

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

Atlanta Field Services Group  
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 1018  
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

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

**Appellant:** [appellant]

**Agency classification:** Office Assistant (OA)  
GS-303-7

**Organization:** [organization] Wildlife Refuge  
Region [#]  
Regional Chief, National Wildlife  
Refuge System  
Division of Refuges/RF-3  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
U. S. Department of the Interior  
[location]

**OPM decision:** Title at agency discretion with the  
parenthetical title of Office Automation  
GS-303-6

**OPM decision number:** C-0303-06-09

/s/ Marta Brito Pérez

Marta Brito Pérez  
Associate Director  
Human Capital Leadership  
and Merit System Accountability

May 18, 2005

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).

Since this decision lowers the grade of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the sixth pay period after the date of this decision, as permitted by 5 CFR 511.702. The applicable provisions of parts 351, 432, 536, and 752 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, must be followed in implementing the decision. If the appellant is entitled to grade retention, the two-year retention period begins on the date this decision is implemented. Since a position description (PD) must meet the standard of adequacy explained in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, section III.E, the appellant's PD must also be revised, as discussed in this decision. The servicing human resources office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected PD and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

**Decision sent to:**

[appellant]  
[address]  
[location]

Director  
Human Resources Office  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
[address]  
[location]

Director of Personnel  
U.S. Department of Interior  
Mail Stop 5221  
1849 C Street, NW.  
Washington, DC 20240

## **Introduction**

On July 23, 2004, the Atlanta Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant' name]. Her position is currently classified as an Office Assistant (OA), GS-303-7. The appellant believes that her position should be upgraded to Administrative Support Assistant, GS-303-8. She works in the [organization] Wildlife Refuge, Region [#], Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System, Division of Refuges/FR-3, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, [location]. We received the complete appeal administrative report from the agency on September 23, 2004.

To help decide the appeal, we conducted a telephone audit and an on-site audit of the position with the appellant and we interviewed her supervisor. We also interviewed the Region [#] Deputy Regional Chief for Wildlife Refuge Systems and the Chief of Refuge Budget and Information Management. In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed the audit findings and all information of record furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official position description (PD).

## **General issues**

In her letter of appeal, the appellant states that her current PD, number [#], is not accurate because her duties have increased and/or expanded. Likewise, her supervisor certified that the PD is inaccurate because it does not describe the duties the appellant carries out on a daily basis.

A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position by a responsible management official; i.e., a person with authority to assign work to a position. A position is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by an employee. Classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the duties assigned by management and performed by the employee. We classify a real operating position, and not simply the PD. Based on our review of the record, we find that the appellant's official PD, though generic, includes the major duties and responsibilities of her position, but has some misleading statements and discrepancies.

We view a PD as adequate for classification purposes when it is considered so by a person knowledgeable of the occupation and the classification standards and is supplemented by current information about the position's organization, functions, programs, and procedures. Our fact finding revealed that there are some misleading statements and discrepancies within the PD as it relates to the appellant's duties. For example, the budget duty statement indicates that the incumbent reviews submissions of office staff for proper format and compliance with agency budget requirements and consolidates material into an annual office budget. This implies an oversight function for budget documentation and tracking that is not present in the appellant's organizational environment since the appellant's operating level is the first level for budget entry. In contrast, the appellant gathers information from refuge staff on known budget requirements and incorporates them in budget projections. The PD also states that the position is responsible for writing PDs and crediting plans, advertising vacancies, and rating applications. However, these functions are assigned to the agency's regional office or higher organizational

level. Since PD's must meet the standard of adequacy as stated in *The Classifier's Handbook*, Chapter 3, Position Descriptions, the appellant's agency must revise her PD .

Implicit in the appellant's rationale for a higher grade is her belief that a PD for an Administrative Support Assistant, GS-303-8, recently developed and implemented for some refuge support positions within the region, is also appropriate for her position. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards and guidelines is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding her appeal.

Like OPM, the appellant's agency must classify positions based on comparison to OPM standards and guidelines. The agency also has primary responsibility for ensuring that its positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. If the appellant considers her position so similar to others that they all warrant the same classification, she may pursue the matter by writing to her human resources office. In doing so, she should specify the precise organizational location, classification, duties, and responsibilities of the positions in question. If the positions are found to be basically the same as hers, the agency must correct their classification to be consistent with this appeal decision. Otherwise, the agency should explain to her the differences between her position and the others.

The appellant also discusses the increased volume of work she performs. However, volume of work cannot be considered in determining the grade of a position (*The Classifier's Handbook*, Chapter 5).

