
Human Resources Specialist (Employee Benefits)

Career Path Guide



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Introduction

This guide contains a detailed career path for an individual working in the Employee Benefits specialty area. Career paths, and the information associated with them, are extremely useful in planning a career. In essence, they represent a road map that shows: (1) how people typically advance through a career, (2) competencies that will support you at each stage of your career, and (3) suggested activities, such as developmental activities and formal training, that strengthen competencies.

This career path was developed by subject matter experts working in the Human Resources Management (HRM) Series (GS-0201) at agencies across the Federal Government. As such, the information contained in this career path reflects expert recommendations regarding the developmental experiences that prepare individuals at each career stage for the next level. While the grade at which individuals enter the HR occupation and the full performance level of each position varies greatly across the Federal Government, for purposes of this guide, we have defined Entry-Level as GS-5/7/9, Full Performance as GS-11/12, Expert as GS-13/14/15, and Managerial as GS-15/SES.

There are several important points that you should keep in mind as you review this guide.

- While the career paths described are recommended by experts, these are not the only ways to succeed. There are many avenues to success as a human resources specialist. Regardless of the specific path that your career follows, you should constantly strive to strengthen the competencies that are relevant to your career goals.
- The developmental experiences described are not the only ones that contribute to career success. While these experiences were specifically identified by job experts as being important, there are many other experiences that will also help you to gain the competencies needed to be successful.

Understanding the Career Path Diagrams

The career path diagrams outline typical avenues for moving among and across jobs in ways that facilitate growth and career advancement. Within this guide, there are two types of career path diagrams. The first diagram, shown after this section, is a general overview of your specialty area and describes the career as a whole. Arrows represent typical movement between career stages or specialty areas. An additional set of detailed diagrams shows movement that typically occurs within each career stage (e.g., Entry-Level, Full Performance, and Expert/Team Leader/Supervisor/Managerial). For both diagrams, solid arrows depict the most common career moves, while dotted arrows show less common, yet equally feasible career choices.

Understanding Success Factors

Success factors are typically broad in scope and can be viewed as “pieces of advice” from senior members who have reflected on their experience in the HR field and provided statements on how to maximize performance and career advancement. You will notice that many of the success factors are not tied to any particular specialty area or career stage. After reading through the success factors, you should seek clarification from your supervisor on how best to implement some of the suggestions.

Understanding the Competency Information

For each of the points along the career path (i.e., Entry Level), the guide identifies both general and technical competencies. A competency is the combination of knowledge, skill, and/or ability one needs to successfully perform a job function. General competencies cut across occupations, while technical competencies are specific to an occupation and/or specialty area. This guide provides definitions of the technical competencies along with illustrative work behaviors. Mastering the activities listed under each of the technical competency sections may increase your likelihood of success, within both your current and future positions.

For both general and technical competencies, a desired proficiency level is listed for each competency. The numeric proficiency scale used for the competencies in this guide is shown below:

Proficiency Level	General Competencies	Technical Competencies
5 = Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in exceptionally difficult situations. • Serves as a key resource and advises others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in exceptionally difficult situations. • Serves as a key resource and advises others. • Demonstrates comprehensive, expert understanding of concepts and processes.
4 = Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in considerably difficult situations. • Generally requires little or no guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in considerably difficult situations. • Generally requires little or no guidance. • Demonstrates broad understanding of concepts and processes.
3 = Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in difficult situations. • Requires occasional guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in difficult situations. • Requires occasional guidance. • Demonstrates understanding of concepts and processes.
2 = Basic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in somewhat difficult situations. • Requires frequent guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in somewhat difficult situations. • Requires frequent guidance. • Demonstrates familiarity with concepts and processes.

1 = Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in the simplest situations. • Requires close and extensive guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies the competency in the simplest situations. • Requires close and extensive guidance. • Demonstrates awareness of concepts and processes.
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Understanding the Training Areas

Training areas are subjects for study that strengthen either general or technical competencies. By seeking training in these subject areas, you can maximize success within the current role and prepare for advancement to the next. Some of these training areas will be linked to internal training courses offered by your agency, while others may be linked to external training provided by Governmental or non-Governmental sources. You should discuss these training areas and/or courses with your manager to determine your options for completing formal coursework in your field. Keep in mind, however, that much of your training may occur through on-the-job experiences like those listed under “Critical Developmental Activities.”

