

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Public Affairs Assistant (OA)
GS-1001-5

Organization: [organization]
[organization]
Marine Corps Air Station
U.S. Marine Corps
Department of the Navy
[location]

OPM decision: (Title at agency discretion with the
parenthetical title of Office Automation)
GS-1001-5

OPM decision number: C-1001-05-01

/s/ Marta Brito Pérez

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

March 22, 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).

Decision sent to:

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Introduction

On September 30, 2004, the Atlanta Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant]. Her position is currently classified as a Public Affairs Assistant (OA), GS-1001-5. The appellant requests that her position be reclassified in the Public Affairs Series as a Community Relations Assistant, GS-1035-7. She works in the [organization], [organization], Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS), U.S. Marine Corps, Department of the Navy, [location]. We received the complete administrative report from the agency on October 23, 2004. We have accepted and decided her appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

The appellant appealed to her agency and, on June 23, 2004, the agency issued a decision sustaining the position's existing classification. She subsequently appealed to OPM.

General issues

The appellant makes various statements about her agency's evaluation of her position. Because our decision sets aside all previous agency decisions, the appellant's concerns regarding her agency's classification review process are not germane to this decision. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make an 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 and the position description (PD) of record.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to a standard PD, number [#]. Both the appellant and her supervisor certified the accuracy of the PD.

The appellant works in the [organization] Office serving as the point of contact and coordinator for community relations activities and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) for the MCAS. She spends 50 percent of her time processing correspondence requests from the public for visits and tours of the MCAS. This includes planning, arranging, and coordinating the tours for local, national, and international visitors. She coordinates and updates special function activities and events such as the Rotary Career Day, the Veteran's Day Parade, and the Battle Color Ceremony. This includes attending the meetings to determine what type of assistance is needed from the MCAS for these events. The appellant coordinates and implements internal functions to ensure that lodging, transportation, and dining arrangements are appropriate for visitors. She finalizes itineraries for tours and ensures that speakers are available when needed. The appellant also receives and processes general complaints from the public; e.g., noise issues, damage claims, etc. She gathers information such as date, type of disturbance, and time of occurrence, and refers

complaints to the appropriate organization to resolve. She reviews the responses to ensure that the complaints are answered and responses are provided timely to the initiators.

The appellant serves as the FOIA coordinator for 40 percent of her time. In this capacity, she coordinates and processes all requests relating to FOIA, except those dealing with complex/litigation issues, prior to signature by the PA Officer. She receives FOIA requests from individuals who need copies of accident reports and other similar requests of a recurring nature. The appellant reviews the request and provides the requester a standard letter to complete to gather required information for the report to be released. She forwards the request to the appropriate command office to research. Once the research is complete, she reviews it for confidential information before releasing the report. She drafts responses to inform the requestor of the status and the standard procedures for release of information. She ensures proper processing of the case and assembly of the case files in accordance with directives. Requests that are not releasable are forwarded to the Command's Joint Law Center for denial authority. She tracks and monitors all FOIA requests received and provides an annual report.

The remaining 10 percent of the appellant's time is spent on a wide variety of administrative duties, such as composing letters, memoranda, and reports. She screens advertisements, reviews daily newspapers to find articles that pertain to the base, and forwards them to headquarters. She greets and directs visitors, receives calls, and sorts and distributes incoming mail. The work supports the [organization] Office functions and programs and involves the use of automated software that allows the appellant to edit or reformat various reports, update or revise existing databases, and occasionally create databases and forms.

The appellant independently plans and carries out duties, keeping the supervisor informed of sensitive or controversial activities. Problems are resolved according to established guidelines, previous instructions, or accepted practices. The appellant's work is reviewed for technical soundness, appropriateness, and conformance with program objectives.

The PD contains more information about the appellant's duties and responsibilities and how they are performed. It is incorporated by reference into this decision.