### **Position information**

The appellant's position is the principal administrative support for the 34,000 acre [organization] Wildlife Refuge which also manages the smaller 6,290 acre [organization] Wildlife Refuge which has one employee assigned on-site. Refuge staff consists of 15 permanent employees, including the Refuge Manager and Deputy Refuge Manager. The appellant performs a variety of clerical and administrative support duties including budgeting, purchasing, record keeping, time and attendance, travel, reports, human resources, property custodial activities, and other miscellaneous tasks.

Budget support duties account for approximately 30 percent of the appellant's time. The work involves compiling information and preparing the operating budget; coding, entering, tracking, and reconciling expense data; and reporting and advising on budget status. The appellant uses the regional office's specific sub-activity and line item account allocations (which are tied to agency budget program appropriations) and rules for use, along with general guidance from the Refuge Manager or his deputy, on how funds should be spent. The budget, which annually exceeds one million dollars, includes appropriation money for approximately six to eight sub-activities each year: operations and maintenance, projects, forest management or timber sales, refuge prescribed fires, recreation fees and any special appropriations, such as for individual wildfires and storm damage from hurricanes. Expenses for each sub-activity and line item are charged to a number of activity-based costing codes, which normally remain the same from year

to year. The budget includes 2-year, 1-year, and no-year, revolving, and reimbursable funds and is complicated by changing appropriations, changing prices, and emergency expenses. Although the appellant maintains separate accounts for both refuges for internal use, expenses for the two refuges are entered into the national financial system under the same cost codes. The appellant projects the budget using budget requests, salary figures, and historical data, and expected increases and works closely with refuge specialists in projecting needs for projects. She reviews utilization of funds and funds availability and advises management on status of accounts. The appellant assigns accounting codes to expenses and changes expense codes for standard items to meet budget needs, but consults with the supervisor on major shifts and end of year priorities and expenses. She assigns charge codes, provided by the regional office, to track use of funds from other agencies, ecological services, and interest groups such as Ducks Unlimited, Wings, Native Grass, etc.

For approximately 25 percent of her time, the appellant procures refuge supplies, equipment, and services and administers the purchase, travel, and fleet card program. She uses blanket purchases arrangements, purchase orders, convenience checks, and required supply sources and has purchasing warrant authority for up to \$10,000 for credit card purchases. The appellant gathers bids and prepares purchase requests for items over her purchasing limit and enters all acquisition requests into the agency contracting system for further action by the contracting office. She determines proper established or open market sources, obtains price quotations, prepares justifications with technical information provided by refuge staff, and makes purchases or submits requests with all required information to the regional office. With the exception of credit card purchases, invoices for purchases over \$500 are sent to the regional office for signature and the Denver office for payment. Purchases other than standard items are authorized by the supervisor. The appellant sets up purchase agreements with vendors for annual services. She monitors the procurement and tracks all data in the financial system. She certifies invoices and prepares vouchers for payment. She reviews and reconciles vouchers and tracks data, including the financial portion of any Memoranda of Understanding or co-op agreements involving money or funding.

The appellant spends approximately 25 percent of her time performing administrative support duties, 10 percent on human resources support, and 10 percent on custodial officer functions. These include administering the hunt program by proof reading and ordering applications and regulations for the various hunts held at the refuges; issuing permits; and verifying, tracking, and reporting fees collected; and transmitting fees to the agency finance center. This program involves several thousand hunt applications and fee payments of approximately \$50,000 per year. The appellant rotates with others in answering the phone and assisting visitors and provides general and limited technical information, e.g., special use permits, to the public. She prepares time and attendance documentation, including identification of overtime and other special pay authorizations, for all employees and maintains payroll records. She ensures codes are properly charged and changes cost codes as needed. The appellant prepares a variety of standard reports and reconciles reports transmitted by higher agency levels. She composes routine correspondence; occasionally prepares procedures for internal administrative operations such as how to submit time and attendance reports and how to coordinate hunt activities; provides guidance to refuge staff on administrative matters and procedures; and serves as property custodial officer for property of limited value. The appellant initiates personnel action

requests and provides general human resources information and forms completion assistance to employees (benefits, thrift savings plan, leave, personnel policies and procedures, etc). She refers employees to the regional office for more complex inquiries. The appellant performs office automation duties using several systems in conjunction with her overall responsibilities. She also oversees the work of a lower graded part-time assistant when one is assigned.

The appellant's supervisor is the refuge manager, who makes assignments by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and reviews work for technical accuracy, soundness of judgment, and adherence to program requirements. The appellant works independently and may obtain assistance from staff specialists at higher organizational levels or from the supervisor for new, high cost, or unique actions.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The agency classified the appellant's position in the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, and titled it Office Assistant (Office Automation). The appellant does not disagree with the series determination.