Understanding the Critical Developmental Activities

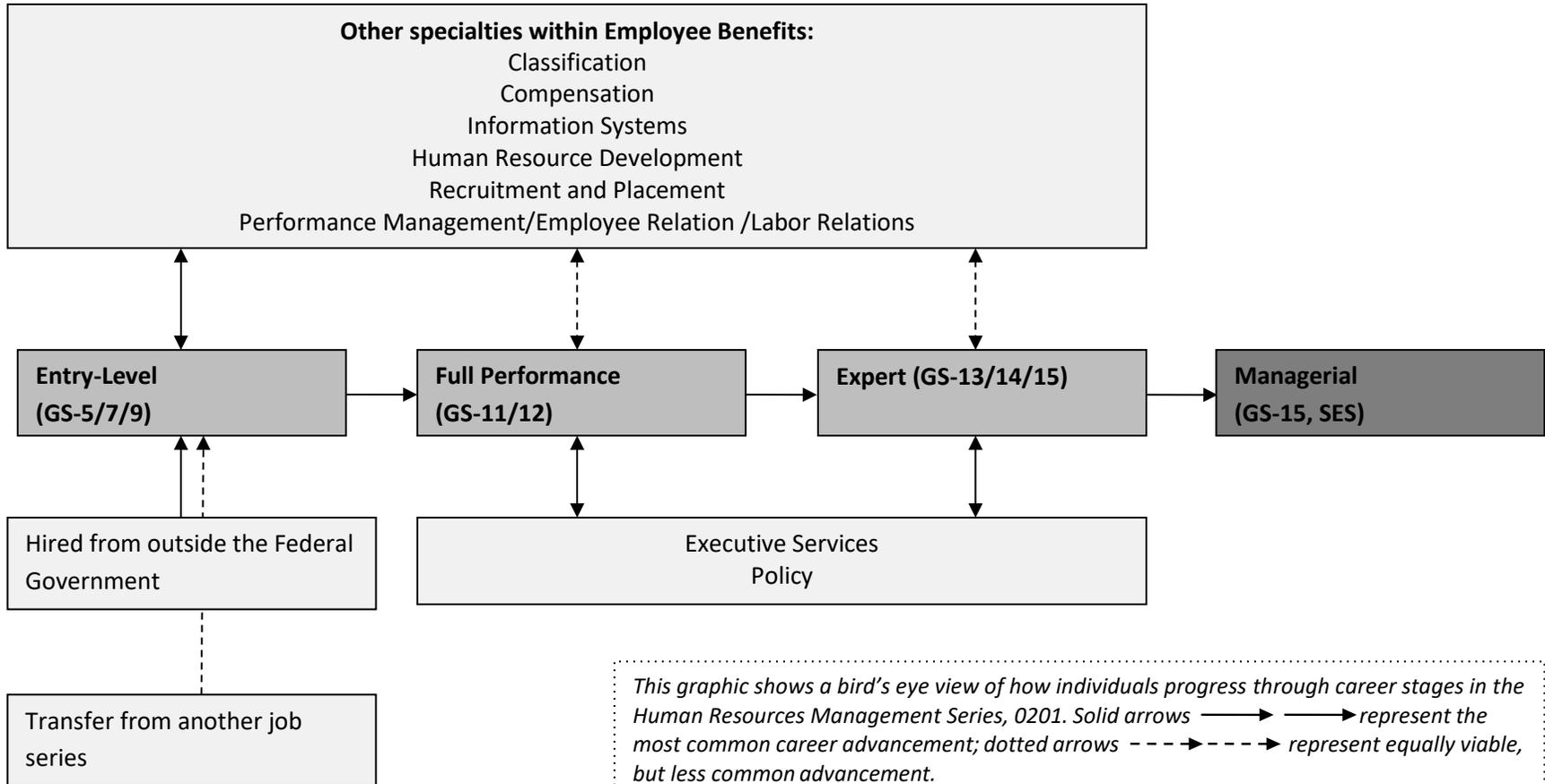
Critical developmental activities are experiences employees can seek as they move through the career paths. Each of these experiences is associated with a specific career stage and provides the opportunity to strengthen both general and technical competencies. Within each career stage, the developmental activity may be the same but will vary in complexity depending on the grade level.

The experiences listed in this document are recommended, but not required. Before you engage in a particular developmental experience, you should discuss the experience with your manager. Remember that workload considerations may affect the ability of your supervisor to provide you with some of the developmental assignments suggested in this document. For this reason it is a good idea to seek out opportunities for learning that may not involve formal assignments. When you and your supervisor have agreed on a developmental experience, discuss what you should gain from the experience.

Qualifications Requirements

Please note that this guide is for development purposes only and does not address position requirements or your eligibility for a particular job. For information about Governmentwide qualifications requirements, please refer to www.opm.gov/qualifications/Standards/IOs/g0200/0201.htm. Additionally, there may be position-specific requirements, including specialized experience. Your supervisor can provide more information on these additional requirements.

Human Resources Specialist (Employee Benefits) Career Path Overview



This graphic shows a bird's eye view of how individuals progress through career stages in the Human Resources Management Series, 0201. Solid arrows → represent the most common career advancement; dotted arrows - - - → represent equally viable, but less common advancement.

As this diagram shows, it is fairly common for individuals to transfer into or out of a specialized Employee Benefits position at the Entry-Level stage and into one of the specialty areas listed in the top box. This becomes less common at the Full Performance and Expert stages. At the Full Performance and Expert stages, it is more common for individuals to transfer into the specialty areas listed in the box directly underneath these stages (e.g., Executive Services or Policy).

Success Factors

Success factors provide general advice and guidance regarding your human resources management career. These statements are not tied to any specific position, grade, qualification requirement, or developmental experience.

Career Movement

- Obtain expertise in staffing and classification as this knowledge is foundational; it is also important for success at higher levels of HR.
- Become fully proficient in more than one technical specialty area if you wish to enter positions beyond full performance.
- Develop breadth of experience by working in offices of differing sizes or locations – but gain depth of experience at each position before moving.
- Before specializing in policy work, gain a solid foundation in operations.

Learning the HR Field

- Strive to understand the foundation of the entire HR system and how it ties together, such as:
 - Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (e.g., legal authorities for issues of concern to Federal employees, applicants for Federal jobs, preference eligibles); Title 5, Merit System Principles (Information about the nine merit system principles that are required of Federal personnel management); Title 5, United States Code (e.g., regulatory authorities for addressing issues of concern to Federal employees, labor unions, compliance monitors, applicants for Federal jobs, preference eligibles)
 - Recent developments in the HR area (e.g., hiring reform, Governmentwide changes, legislative impacts)
- Pay attention to HR-related news within the Federal Government and trends externally (e.g., related to recruitment).

Skills to Develop throughout Your Career

- Learn how to clearly define a problem and probe at the root causes.
- Learn how to use technology to your advantage.
- Continually develop your listening and communication skills.
- Learn how to effectively communicate and navigate the virtual world, including the use of social media.
- Learn how to serve as a business partner and advisor. For example:
 - Develop effective consulting skills.
 - Learn the process of data collection and analysis.
 - Learn how to produce well-written and effective reports that communicate useful information.
 - Seek opportunities to prove your value to customers.