Series and title determination

The agency classified the appellant's position in the GS-1001 series with the title determination at the agency's discretion. The appellant believes her position should be classified in the Public Affairs Series, GS-1035, and titled Public Affairs Assistant.

The GS-1035 series is a two-grade interval series. Classification guidance in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards (Introduction)* and the *Classifier's Handbook* describes distinctions between positions properly classified in two-grade interval administrative series and positions classified in one-grade interval support series. Administrative positions (two-grade interval) are involved in work primarily requiring a high order of analytical ability. This ability is combined with a comprehensive knowledge of (1) the functions, processes, theories, and principles of management and (2) the methods used to gather, analyze, and evaluate information. These positions are typically involved with analyzing, evaluating, modifying, and developing the

basic programs, policies, and procedures that facilitate the work of Federal agencies and programs. In contrast, support positions (one-grade interval) perform work that follows established methods, procedures, and guidelines and may require a high degree of technical skill, care, and precision. The work can be performed based on a practical knowledge of the purpose, operation, procedures, techniques, and guidelines of the specific program area or functional assignments.

The GS-1035 series specifically includes positions responsible for administering, supervising, or performing work involved in establishing and maintaining mutual communication between Federal agencies and the general public and various other pertinent publics including internal or external, foreign or domestic audiences. For example, positions in this series advise agency management on policy formulation and the potential public reaction to proposed policy, and identify and carry out the public communication requirements inherent in disseminating policy decisions. This work involves identifying communication needs and developing informational materials that inform appropriate publics of the agency's policies, programs, services and activities; and planning, executing, and evaluating the effectiveness of information and communication programs in furthering agency goals.

We find that the appellant's position does not involve the two-grade interval work characteristic of the GS-1035 series. The appellant provides administrative support functions and follows established methods and procedures. Her work requires a practical knowledge of the [organization] Office operating program and FOIA procedures. It does not require a high order of analytical ability or a comprehensive knowledge of management principles and theories or analytical methods and techniques to affect the agency's basic programs.

The appellant performs a combination of support duties primarily involving information and public relations work and FOIA processing work. The *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* indicates that positions performing a mix of duties and responsibilities should be classified to the most appropriate series following consideration of the paramount qualifications required, sources of recruitment and lines of progression, the reason for establishing the position, and the background knowledge required. The information and public relations support work constitutes the primary purpose of the appellant's position. The FOIA support work is ancillary to the paramount requirement of the appellant's position and, as such, is not controlling for series determination.

No specific series includes information and public relations support work, but the appellant's position is characteristic of work in the GS-1000 Information and Arts Group of series and meets the general criteria for inclusion in the General Arts and Information Series, GS-1001. This series covers all positions the duties of which are to administer, supervise, or perform: (1) any combination of work characteristic of two or more series in this group where: (a) no one type of work is series controlling; (b) the paramount qualification requirements are not characteristic of another series in the group; and (c) the combination of work is not specifically provided for in another series, or (2) other work typical of this group for which no other series has been established. The GS-1001 series does not designate specific titles. Therefore, the agency may designate an appropriate title by following the guidance in the *Introduction*. Because the

position requires a qualified typist and knowledge of office automation equipment and software, the parenthetical designator, *Office Automation* or *OA*, is added to the title.

Standard determination

There is no published OPM position classification standard with grade-level criteria for the GS-1001 series. The *Introduction* states that if there are no specific published grade-level criteria, then the standard selected as the basis for comparison should be for a kind of work as similar as possible to the work evaluated with respect to (1) the kind of work processes, functions, or subject-matter of work performed; (2) the qualifications required to do the work; (3) the level of difficulty and responsibility; and (4) the combination of classification factors which have the greatest influence on grade level.

The Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (Guide) provides general criteria for use in determining the grade level of non-supervisory clerical and assistance work. Assistance work is defined as technical work performed to support the administration or operation of the programs of an organizational unit. This work requires a working knowledge of the work processes and procedures of an administrative field and the mission and operational requirements of the unit. The appellant's community relations, FOIA, technical, and administrative duties are consistent with that defined as assistance work in that the work is performed in support of the needs of the MCAS. Therefore, the Guide is used to determine the grade level of the appellant's position. The Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide (OAGEG) is used to evaluate the position's office automation duties.

Evaluation using the Guide

Nature of assignment

At the GS-5 level, the employee performs work encompassing a range of standard and nonstandard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of non-recurring problems. Work includes a variety of assignments involving different and unrelated steps, processes, or methods. The employee must identify and understand the issues involved in each assignment and determine what steps and procedures are necessary and the order of their performance. Completion of each transaction typically involves selecting a course of action from a number of possibilities. The work requires extensive knowledge of an organization's rules, procedures, operations, or business practices to perform the more complex, interrelated, or one-of-a-kind processing procedures.

The GS-5 level is met. Comparable to work performed at this level, the appellant must have knowledge of office administration processes and procedures and the mission and operational requirements of the unit. She ensures established procedures for community relations functions are followed. Based on the nature of requests from public groups for tours, speakers, etc., she selects an appropriate course of action and performs any coordination required due to unscheduled changes in activities or availability of speakers, and similar situations. For example, using established policies, procedures, and precedents, she plans, schedules, and coordinates all official visits to the air station; organizes and ensures that tours are appropriate

for the audience; and serves as the focal contact between the base and the public regarding requests for base representation at community events. She applies a practical knowledge of base programs and administrative policies to coordinate any community relations activities or resolve complaints from the general public. Comparable to the GS-5 level, the appellant must understand the issues involved and the appropriateness of the various requests based on regulatory guidance. She uses judgment in determining which of a number of established agency administrative procedures are most suitable in coordinating the variety of activities or resolving the recurring and non-recurring operating problems involved in her work. Also, the appellant must have an understanding and knowledge of headquarters orders concerning FOIA regulations, guidelines, and procedures in order to determine the nature of the request and the steps and procedures to take in accordance with established guidelines. She reviews and processes non-complex FOIA requests, e.g., requests for accident reports, and response documents, and enters and extracts information from the program control database for workload reports. The FOIA work requires repetitive tasks and control of information that typically include following step-by-step instructions to perform standard operational assignments and resolving recurring problems. This type of processing is consistent with GS-5 grade level work.

At the GS-6 level, work requires 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 not met. The work performed by the appellant does not require the considerable evaluative judgment typical of the GS-6 level. The appellant's routine activities, including both community relations and information work and FOIA processing, involve processes and procedures that are recurring and require that the appellant understand the issues involved with the transaction to ensure appropriateness of information and coordination. The work does not require, as at the GS-6 level, that she interpret the intent of rules, regulations, and procedures for the purposes of seeking alternative solutions to issues. Rather, the appellant's work requires use of judgment in selecting and adapting the appropriate guidelines for specific situations and standard operating procedures, practices, and precedents are available and are generally applicable to assignments. Unlike the difficult and complicated transactions identified at the GS-6 level, the appellant processes less difficult FOIA transactions using established policy and standard procedures which identify criteria for releasing information. The more

difficult cases and those which involve denial of requests are referred to the command's Joint Law Center.

This factor is properly evaluated at the GS-5 level.

Level of responsibility

At the GS-5 level, the supervisor assigns work by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance on assignments that do not have clear precedents. The employee works in accordance with accepted practices and completed work is evaluated for technical soundness, appropriateness, and effectiveness in meeting goals. Extensive guides in the form of instructions, manuals, regulations, and precedents apply to the work. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require the employee to use judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines for application and adapting them according to circumstances of the specific case or transaction. Often, the employee must determine which of several alternative guidelines to use. If existing guidelines cannot be applied, the employee refers the matter to the supervisor. Contacts are with a variety of persons within and outside the agency for the purpose of receiving or providing information relating to the work or for the purpose of resolving operating problems in connection with recurring responsibilities.