We considered the Budget Clerical and Technician Series, GS-561, from the Job Family Standard (JFS) for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget, for this position. The GS-561 series includes positions that involve performing clerical and technician work in support of budget analysis and administration when such work requires primarily knowledge of the procedures which facilitate budgeting. While the appellant performs budget support duties for at least 30 percent of the time, she also performs a variety of other general clerical and assistance duties in carrying out the refuge's administrative functions, including human resources, purchasing, time and attendance, record keeping, property custodial activities, travel, and hunt program administration. No one series includes positions performing all of these tasks.

In addition, we considered the Secretary series, GS-318, which includes positions assisting one individual, and in some cases the subordinate staff of that individual, by performing general office work auxiliary to the work of the organization. The duties require knowledge of clerical and administrative procedures and requirements; various office skills; and the ability to apply such skills in a way that increases the effectiveness of others. The duties do not require technical or professional knowledge of a specialized subject-matter area. The paramount requirement of the appellant's position is to perform the administrative functions for the refuge rather than to increase the effectiveness of others and require a greater knowledge of the procedures, regulations and guidelines for carrying specialized administrative functions than are required by the GS-318 series.

The GS-303 series includes positions the duties of which are to perform or supervise clerical, assistant, or technician work for which no other series is appropriate. Knowledge of the procedures and techniques needed to carry out the work of the organization is required. The appellant's position has comparable duties, responsibilities, and knowledge requirements. Since no titles are prescribed for the GS-303 series, the position is titled at the agency's discretion. In addition, when positions require significant knowledge of office automation systems and a fully

qualified typist to perform word processing duties, the parenthetical title *Office Automation*, or *OA*, is added to the title of the position.

The GS-303 series does not include evaluation criteria. Therefore, we have used the grading criteria contained in the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (the Guide) to evaluate the office and clerical work performed by the appellant. The appellant's office automation duties are evaluated by application of the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide (OAGEG). To check the grade level of the position, we separately evaluated the appellant's budget duties and related procurement support duties using the JFS for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work, GS-500, even though they are an integral part of her overall office support assignment.

## **Grade determination**

### *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 through GS-7 and uses two criteria for grading purposes: *Nature of assignment*, which includes the knowledge required and complexity of the work, and *Level of responsibility*, which includes supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts.

#### *Nature of assignment*

At the GS-6 level, clerical work entails processing a wide variety of transactions for more than one type of assigned activity or functional specialization. Assignments are subject to different sets of rules, regulations, and procedures. Technical assistance work involves 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 requiring application of established policies, practices, and criteria. Typical assignments involve identifying issues, problems, or conditions and seeking alternative solutions in accordance with rules and guidelines. 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 situations that require judgment in selecting a best or appropriate solution. The work requires a practical knowledge of guidelines and precedent cases relating to a particular area and obtained through considerable work experience. It also requires skill in recognizing the dimensions of a problem and expressing ideas in writing.

The GS-6 level is met. As at this level, the appellant's position has continuing responsibility for administrative support for the refuge and applies established policies, instructions, and practices. She handles a variety of related actions such as budget, purchasing, property accountability, supply, time and attendance, travel, and the hunt program, which are subject to different sets of rules, regulations, and procedures. While situations, such as individual problems and refuge projects and wildfires and their specific sub-activity numbers, differ, the procedures and budget

codes are established and remain relatively stable. Like the GS-6 level, the appellant may have to determine the intent of or interpret available guidelines when they are not directly applicable to specific situations. The appellant's duties require comparable GS-6 level knowledge of organizational programs and operations to provide information; act as the point of contact for administrative requirements; recommend budget, purchasing, or other administrative actions to her supervisors or other refuge staff; and prepare a variety of standard reports. The appellant infrequently develops internal operating procedures and timeframes for actions, such as handling administrative procedures and fee checks for hunts. Additionally, she may receive visitors and answers the phone and correspondence providing non-technical (administrative aspects of the program relating to her responsibilities and refuge activities) and limited technical information (special-use permits), etc.

Like the GS-6 level, actions are complicated due to the alternative actions available and situations involved. For example, budgeting requires projecting annual expenses, adjusting accounts to match funding, identifying sub-activity codes, line item, and budget codes for refuge expenses, and advising management on budget status and resolving discrepancies for her budget accounts. The appellant determines or recommends, for high cost or sensitive items, the most advantageous cost codes for budget purposes to the supervisor when programs or activities overlap. As a second example, in procuring equipment, supplies, and services, the appellant determines options and may establish blanket purchase agreements with local vendors, use a credit card, or order items through General Services Administration or the regional contracting office. She enters data for, adjusts distributions, monitors, reconciles discrepancies, and reports all procurement actions and expenses using the Budget Tracking System (BTS), the Federal Finance System (FFS), and, often, the Interior Department Electronic Acquisition System – Procurement Desktop (IDEAS-PD).