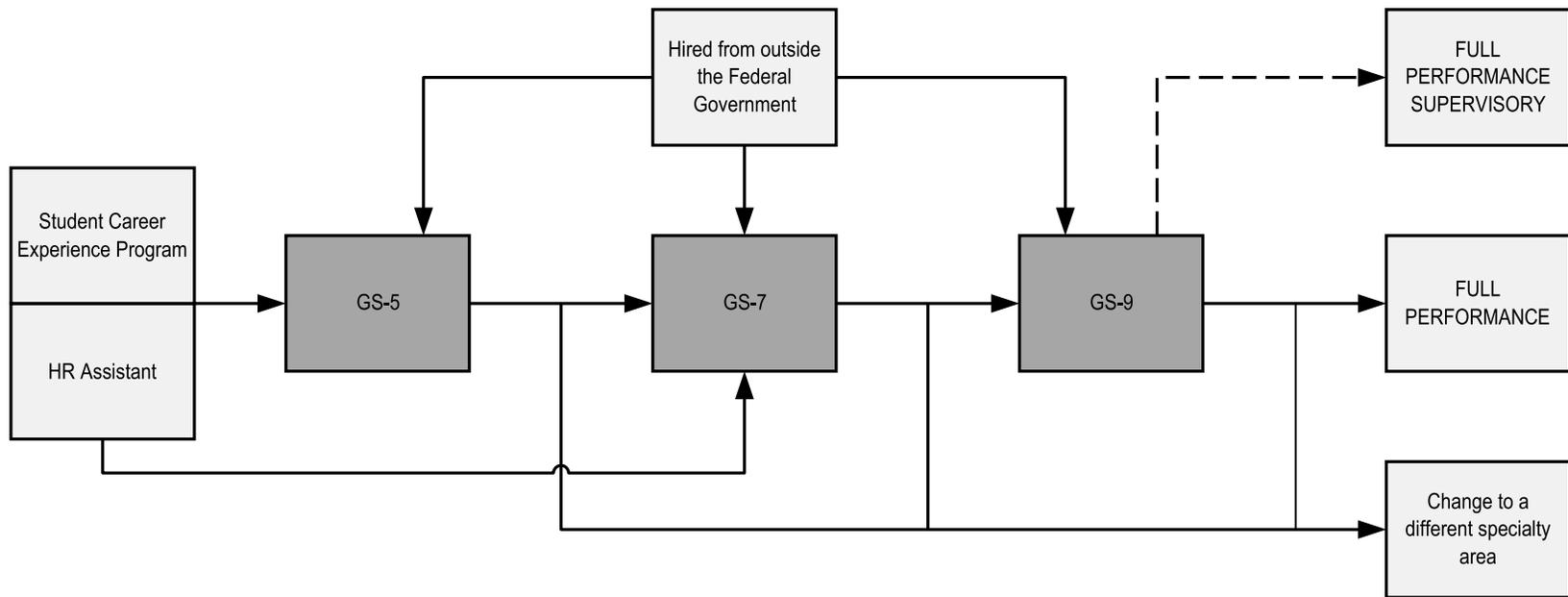
Ways to Stand Out

- Show a willingness to do independent research when solving problems.
- Adopt a product-focused perspective and learn how to deliver results.
- Seek out a mentor and consider becoming one when you reach a higher level.
- Maintain a high level of attention to detail. Do accurate and thorough research.
- Make a commitment to understand your agency's organizational structure, mission, and culture.

Working with Your Customers Effectively

- Attend customer staff meetings and listen for opportunities to show your value.
- Be resilient and patient when working in the HR field. Avoid taking things personally when solutions are not adopted; many ideas are rejected due to factors beyond your control.
- Learn how to be ethical and flexible at the same time. Find ways to get to “yes” legally and/or present options that meet management needs.
- Find ways to relate to your customers and better understand them. Use their terminology and translate what you are doing into their language. When you have gathered data, take the time to interpret the data in ways they can understand.

Entry-Level Career Stage Human Resources Specialist (Employee Benefits)



LEGEND

- ▶ Represents the most common career advancement
- - - - -▶ Represents equally viable, but less common career advancement

Human Resources Specialist (Employee Benefits)

Entry-Level GS-5/7/9

General Competencies	Proficiency Level		
	GS-5	GS-7	GS-9
Attention to Detail: Is thorough when performing work and conscientious about attending to detail.	2	3	3
Client Engagement/Change Management: Knowledge of the impact of change on people, processes, procedures, leadership, and organizational culture; knowledge of change management principles, strategies, and techniques required for effectively planning, implementing, and evaluating change in the organization.	1	2	2
Creative Thinking: Uses imagination to develop new insights into situations and applies innovative solutions to problems; designs new methods where established methods and procedures are inapplicable or are unavailable.	2	2	2
Customer Service: Works with clients and customers (that is, any individuals who use or receive the services or products that your work unit produces, including the general public, individuals who work in the agency, other agencies, or organizations outside the Government) to assess their needs, provide information or assistance, resolve their problems, or satisfy their expectations; knows about available products and services; is committed to providing quality products and services.	3	3	3
Decision Making: Makes sound, well-informed, and objective decisions; perceives the impact and implications of decisions; commits to action, even in uncertain situations, to accomplish organizational goals; causes change.	2	2	3
Flexibility: Is open to change and new information; adapts behavior or work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles; effectively deals with ambiguity.	2	2	3
Influencing/Negotiating: Persuades others to accept recommendations, cooperate, or change their behavior; works with others towards an agreement; negotiates to find mutually acceptable solutions.	2	2	2
Information Management: Identifies a need for and knows where or how to gather information; organizes and maintains information or information management systems.	2	2	3
Integrity/Honesty: Contributes to maintaining the integrity of the organization; displays high standards of ethical conduct and understands the impact of violating these standards on an organization, self, and others; is trustworthy.	3	4	4
Interpersonal Skills: Shows understanding, friendliness, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern, and politeness to others; develops and maintains effective relationships with others; may include effectively dealing with individuals who are difficult, hostile, or distressed; relates well to people from varied backgrounds and different situations; is sensitive to cultural diversity, race, gender, disabilities, and other individual differences.	3	3	3