The GS-5 level is met. The supervisor assigns work in terms of objectives, priorities, and deadlines. The appellant independently plans and carries out successive steps according to the specific requirements of each task. Like the GS-5 level, completed work is evaluated in terms of accuracy and accomplishment of work objectives; e.g., the PA Officer reviews and signs the FOIA requests. The appellant manages the day-to-day activities of her assignments based on established policies and procedures. Judgment is used in selecting the appropriate guidelines based on the work assignments. As at the GS-5 level, the appellant has contacts with lawyers, businesses, military personnel, and the general public to exchange information, such as plans for base activities and programs, and to resolve problems associated with the day-to-day operations of the MCAS, such as gathering information needed to respond to noise control complaints and processing tour and FOIA requests.

At the GS-6 level, the supervisor reviews completed work for conformance with policy and requirements. The employee 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. This recognition typically extends beyond the immediate office or work unit to the overall organization or, in some cases, outside the organization. The employee is regarded as an expert source of information on regulatory requirements for the various transactions, and is frequently called upon to provide accurate information rapidly on short notice. Guidelines for the work are numerous and varied, making it difficult for the employee to choose the most appropriate instruction and decide how the various transactions are to be completed. Guidelines often do not apply directly, requiring the employee to make adaptations to cover new and unusual work situations. This may involve deviating from established procedures to process transactions which cannot be completed through regular channels or involve actions where guidelines are conflicting or unusable.

The GS-6 level is not met. Although the appellant works independently, she receives more supervision than is anticipated at the GS-6 level in that her work is evaluated in terms of accuracy and accomplishment of work objectives, and the supervisor provides guidance for issues without clear precedents and sensitive issues. The appellant is the point of contact for her assigned functions, but her day-to-day assignments do not have a complicated framework of established procedures and guidelines comparable to the GS-6 level. Guidelines are available and generally cover most aspects of the work the appellant performs. They are specific enough that, unlike the GS-6 level, significant judgment and interpretation are not required. For example, the appellant explains FOIA requirements, obtains required information for standard requests, forwards the requests to Provost Marshall Office for research, and ensures all processing procedures are followed. In addition she drafts letters, and performs a variety of technical and administrative tasks, such as receives and sorts mail, establishes procedures for and maintains internal office files, identifies office requirements for communication, transportation, and computer needs, etc., following established guidance or previous requirements. Instances requiring deviation from established procedures, common at the GS-6 level, are infrequent, and are referred to the appellant's supervisor for authoritative resolution.

This factor is properly evaluated at the GS-5 level.

Since both factors are credited at GS-5, the overall evaluation of the position using the Guide is GS-5.

Evaluation using the OAGEG

The appellant's OA duties are evaluated using the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide which is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Since the appellant's- OA work does not impact the final grade level work of the position, a summary of factor level determinations follows.

Summary

| <i>Factor</i> | <i>Level</i> | <i>Points</i> |
|--|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Knowledge required by the position | 1-3 | 350 |
| 2. Supervisory controls | 2-2 | 125 |
| 3. Guidelines | 3-2 | 125 |
| 4. Complexity | 4-2 | 75 |
| 5. Scope and effect | 5-1 | 25 |
| 6. and 7. Personal contacts and Purpose of contacts | 1a | 30 |
| 8. Physical demands | 8-1 | 5 |
| 9. Work environment | 9-1 | <u>5</u> |
| <i>Total</i> | | 740 |

The total of 740 points falls within the GS-4 range (655-850) on the grade conversion table provided in the standard.

Summary

The appellant's information and public relations work is properly evaluated at the GS-5 level and her OA duties are properly evaluated at the GS-4 level.

Decision

Based on mixed grade principles, the appellant's position is properly classified as GS-1001-5. Selection of an appropriate title is at the agency's discretion. The parenthetical title *Office Automation*, or *OA*, must be added to the position title.