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. Assignments involve a wide variety of problems or situations common to the segment of the program or function and consist of a series of related actions or decisions prior to final completion. Decisions 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 and taking or recommending actions that are consistent with the objectives and requirements of the program or functions.

The illustration for work at the GS-7 level identifies an employee in a single function field office who performs staff support work in budgeting, purchasing, supply management, personnel administration, data processing and files management. The employee collects data for the office operating budget which includes a wide range of program functions in several appropriations and accounts subject to different regulations and procedures, reviews submissions of office staff assistants for proper format and compliance with agency budget requirements, and consolidates material into an annual office budget; sets up controls to monitor expenses during the year; and recommends budget adjustments including restructuring budget allocations or work plans to deal with changing situations such as varying costs for equipment parts, or services, and changes in the availability of funds. The employee purchases supplies, equipment, and services, and processes and tracks purchase documents. He or she also completes requests for personnel



actions and writes position descriptions; conducts local recruitment and holds new employee orientation sessions; and maintains and revises an office filing system. The employee collects and retrieves program information from technical specialists and enters and retrieves information from a variety of systems. The work requires a broad understanding and detailed procedural knowledge of budget, purchasing, personnel, and information processing functions of the field office to recognize the dimensions of the problems involved and ability to take or recommend action based upon application or interpretation of established guidelines and practical knowledge of the operations, regulations, principles, and peculiarities of the assigned program, function, or activity.

The GS-7 level is not met. The nature of the appellant's assignments does not require comparable specialized knowledge of a program or functional specialty or involve the wide variety of problems encountered. The appellant provides clerical and administrative support for a small staff of 15 permanent positions providing refuge program services and must know the rules and procedures for administrative functions as they pertain to the particular refuge programs. The appellant works in a relatively narrow budgetary area involving standard transactions and approximately 6 to 8 sub-activities, which limits the breadth and depth of knowledge required and the complexity of problems encountered. She performs duties similar to those described by the work example under the GS-7 level, but the appealed position lacks the depth and complexity in assignments as would be found in a larger, more diverse office structure as illustrated. Typically, GS-7 employees are more concerned with the broader aspects of program objectives, peculiarities, and interrelationships rather than a defined range of assignments subject to established and recurring guidelines and regulations as demonstrated by the appellant's position. While the appellant is concerned with the details, procedures, and guidelines for administrative transactions, it is the appellant's supervisor, his deputy, and the staff at the regional office who are responsible for the refuge budget and procurement and who are concerned with the broader aspects.

This factor is credited at GS-6.

#### *Level of Responsibility*

At the GS-6 level, the employee performing clerical work is recognized as an authority on processing transactions or completing assignments within a complicated framework of established procedures and guidelines, often when there are no clear precedents, and is regarded as an expert source of information on regulatory requirements for the various transactions. The employee adapts and applies numerous and varied guidelines. An employee performing technical or assistance work receives assistance with interpretation of policy from the supervisor. 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. Comparable to the GS-6 level, the appellant's work is reviewed for overall technical soundness and conformance to agency policies, legal, or system requirements. Completed work entered into the system is also reviewed by Regional Office staff by snapshot review or other methods. The methods are seldom reviewed in detail. The appellant makes decisions based on factual information, e.g., the needs or circumstances involved in a repair or purchase requests; the records supporting a transaction; public use requests; pertinent regulations and precedent, complaints from the public, etc. As at the GS-6 level, the appellant contacts others, e.g., vendors, personnel from special interest organizations or other agencies, and regional office staff, in order to identify problems, needs or issues, or to coordinate work efforts or resolve problems.

At the GS-7 level, the employee independently completes assignments in accordance with accepted practices, resolving most conflicts that arise. The primary difference between the GS-6 and GS-7 levels is in the difficulty and boundaries of the assignments. Similar duties may be performed at both the GS-6 and GS-7 level. However, the evaluative judgment and analytical ability required for assignments are a determining factor. At the GS-7 level, the guidelines are more complex because the employee deals with a variety of problems and situations, and the guides tend to be general and apply less to specific actions. The employee at the GS-7 level must use significant judgment to interpret guidance and improvise procedures to accommodate unusual or one-of-a-kind situations. The employee is a resource for an organization, typically a large one which would generate a wide variety of problems and situations, for explaining regulatory guidance, and resolving operational problems and disagreements affecting assigned areas. The contacts and purpose of contacts are usually the same as at the next lower level. However, the GS-7 employee 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. Unlike that level, the appellant's work is reviewed for overall technical soundness in addition to conformance to policy. It is also subject to review at higher levels and by the supervisor for results and adherence to requirements. The appellant's work involves recurring processes, e.g., transaction processing, documenting, and resolution of discrepancies and problems and administrative responsibility for hunts and non-technical correspondence, and does not vary from month to month as anticipated at the GS-7 level. The appellant also does not normally receive assignments in terms of objectives, priorities, and deadlines. Guidelines cover most aspects of assignments and while some interpretation is required for applying them to situations, they do not normally require adaptation or improvising of procedures to accommodate unusual or one-of-a-kind situations. Although the appellant is the main point-of-contact for employees and vendors and contractors and provides refuge assistance, the main purpose of contacts is to exchange factual information regarding the organization and its functions rather than to provide authoritative explanations of requirements or resolve operational problems involving a complex administrative assignment typical of the GS-7 grade level. Authoritative explanations for various transactions are provided by refuge management staff or agency staff at the regional or higher organizational levels.