Legal, Government and Jurisprudence: Knowledge of laws, legal codes, court procedures, precedents, legal practices and documents, Government regulations, executive orders, agency rules, Government organization and functions, and the democratic political process.	1	2	2
Oral Communication: Expresses information (for example, ideas or facts) to individuals or groups effectively, taking into account the audience and nature of the information (for example, technical, sensitive, controversial); makes clear and convincing oral presentations; listens to others, attends to nonverbal cues, and responds appropriately.	2	2	3
Organizational Awareness: Knows the organization's mission and functions, and how its social, political, and technological systems work and operates effectively within them; this includes the programs, policies, procedures, rules, and regulations of the organization.	1	2	2
Planning and Evaluating: Organizes work, sets priorities, and determines resource requirements; determines short- or long-term goals and strategies to achieve them; coordinates with other organizations or parts of the organization to accomplish goals; monitors progress and evaluates outcomes.	2	2	2
Problem Solving: Identifies problems; determines accuracy and relevance of information; uses sound judgment to generate and evaluate alternatives, and to make recommendations.	2	2	2
Project Management: Knowledge of the principles, methods, or tools for developing, scheduling, coordinating, and managing projects and resources, including monitoring and inspecting costs, work, and contractor performance.	1	2	2
Reading: Understands and interprets written material, including technical material, rules, regulations, instructions, reports, charts, graphs, or tables; applies what is learned from written material to specific situations.	2	3	3
Reasoning: Identifies rules, principles, or relationships that explain facts, data, or other information; analyzes information and makes correct inferences or draws accurate conclusions.	2	2	3
Self-Management: Sets well-defined and realistic personal goals; displays a high level of initiative, effort, and commitment towards completing assignments in a timely manner; works with minimal supervision; is motivated to achieve; demonstrates responsible behavior.	2	2	3
Stress Tolerance: Deals calmly and effectively with high stress situations (for example, tight deadlines, hostile individuals, emergency situations, dangerous situations).	2	2	3
Teamwork: Encourages and facilitates cooperation, pride, trust, and group identity; fosters commitment and team spirit; works with others to achieve goals.	2	2	3
Technical Competence: Uses knowledge that is acquired through formal training or extensive on-the-job experience to perform one's job; works with, understands, and evaluates technical information related to the job; advises others on technical issues.	2	2	3
Workforce Planning: Knowledge of HR concepts, principles, and practices related to determining workload projections and current and future competency gaps to align human capital with organizational goals.	2	2	2

Writing: Recognizes or uses correct English grammar, punctuation, and spelling; communicates information (for example, facts, ideas, or messages) in a succinct and organized manner; produces written information, which may include technical material that is appropriate for the intended audience.	2	2	3
Technical Competencies			
Employee Benefits: Knowledge of HR concepts, principles, and practices related to retirement, insurance, injury compensation, and other employee benefits programs.	1	1	2

Typical Duties

Works with Senior Human Resources Specialists to:	GS-5	GS-7	GS-9
Direct employees to appropriate sources of information about benefits and/or work-life programs.	✓	✓	N/A
Resolve simple problems in the administration of a benefits program.	✓	✓	N/A
Assist new employees with completing various benefits forms.	✓	✓	N/A
Review worker's compensation claims to determine if additional documentation is required.	✓	✓	N/A
Assist with planning informational events related to work-life balance.	✓	✓	N/A
Interpret, apply, and explain retirement and insurance regulations to employees (e.g., retirement eligibility and computations, benefit programs and insurance eligibility, and qualifying life event changes).	N/A	N/A	✓
Work through Contracting Officer to contract for services related to work-life balance programs (e.g., day care, gym memberships, health and wellness programs, and health screenings).	N/A	N/A	✓
Prepare benefits forms and ensures that they are appropriately processed.	N/A	N/A	✓
Compute employee annuity and survivor benefit estimates.	N/A	N/A	✓
Identify and utilize the appropriate resources (e.g., OPM's website, specific manuals) to locate policies and procedures for standard benefits.	N/A	N/A	✓

Training Areas

Federal Benefits Programs (i.e., CSRS/FERS retirement, Thrift Savings Plan, health, life, vision, dental, and long-term care insurance, Flexible Spending Account Program)

