowledge required and the degree to which experienced judgment is required in evaluating alternative courses of action or diagnosing problems or failures; the extent to which the engineer must define the problem; and originality required.

GS-11 engineers apply broad knowledge of diverse engineering concepts and procedures of a functional or subject-matter area. They carry out a wide range of professional engineering studies and assignments. Agency manuals, standards, and precedents normally apply to their assignments. However, GS-11 engineers usually make significant adaptations of them for particular applications. They apply knowledge of related disciplines and normally coordinate with specialists in them. They must be aware of the ramifications of their findings and actions for related equipment or systems. Characteristically, GS-11 engineers first adequately define the problem or assess several alternatives prior to determining the course of action. The action may involve a corrective measure or recommending a system or design approach. Typical of this level is the engineer involved in performing engineering functions for older or well-established equipment when new or changed requirements are imposed, such as greater efficiency or closer tolerances involving substantial modification of existing equipment. Some engineers at the

GS-11 level evaluate applications for a variety of types of broadcast stations or communications facilities that utilize approved and rather well established equipment. Others may conduct a variety of investigations and analyses relating to site selection and systems integration, in connection with installation of systems to be installed at several facilities

GS-12 engineers apply deep and diversified knowledge to atypical or highly difficult assignments, in a subject matter or functional area, e.g., unusual problems that arise during the rework of major systems for which they have technical responsibility. Precedents for their assignments are sometimes absent, but more commonly, their relationship to the particular assignment is obscure. Conflicting issues often characterize GS-12 assignments. By comparison, GS-11 engineers apply broad knowledge of the subject matter or functional area to those assignments which can be carried out through significant and skillful adaptation of precedents and established approaches. GS-12s usually perform preliminary engineering analyses on large and complicated projects. Consequently, they must be knowledgeable of research and developmental activities and technological advances in order to incorporate them into their assignments. Their assignments are complicated by the many operations which the equipment or systems must perform and the many variables which the engineers must consider. Coordination with related groups and integration of many design changes or major equipment alterations characterize GS-12 assignments.

The appellant's position meets the GS-11 criteria. Similar to the GS-11 level he applies a broad knowledge of a subject-matter area involving electronics engineering concepts pertaining to the upgrading of the region's radio communications and frequency management systems. The current radio system is 30 years old and requires the appellant to conduct a wide range of analytical studies to determine the best methods for modernizing and converting what were separate functioning Area Office systems into a region wide system involving an overall conversion from analog to digital microwave. He is also involved in a project to convert the radio frequency system from wide band to narrow band by the end of 2005. While agency manuals and standards normally apply to this work, he has made significant adaptations to them and issued supplemental guidance (Power O&M Guide 17) to the Area Offices concerning methods for upgrading and conversion. Similar to the GS-11 level, he applies knowledge of related fields such as electrical engineering and information technology, working with contractor specialists in those fields (e.g., Motorola) to define problems, assess alternatives, analyze design approaches, and recommend system changes. Like the GS-11 level, he must be aware of the impact of his study findings on the existing equipment and systems located in three states because his projects entail region-wide equipment upgrades, the addition of new sites, and the merging of different communication paths and technologies. The appellant's duties favorably compare to the illustrative assignments at the GS-11 level in the standard where the engineer is involved with older equipment that must be upgraded to meet new or changing requirements, necessitating substantial modification of existing equipment; or where a variety of analyses are conducted relating to site selection or system integration in connection with the installation of new systems at several facilities.

The appellant's assignments do not meet the GS-12 level. Unlike that level, the appellant is not involved with atypical electronics engineering projects where precedents are absent or relationship to the assignment is obscure. While he has technical responsibility for the region's

upgrading of the radio and frequency systems, agency manuals and technical standards normally apply to the projects, even though some adaptation may be necessary to deal with unusual engineering problems. In addition, private design contractors and the RRLO in [name of city] are important resources for information concerning highly unusual technical issues. Although his assignments cover a wide geographic area, they are well established and not so complicated as to require knowledge of research and development activities, frequent coordination with related groups, or integration of many design changes.

Level of responsibility

This factor deals with the extent and depth of review given to completed work and guidance received while the work is in progress; the nature and purpose of personal contacts; the impact of findings, recommendations and advice; the authority to commit the activity or agency to a course of action; and the availability and relevance of guidelines and precedents.

GS-11 engineers receive background information and guidance from the supervisor on unusual problems or important and novel issues. GS-11 engineers receive most assignments within their subject-matter or functional area without instructions. They determine the nature of the questions and issues involved, and independently plan and carry out the investigation, analysis, and details of the work. Work products are accepted as technically accurate and complete. Their supervisors review the completed work for general adequacy, effect on other assignments, and conformance with agency policies. In dealing with contractors GS-11 engineers make commitments on matters in their assigned area which are covered by precedents, agency regulations, policies, and accepted engineering practices.

GS-12 engineers receive instructions from the supervisor on the objectives or operational requirements that the equipment or systems must meet and relative priority of their assignments, but the engineers are free to analyze problems and develop their own approaches and work plans. They receive little technical advice or guidance and technical manuals or specifications pertinent to their assignments are frequently inadequate. Supervisors review the completed work for technical soundness and for compliance with broad local or agency policy.

The appellant's level of responsibility meets the GS-11 criteria. Similar to the GS-11 level, he receives assignments without supervisory instructions within the radio communications functional area. He determines the issues involved for upgrading the system, and independently plans and carries out the analysis and details of the projects. His work is reviewed by the supervisor and particularly the RRLO for general adequacy, the impact of his recommendations on the entire regional radio communications program, and for conformance with agency guidelines, policies and procedures. In dealing with contractors, like the GS-11 level the appellant is authorized to make commitments on all matters dealing with the upgrading of the radio and frequency systems which are covered by agency regulations, policies, and guidance issued by higher organizational levels.

The position does not meet the GS-12 level. While the appellant independently plans and carries out his work, freedom to develop overall approaches and work plans is limited by technical guidance, direction and review from higher levels, i.e., [name of city] RRLO. Unlike the GS-12

level, the appellant uses technical manuals and specifications that are adequate, although he may have to adapt them to specific assignments. His completed work receives closer review than the minimal review for compliance with broad local or agency policies typical of the GS-12 level.

Summary

By application of both grading factors in the GS-855 standard, the appellant's position meets the GS-11 level. Therefore, the grade of the position is GS-11.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Electronics Engineer, GS-855-11.