This factor is credited at GS-6.

*Evaluation summary using The Guide*

Since we have assessed both factors, *Nature of assignment* and *Level of responsibility*, with the GS-6 grade level by application of the Guide, we have determined that the appellant's general clerical and assistant duties are properly evaluated at the GS-6 grade level.

***Evaluation using the JFS for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work, GS-0500***

The GS-0500 JFS for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format under which factor levels and accompanying point values are assigned for each of the nine factors. The total is converted to a grade level by use of the grade conversion table provided in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor levels. For a position to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor level description, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect that meets a higher level.

*Factor 1, Knowledge required*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the worker must understand in order to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, principles, concepts and the nature and extent of skills needed to apply them.) The agency credited Level 1-4.

At Level 1-3, the work requires knowledge of a body of standardized regulations, requirements, procedures, and operations associated with clerical and technical duties related to the assigned accounting, budget, or financial management support function. This kind of knowledge includes knowledge of the various steps and procedures required to perform a full range of accounting, budget, or financial management support duties related to recurring or standardized transactions such as verifying the availability of funds by account and obligating necessary dollar amounts. It includes knowledge of various accounting, budget, or other financial processing procedures to support transactions that involve the use of different forms and the application of different procedures, such as maintaining the time and attendance reports of both General Schedule and Federal Wage System employees with premium pay and shift work. Level 1-3 knowledge also includes knowledge of one or more automated data bases associated with a specific accounting, budget, or other financial management function sufficient to input a range of standard information or adjustments, understand recurring error reports and take corrective action, and generate a variety of standard reports. It includes knowledge of the structure and content of budget and related documents (e.g., invoices, reports, travel orders, payroll forms, etc.) and frequently used and clearly stated regulations and rules to investigate and resolve routine or recurring discrepancies, check documents for adequacy, determine if a transaction is permitted, or perform comparable actions that are covered by established procedures.

An illustration of Level 1-3 work includes employee review of purchase orders, contracts, travel orders, and other claims against obligated funds. They enter data into accounting systems, correct invalid/incorrect entries, and prepare trial balances to check the status of accounts. They verify contract payment provisions. They review files for accuracy and compatibility with the various accounting systems used and receive, extract, record, and balance data for assigned accounts in automated systems. They monitor accounts and sub-account balances, review postings to ensure accuracy, and recommend corrective action. A second illustration includes employees who review vouchers, purchase requests, work orders, contract invoices, etc., to verify budgetary account codes and dollar amounts and ensure funds are available. They check closed accounts for unobligated balances. They adjust account balances to reflect the effect of allotments, transfers, obligations, expenditures, and other actions which change the amount of funds available in accounts.

Level 1-3 is met. The appellant performs a full range of budget support activities involving allocated funds normally for six to eight assigned sub-activities and their line items. This requires a general understanding of the budget process and the agency's financial management system and knowledge of a body of standardized procedures, requirements, operations, and documents. It also requires knowledge of the rules and procedures for each of the assigned sub-activities. The appellant's work requires that she be knowledgeable of the refuge's sub-activities, line items, and activity budget codes. The rules and procedures for use of funds are provided by the regional financial management office. Most budget activity for the refuge is in the maintenance and operations accounts, which are two-year funds, but the appellant's accounts also include no-year, one-year, and reimbursable accounts. The appellant prepares projections for annual budget proposals, assigns standard management codes for various operating costs, fixed expenses, and salaries, as well as special projects, unplanned wildfires and weather-related events, and reimbursable agreements. As at Level 1-3, the appellant records and tracks all funds obligated through contracts, procurements, travel, payroll, etc., and reviews financial office reports of transactions. She maintains an internal database and uses it to identify budget inconsistencies with the agency financial system reports and reconcile differences. She advises the refuge manager or his deputy on the status of accounts and performs or recommends adjustments to reconcile and balance accounts or redirect expenses to more appropriate management codes.