Injury Compensation

Federal Work-Life Balance Programs

Contracting Officer Technical Representative

(COTR) Agency Policies and Procedures

Critical Developmental Activities

To Strengthen General Competencies

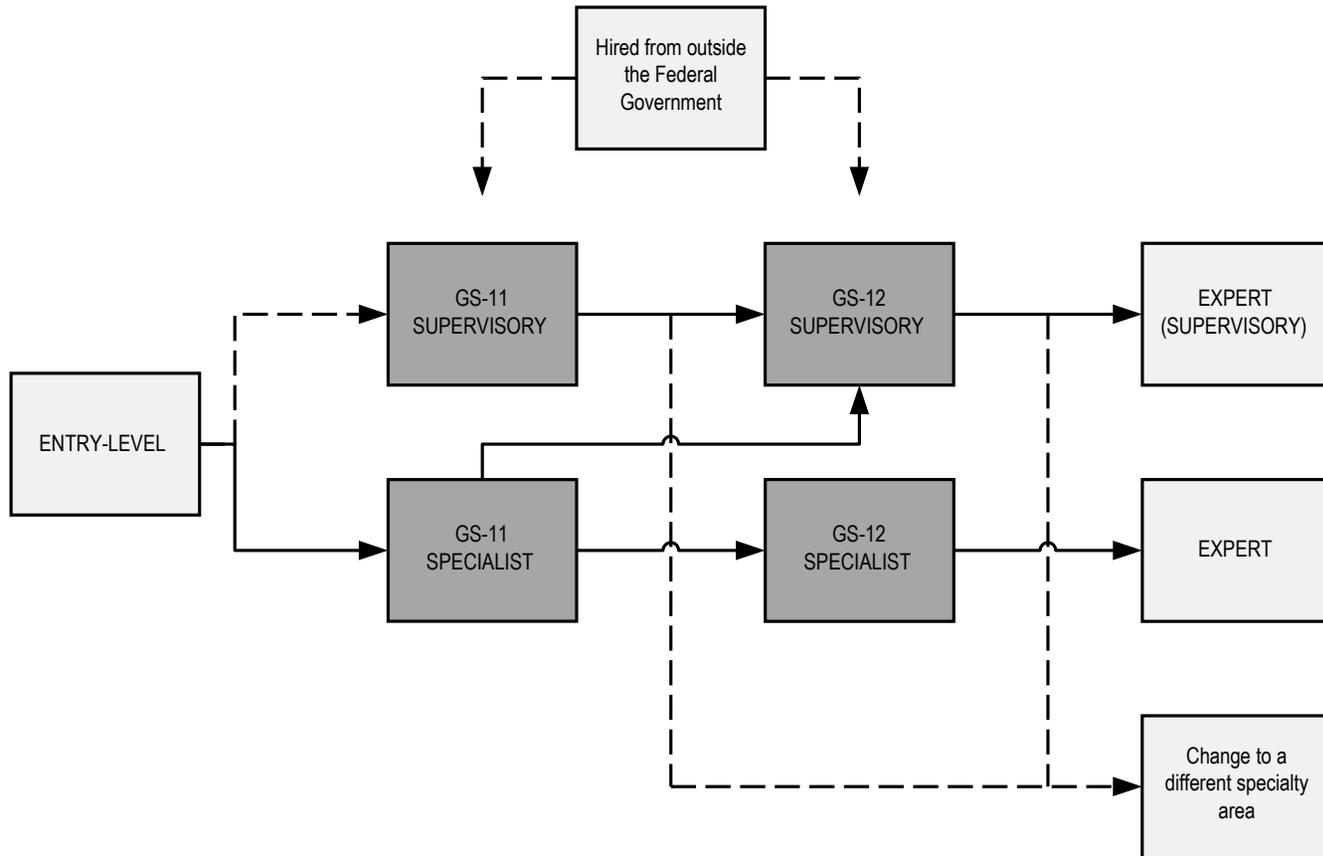
- Actively participate on a team.
- Volunteer to participate in a high-visibility project.
- Learn about the agency where you work.
- Learn new technologies (e.g., through self-study, seminars).
- Study technical writing as it applies to your work role.
- Attend technical conferences, meetings, or seminars.
- Read technical publications to keep up-to-date on new development in your field (e.g., books, professional newsletters, trade journals).
- Conduct briefings and seminars.
- Build a network of peers through which you can exchange ideas and discuss issues relevant to technical advances in your field.
- Learn from others on the job (e.g., obtain on-the-job training, ask others for guidance).
- Find a mentor for technical and/or career guidance.
- Study lessons learned from reviews of failed and successful projects.
- Gain an understanding of basic position management and classification.
- Gain an understanding of job analysis.
- Gain a basic understanding of the agency budgeting process.

To Strengthen Technical Competencies

- Learn about federal benefits (e.g., health, life, and retirement) and the eligibility requirements for each.
- Contribute to the process of contracting work-life balance programs.
- Familiarize yourself with the resources for answering employee benefits questions (e.g., FEHB and FEGLI handbooks, Benefits Administration Letters, CSRS and FERS Handbook, FSAFEDS and FLTCIP websites).
- Counsel employees who have basic insurance and retirement questions.
- Assist other specialists in planning and conducting the Open Season.
- Assist employees with benefits enrollment and applications.
- Assist other specialists with reviewing and submitting retirement applications.

Human Resources Specialist (Employee Benefits)

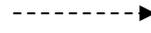
Full Performance Career Stage



LEGEND



Represents the most common career advancement



Represents equally viable, but less common career advancement

Human Resources Specialist (Employee Benefits)

Full Performance, GS-11/12

General Competencies	Proficiency Level	
	GS-11	GS-12
Attention to Detail: Is thorough when performing work and conscientious about attending to detail.	4	4
Client Engagement/Change Management: Knowledge of the impact of change on people, processes, procedures, leadership, and organizational culture; knowledge of change management principles, strategies, and techniques required for effectively planning, implementing, and evaluating change in the organization.	2	3
Creative Thinking: Uses imagination to develop new insights into situations and applies innovative solutions to problems; designs new methods where established methods and procedures are inapplicable or are unavailable.	3	3
Customer Service: Works with clients and customers (that is, any individuals who use or receive the services or products that your work unit produces, including the general public, individuals who work in the agency, other agencies, or organizations outside the Government) to assess their needs, provide information or assistance, resolve their problems, or satisfy their expectations; knows about available products and services; is committed to providing quality products and services.	4	4
Decision Making: Makes sound, well-informed, and objective decisions; perceives the impact and implications of decisions; commits to action, even in uncertain situations, to accomplish organizational goals; causes change.	3	3
Flexibility: Is open to change and new information; adapts behavior or work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles; effectively deals with ambiguity.	3	4
Influencing/Negotiating: Persuades others to accept recommendations, cooperate, or change their behavior; works with others towards an agreement; negotiates to find mutually acceptable solutions.	3	3
Information Management: Identifies a need for and knows where or how to gather information; organizes and maintains information or information management systems.	3	3
Integrity/Honesty: Contributes to maintaining the integrity of the organization; displays high standards of ethical conduct and understands the impact of violating these standards on an organization, self, and others; is trustworthy.	4	4
Interpersonal Skills: Shows understanding, friendliness, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern, and politeness to others; develops and maintains effective relationships with others; may include effectively dealing with individuals who are difficult, hostile, or distressed; relates well to people from varied backgrounds and different situations; is sensitive to cultural diversity, race, gender, disabilities, and other individual differences.	4	4