At Level 1-4, work requires an in-depth or broad knowledge of a body of accounting, budget, or other financial management regulations, practices, procedures, and policies related to specific financial management functions. This includes knowledge of various interrelated steps, conditions and procedures required to assemble, review, and maintain complex accounting, budget, or other fiscal transactions (e.g., reconciling accounts in accounting systems involving subdivision of accounts, frequent and varied adjustments to accounts, or extensive balancing and reconciling of detailed summary accounts); or to resolve problems in balancing accounts, adjusting discrepancies, developing control records, verifying the accuracy of budgetary data, adjusting dollar amounts of accounts by line item and object class, and preparing reports on the status of funds. This level also requires knowledge of various accounting, budget, or other financial regulations, laws, and requirements such as pay and leave rules and administrative rules associated with recording and tracking budgetary transactions, tax laws, entitlement rules, documentation requirements, schedules, and deductions, to ensure compliance and recommend

action. It requires knowledge of extensive and diverse accounting, budget, or other financial regulations sufficient to resolve nonstandard transactions and complaints and provide advice as needed. Work at Level 1-4 also includes conducting extensive and exhaustive searches to investigate problems or errors requiring reconciling and reconstructing incomplete information, reconciling errors in automated systems requiring an understanding of nonstandard procedures, and performing other budget work requiring authoritative procedural knowledge.

As seen in illustrations for Level 1-4, employees maintain extensive records of industrially funded (revolving fund) activities, by cost center on hours worked, standard charges, job orders, transfers, estimates, and reimbursements (payments) to the fund. Tasks performed include examination and verification of cost data, and detection of over- or under-obligations and net expenditures of funds on processing customer orders. Work is complicated by program changes, changes in cost factors, and variations in sources of funding and methods of payment.

Level 1-4 is not met. The appellant's budget-related work does not require an in-depth or broad knowledge of budget regulations, practices, procedures, and policies relating to overall budget functions as anticipated at Level 1-4, but rather requires a solid knowledge of standard procedures, requirements, and operations associated with duties related to her support functions and the refuge's assigned sub-activities. The codes used for tracking expenses and activities are standard and well defined and do not change frequently. The appellant's position does not require knowledge to regularly resolve complex problems in balancing accounts, adjusting discrepancies in the accounting system, verifying the accuracy of budgetary data, and ensuring compliance with budget regulations, laws, and requirements. Her organization is the lowest level for budget and financial transaction input and is not responsible for reviewing the actions of other offices for accuracy and compliance or for resolving problems in the accounting system. The appellant reconciles problems using the refuge's records in the agency budget tracking system and does not make corrections directly to the agency accounting system. Her budget entries and financial transactions are subject to review for accuracy and compliance at the regional office. Also, the appellant's position does not regularly require the extensive and exhaustive searches, typical of Level 1-4, for problems or errors due to incomplete information and requiring knowledge of a variety of accounting and budget functional areas and their relationships to other functions. The appellant advises the refuge manager on budget procedural actions, but is not responsible for authoritative procedural knowledge. She contacts financial management staff at the regional office for procedural guidance.

Level 1-3 is credited for 350 points.

### *Factor 2, Supervisory controls*

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of complete work. The agency credited Level 2-3.

At Level 2-3, the highest level described in the standard, the supervisor assigns work with standing instructions on objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance for unusually involved situations. The employee independently processes the most difficult procedural and technical tasks or actions and handles problems and deviations in accordance with instructions,

policies, previous training, or accepted practices. Completed work is reviewed for results and conformity to established requirements rather than the methods used to complete the assignments.

Level 2-3 is met, but not exceeded. The appellant's supervisor is available to provide general guidance on the techniques and procedures for unusual transactions that are without precedents and that are not clearly covered by existing guidelines and instructions. The appellant is responsible for independently planning and carrying out all of the procedural and technical processing of budgetary and related transactions, such as purchases, pay and leave, training, and travel, for the refuge in accordance with available guidelines and precedents. For example, the appellant adjusts the current operating budget as shifts in and between projects and requirements are needed throughout the fiscal year. She makes small funds adjustments independently and consults with the supervisor on the need for more significant changes. She advises management on trends in spending or account status and recommends changes. The appellant's work is reviewed for technical accuracy, accomplishment of objectives, and adherence to policies.

Level 2-3 is met for 275 points.

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

This factor covers the nature of the guidelines used and the judgment needed to apply them. The agency credited Level 3-3.

At Level 3-2, a number of established procedures and specific guidelines in the form of agency policies and procedures, Federal codes and manuals, specific related regulations, precedent actions, and processing manuals are readily available for doing the work and are clearly applicable to most transactions. The employee must use judgment to identify and select the most appropriate procedures, available alternatives, or precedent action to use and must use judgment and initiative to handle aspects of the work not completely covered. The employee refers situations in which the existing guidelines cannot be applied or significant deviations must be made to the supervisor.