Legal, Government and Jurisprudence: Knowledge of laws, legal codes, court procedures, precedents, legal practices and documents, Government regulations, executive orders, agency rules, Government organization and functions, and the democratic political process.	3	3
Oral Communication: Expresses information (for example, ideas or facts) to individuals or groups effectively, taking into account the audience and nature of the information (for example, technical, sensitive, controversial); makes clear and convincing oral presentations; listens to others, attends to nonverbal cues, and responds appropriately.	3	3
Organizational Awareness: Knows the organization's mission and functions, and how its social, political, and technological systems work and operates effectively within them; this includes the programs, policies, procedures, rules, and regulations of the organization.	3	3
Planning and Evaluating: Organizes work, sets priorities, and determines resource requirements; determines short- or long-term goals and strategies to achieve them; coordinates with other organizations or parts of the organization to accomplish goals; monitors progress and evaluates outcomes.	3	3
Problem Solving: Identifies problems; determines accuracy and relevance of information; uses sound judgment to generate and evaluate alternatives, and to make recommendations.	3	3
Project Management: Knowledge of the principles, methods, or tools for developing, scheduling, coordinating, and managing projects and resources, including monitoring and inspecting costs, work, and contractor performance.	2	3
Reading: Understands and interprets written material, including technical material, rules, regulations, instructions, reports, charts, graphs, or tables; applies what is learned from written material to specific situations.	3	4
Reasoning: Identifies rules, principles, or relationships that explain facts, data, or other information; analyzes information and makes correct inferences or draws accurate conclusions.	3	3
Self-Management: Sets well-defined and realistic personal goals; displays a high level of initiative, effort, and commitment towards completing assignments in a timely manner; works with minimal supervision; is motivated to achieve; demonstrates responsible behavior.	3	3
Stress Tolerance: Deals calmly and effectively with high stress situations (for example, tight deadlines, hostile individuals, emergency situations, dangerous situations).	3	4
Teamwork: Encourages and facilitates cooperation, pride, trust, and group identity; fosters commitment and team spirit; works with others to achieve goals.	3	3
Technical Competence: Uses knowledge that is acquired through formal training or extensive on-the-job experience to perform one's job; works with, understands, and evaluates technical information related to the job; advises others on technical issues.	3	3
Workforce Planning: Knowledge of HR concepts, principles, and practices related to determining workload projections and current and future competency gaps to align human capital with organizational goals.	2	3
Writing: Recognizes or uses correct English grammar, punctuation, and spelling; communicates information (for example, facts, ideas, or messages) in a succinct and organized manner; produces written information, which may include technical material that is appropriate for the intended audience.	3	3

Technical Competencies

Employee Benefits: Knowledge of HR concepts, principles, and practices related to retirement, insurance, injury compensation, and other employee benefits programs.	3	3
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Supervisory Competencies

HR Specialists at the Full Performance level may either be specialists or supervisors. Supervisory competencies are determined by the hiring agency. OPM developed guidance for agencies to help them determine requirements for supervisory positions including supervisory competencies. For more information on OPM's Supervisory Qualification Guide, click on www.opm.gov/qualifications/standards/Specialty-Stds/GS-SUPV.asp.

Typical Duties

<i>Specialist or Supervisory Positions</i>	GS-11	GS-12
Prepares informational materials for employees on benefits programs	✓	✓
Prepares informational materials for employees on work-life balance initiatives.	✓	✓
Counsels employees, managers, and beneficiaries on a variety of standard and non-standard benefits and options (e.g., long-term care insurance benefits, retirement options, eligibility requirements, health and life insurance, and Thrift Savings Plan issues).	✓	✓
Determines if additional documentation is required to establish entitlement for a disability annuity before sending to OPM.	✓	✓
Prepares sensitive correspondence on complex, delicate, or highly contested case matters and retirement coverage determinations.	✓	✓
Coordinates work-life program activities.	✓	✓
<i>Supervisory Positions Only</i>		
Plans and schedules ongoing work on a quarterly or annual basis.	✓	✓
Recommends adjustments to staffing levels or work procedures to accommodate resource decisions made at higher levels.	✓	✓
Oversees the development of technical data, estimates, statistics, suggestions, and other information useful to higher-level managers in determining goals and objectives to emphasize.	✓	✓
Conducts a wide range of activities related to staff work, such as: assigning work, tracking progress, and approving the final work product.	✓	✓
Evaluates subordinate work performance and counsels subordinates on both work and administrative matters.	✓	✓
Identifies developmental and training needs of employees.	✓	✓
Resolves complaints and effects minor disciplinary measures when necessary.	✓	✓
Prepares reports and communications for senior management/supervisors.	✓	✓

Training Areas

Federal Benefits Programs (i.e., CSRS/FERS retirement, Thrift Savings Plan, health, life, vision, dental, and long-term care insurance, Flexible Spending Account Program)

Federal Erroneous Retirement Coverage Correction Act (FERCCA)

Injury Compensation

Federal Work-Life Balance Programs

Contracting Officer Technical

Representative Agency Policies and Procedures

Mentoring Employees

Improving Employee Performance and Productivity

Conducting Employee Performance Appraisals in Accordance with Agency

Systems Identifying and Assisting Employees with Unacceptable Performance

Training Individuals Making Career Transitions (e.g., non-supervisory to manager, or manager to executive)

Critical Developmental Activities

Developmental Activities for Specialist or Supervisory

Positions To Strengthen General Competencies

- Participate in all stages of, or manage a project.
- Lead a team effort by acting as a project lead, program lead, or team lead.
- Participate in projects that are highly visible, sensitive, or political.
- Act as a subject matter expert (SME) in a panel.
- Consult with customers to define and/or solve customer problems.
- Cross-train into another area of expertise (e.g. temporary job rotations, job shadowing, or developmental assignments).
- Participate in online training, attend briefings, or obtain on-the-job training to understand the policies and politics relevant to your work.
- Collaborate and coordinate with another group to perform project work (e.g., outside group).
- Develop a broad professional network through joint projects, participation in workshops, membership in professional and trade associations, and internal and external customer relationships.
- Demonstrate your work at a technical conference, meeting, or seminar.
- Provide informal mentoring to others in your specialty area.
- Attend university and industry association educational events.
- Maintain awareness of trends and state-of-the-art in your field.
- Discuss ideas to resolve project issues with senior staff members or a mentor.
- Meet with your manager to present and discuss your analysis of options, tradeoffs, and recommendations for action relating to a problem or issue in a project/program.
- Participate on a workforce planning team.

To Strengthen Technical Competencies

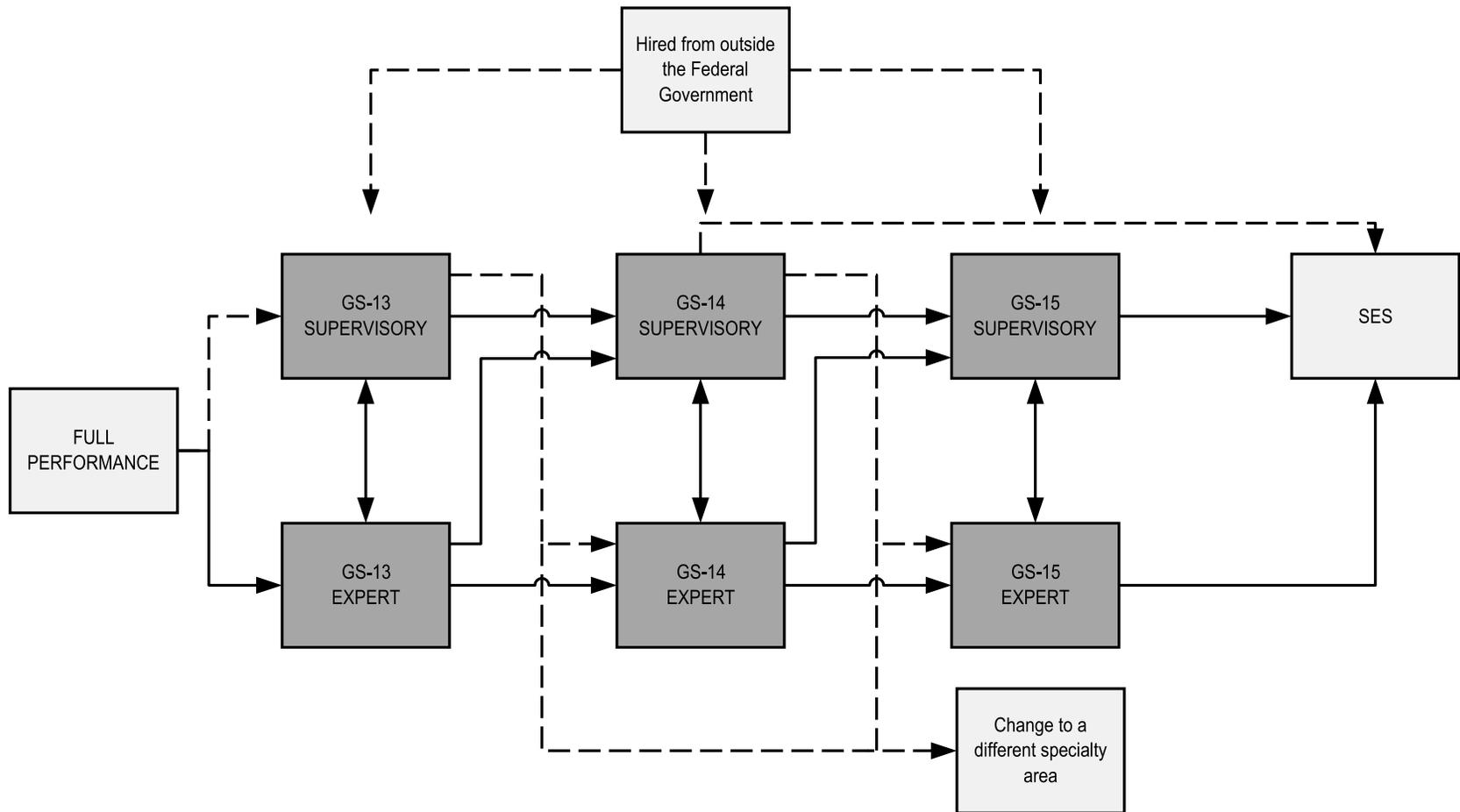
- Counsel employees and survivors on the full range of retirement and benefits issues.
- Conduct research on complex technical questions or sensitive cases.
- Assist other specialists in resolving complex technical issues (e.g., corrections under FERCCA).
- Oversee the contractor performance and evaluate the agency work-life balance program.
- Monitor, administer, and assist with benefits enrollment and applications.

- Make determinations related to retirement coverage and insurance eligibility.
- Update guidance and counsel employees on benefit program changes.
- Review employee retirement applications and prepare full submission for OPM.
- Plan and conduct the Open Season (e.g., plan employee communications, monitor enrollments, conduct health fairs, and address belated enrollment requests).

Additional Developmental Activities for Supervisory Positions Only

- Seek periodic feedback from others on your management and leadership skills.
- Find a mentor or talk with other managers to learn about their leadership styles, challenges, and experiences.
- Look for ways to praise and highlight others' achievements.
- Identify and communicate your priorities to your employees.
- Offer to serve as a sounding board for others if they run into technical difficulties, and ask them to do the same for you.
- Develop and execute a budget for a project or assignment.
- Learn strategies on how to handle conflict in the organization.
- Contribute to processes that create and support a diverse environment (e.g. hiring and training).