Level 3-2 is met. The appellant uses agency budget, procurement, and payroll manuals; Federal procurement regulations; various computer and computer systems manuals and guidelines; policy memoranda; annual budget directives; agreements with other organizations; and operating instructions and procedures. The appellant uses judgment in selecting appropriate guides for each type of action affecting the refuge budget. Guidelines are available for most transactions. The appellant uses judgment to handle situations not completely covered by available guidelines and occasionally develops standard operating procedures for the refuge.

At Level 3-3, the highest level described, guidelines are the same as those described at Level 3-2 but, because of the complicating nature of the assignments, they lack the specificity, frequent change, or are not completely applicable to the work requirements, circumstances, or problems. This may require the employee to rely on experienced judgment, rather than guides, to fill in gaps, identify sources of information, and make working assumptions about what transpired. The employee uses judgment to interpret guidelines, adapt procedures, decide approaches, and

resolve specific problems, e.g., how to charge expenses to meet agency needs and refuge budget needs.

Level 3-3 is not met. The guidelines for the appellant's position are more specific and directly applicable than those described at Level 3-3. Though the work involves a number of budgetary transactions, guides are available and typically cover most of them. The appellant contacts regional office staff for assistance with significant situations lacking guidelines.

Level 3-2 is credited for 125 points.

#### *Factor 4, Complexity*

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks or processes in the work performed, the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done, and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work. The agency credited Level 4-3.

At Level 4-3, the work involves performing various accounting, budget, or financial management support related duties or assignments that use different and unrelated processes, procedures, or methods. Transactions are not completely standardized, deadlines are continually changing, functions assigned are relatively broad and varied, or transactions are interrelated with other systems and require extensive coordination with other personnel. The employee determines what needs to be done based on the nature of the problem or issue to be solved. The employee considers different sources of information and reviews regulations and manuals.

Level 4-3 is met. The appellant identifies, compiles, organizes, verifies, and maintains a variety of budgetary data relating to refuge accounts. The work involves various sub-activities, each of which has different budgetary rules. While most of the appellant's budget work involves the operations and maintenance accounts, the budget and expenditure control activities are complicated by annual and special projects, controlled and uncontrolled fires, funding changes during the execution phase, particularly for wildfire funding, and other unforeseen situations. As at Level 4-3, actions are not completely standardized. The appellant considers all pertinent budget information in deciding or recommending how to code expenses and charge accounts when several possible options are available, e.g., timber sales costs versus general operating funds. Like Level 4-3, transactions are entered into different systems and the appellant must be able to reconcile accounts referencing the various systems.

At Level 4-4, the work involves greater variety and complexity of transactions or systems than is involved at the next lower level. It requires application of many different and unrelated processes and methods relating to examination or analysis of complex and unusual transactions requiring substantial research and a thorough understanding of a wide variety of transactions and accounts. Typically the work at Level 4-4 is characterized by an employee who analyzes and tests a variety of established techniques and methods for use by others. Decisions regarding what needs to be done include assessing unusual circumstances or conditions, interpreting considerable data to identify problems; and dealing with incomplete, unreliable, or conflicting data. The work requires an employee to make decisions, devise solutions, and take actions based on program knowledge.

Level 4-4 is not met. The appellant's work does not have the greater variety and complexity of transactions or unusual problems described at this level. She is responsible for six to eight accounts and related transactions rather than the wide variety of accounts and transactions described at Level 4-4. Unlike Level 4-4, the appellant does not routinely deal with incomplete, unreliable, or conflicting data. While she makes independent decisions and uses judgment, her actions are based more on established procedures and guidelines rather than on program knowledge and do not require that she test a variety of established techniques and methods for use by others or that she typically assess unusual circumstances.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

*Factor 5, Scope and effect*

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside of the organization. The agency credited Level 5-3.

At Level 5-2, the purpose of the work is to apply specific rules or procedures to perform a full range of related accounting, budget, or financial management clerical or technical tasks, duties, and assignments that are covered by well-defined and precise program procedures and regulations. The employee completes standard clerical transactions in the functional area by reviewing documents for missing information, searching records and files; verifying and maintaining records of transactions; and answering routine procedural questions. The work affects the adequacy and efficiency of the accounting and budget or financial management function. The work may also affect the reliability of the organization's financial support services provided to users, customers, etc.

Level 5-2 is met. The appellant is responsible for compiling and consolidating annual budget estimates for the refuge, monitoring spending in budget accounts, reconciling discrepancies, and preparing budget reports. The work affects the accuracy, timely submission, and adequacy of the refuge's budget submission, the proper execution of the budget, and the adequacy of information for management use.

At Level 5-3, the purpose of the work is to apply conventional practices to treat a variety of problems in accounting, budget, or financial management transactions where issues might result from insufficient information about the transaction, a need for more efficient processing procedures, or requests to expedite urgently needed cases. The work affects the quality, quantity, and accuracy of the organization's records, program operations, and service to clients. For example, the effect of the work ensures the integrity of the overall general ledger, its basic design and the adequacy of the overall operation of the accounting system and various operating programs; the amount and timely availability of money to pay for services; the economic well-being of employees being serviced; or compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

Level 5-3 is not met. The appellant's position is located at the lowest operating level of the organization and does not involve activities that ensure the integrity of the overall general ledger, its basic design, or the adequacy of the overall operation of the accounting system.



Level 5-2 is credited for 75 points.

*Factor 6, Personal contacts, and Factor 7, Purpose of contacts*

*Personal contacts*

At Level 2, contacts are with employees within the same agency, in other agencies, or with members of the general public in a moderately structured setting.

At Level 3, contacts are with members of the general public which includes personnel making inquiries on behalf of constituents, e.g., public action groups, attorneys and accountants, Congressional members. The contacts are not recurring or routine and are typically in an unstructured setting.

Level 2 is met. The appellant's contacts are generally with employees within the refuge and higher organizational levels. Contacts are also with vendors and the general public to provide or request information. The appellant's contacts, unlike Level 3, are not typically in an unstructured setting and do not normally include individuals from outside the agency who represent the budget and program interests of other Federal agencies, contractors, or Congressional staffs.

*Purpose of contacts*

At Level b, the employee makes contacts to plan and coordinate actions and may contact others to obtain cooperation in submitting paperwork or other information, request correction of errors in documentation, or assist in locating information.

At Level c, the purpose of the contacts is to persuade individuals who are skeptical, uncooperative or threatening, to provide information, take corrective action, and accept findings in order to gain compliance with established laws and regulations. Although the appellant often persuades local reluctant vendors to provide their business information to the government for identification as an authorized vendor, this is a voluntary request and is not comparable to use of persuasive skills for gaining required compliance to established laws and regulations.

Level b is met. As at Level b, the appellant contacts agency personnel and vendors to obtain or clarify information, coordinate the timely submission of information for budget transactions and data entry, and to resolve problems, and to provide advice and assistance to the general public on hunt fees.

Level 2-b is credited for both factors for 75 points.

*Factor 8, Physical demands*

Level 8-1 (5 points), the only level described in the standard, is met. As at this level, the work is primarily sedentary and requires no special physical demands.

*Factor 9, Work environment*

Level 9-1 (5 points), the only level described in the standard, is met. At this level, work is typically in an office setting involving everyday risks or discomforts. The appellant works in a comparable office setting in performing budget duties.

*Summary*

| <i>Factor</i>                                 | <i>Level</i> | <i>Points</i> |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Knowledge required by the position         | 1-3          | 350           |
| 2. Supervisory controls                       | 2-3          | 275           |
| 3. Guidelines                                 | 3-2          | 125           |
| 4. Complexity                                 | 4-3          | 150           |
| 5. Scope and effect                           | 5-2          | 75            |
| 6. & 7. Personal contacts/Purpose of contacts | 2-b          | 75            |
| 8. Physical demands                           | 8-1          | 5             |
| 9. Work environment                           | 9-1          | <u>5</u>      |
| <i>Total</i>                                  |              | 1060          |

A total of 1060 points falls within the GS-5 point range (855-1100) according to the grade conversion table in the standard.

***Evaluation using the OAGEG***

The appellant's OA duties are evaluated using the OAGEG. Her OA duties however, cannot be graded higher than her clerical and assistance duties since they do not routinely involve a wide variety of nonstandard automation problems or assignments requiring knowledge of *advanced* functions of more than one type of software, e.g., developing methods for automating complex administrative reports, including the detailed functional procedures needed to automate the data. The appellant uses a variety of standard software functions, resulting in evaluation of her OA work at a lower grade than the GS-303 work. Therefore, her OA work does not have an impact on the final grade level determination of her position.

*Summary*

The general clerical and assistance duties are evaluated at the GS-6 level. The budget duties are evaluated at the GS-5 level. The office automation duties do not affect the overall worth of the position. Based on application of the mixed grade position criteria as stated in *The Classifier's Handbook*, Chapter 5, the final grade of the appellant's position is determined to be GS-6.

**Decision**

The position is properly classified as (Title to be determined by the agency), GS-303-6. The parenthetical title *Office Automation* or *OA* must be affixed to the selected title.