Human Resources Specialist (Employee Benefits) Expert / Managerial Career Stage



**Human Resources Specialist (Employee Benefits)
Expert, GS-13/14/15**

General Competencies	Proficiency Level		
	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
Attention to Detail: Is thorough when performing work and conscientious about attending to detail.	4	4	4
Client Engagement/Change Management: Knowledge of the impact of change on people, processes, procedures, leadership, and organizational culture; knowledge of change management principles, strategies, and techniques required for effectively planning, implementing, and evaluating change in the organization.	3	4	4
Creative Thinking: Uses imagination to develop new insights into situations and applies innovative solutions to problems; designs new methods where established methods and procedures are inapplicable or are unavailable.	4	4	5
Customer Service: Works with clients and customers (that is, any individuals who use or receive the services or products that your work unit produces, including the general public, individuals who work in the agency, other agencies, or organizations outside the Government) to assess their needs, provide information or assistance, resolve their problems, or satisfy their expectations; knows about available products and services; is committed to providing quality products and services.	4	4	5
Decision Making: Makes sound, well-informed, and objective decisions; perceives the impact and implications of decisions; commits to action, even in uncertain situations, to accomplish organizational goals; causes change.	4	4	5
Flexibility: Is open to change and new information; adapts behavior or work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles; effectively deals with ambiguity.	4	4	4
Influencing/Negotiating: Persuades others to accept recommendations, cooperate, or change their behavior; works with others towards an agreement; negotiates to find mutually acceptable solutions.	4	4	4
Information Management: Identifies a need for and knows where or how to gather information; organizes and maintains information or information management systems.	4	4	4
Integrity/Honesty: Contributes to maintaining the integrity of the organization; displays high standards of ethical conduct and understands the impact of violating these standards on an organization, self, and others; is trustworthy.	4	4	5
Interpersonal Skills: Shows understanding, friendliness, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern, and politeness to others; develops and maintains effective relationships with others; may include effectively dealing with	4	4	5

individuals who are difficult, hostile, or distressed; relates well to people from varied backgrounds and different situations; is sensitive to cultural diversity, race, gender, disabilities, and other individual differences.			
Legal, Government and Jurisprudence: Knowledge of laws, legal codes, court procedures, precedents, legal practices and documents, Government regulations, executive orders, agency rules, Government organization and functions, and the democratic political process.	4	4	5
Oral Communication: Expresses information (for example, ideas or facts) to individuals or groups effectively, taking into account the audience and nature of the information (for example, technical, sensitive, controversial); makes clear and convincing oral presentations; listens to others, attends to nonverbal cues, and responds appropriately.	4	4	5
Organizational Awareness: Knows the organization's mission and functions, and how its social, political, and technological systems work and operates effectively within them; this includes the programs, policies, procedures, rules, and regulations of the organization.	4	4	4
Planning and Evaluating: Organizes work, sets priorities, and determines resource requirements; determines short- or long-term goals and strategies to achieve them; coordinates with other organizations or parts of the organization to accomplish goals; monitors progress and evaluates outcomes.	4	4	4
Problem Solving: Identifies problems; determines accuracy and relevance of information; uses sound judgment to generate and evaluate alternatives, and to make recommendations.	4	4	4
Project Management: Knowledge of the principles, methods, or tools for developing, scheduling, coordinating, and managing projects and resources, including monitoring and inspecting costs, work, and contractor performance.	3	4	4
Reading: Understands and interprets written material, including technical material, rules, regulations, instructions, reports, charts, graphs, or tables; applies what is learned from written material to specific situations.	4	4	5
Reasoning: Identifies rules, principles, or relationships that explain facts, data, or other information; analyzes information and makes correct inferences or draws accurate conclusions.	4	4	5
Self-Management: Sets well-defined and realistic personal goals; displays a high level of initiative, effort, and commitment towards completing assignments in a timely manner; works with minimal supervision; is motivated to achieve; demonstrates responsible behavior.	4	4	4
Stress Tolerance: Deals calmly and effectively with high stress situations (for example, tight deadlines, hostile individuals, emergency situations, dangerous situations).	4	4	4

Teamwork: Encourages and facilitates cooperation, pride, trust, and group identity; fosters commitment and team spirit; works with others to achieve goals.	4	4	4
Technical Competence: Uses knowledge that is acquired through formal training or extensive on-the-job experience to perform one's job; works with, understands, and evaluates technical information related to the job; advises others on technical issues.	4	4	5
Workforce Planning: Knowledge of HR concepts, principles, and practices related to determining workload projections and current and future competency gaps to align human capital with organizational goals.	3	4	4
Writing: Recognizes or uses correct English grammar, punctuation, and spelling; communicates information (for example, facts, ideas, or messages) in a succinct and organized manner; produces written information, which may include technical material that is appropriate for the intended audience.	4	4	4
Technical Competencies			
Employee Benefits: Knowledge of HR concepts, principles, and practices related to retirement, insurance, injury compensation, and other employee benefits programs.	4	4	4

Supervisory Competencies

HR Specialists at the Expert level may either be specialists or supervisors. Supervisory competencies are determined by the hiring agency. OPM developed guidance for agencies to help them determine requirements for supervisory positions including supervisory competencies. For more information on OPM's Supervisory Qualification Guide, click on www.opm.gov/qualifications/standards/Specialty-Stds/GS-SUPV.asp.

Typical Duties

<i>Specialist or Supervisory Positions</i>	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
Serves as a resource to others to resolve complex benefits issues.	✓	✓	✓
Makes retirement coverage determinations involving special retirement matters.	✓	✓	N/A
Develops and disseminates policy and guidance regarding the organization's flexible work schedule options.	✓	✓	✓
Investigates suspected injury compensation claim fraud or abuse and recommends corrective action.	✓	✓	✓
Leads efforts in resolving broad programmatic issues that significantly impact government-wide retirement program administration.	✓	✓	✓
Develops and/or reviews the impact of legislative or regulatory proposals involving broad aspects of Federal employee retirement or insurance benefits programs.	✓	✓	✓

Develops and/or reviews the impact of legislative or regulatory proposals involving broad aspects of Federal Work-Life programs.	N/A	✓	✓
<i>Supervisory Positions Only</i>			
Oversees annual, multiyear, or similar types of long-range work plans or schedules for in-service or contracted work.	✓	✓	N/A
Ensures that the goals or objectives for area of responsibility (e.g., division, program area, function, etc.) are met and determines goals and objectives that require additional emphasis.	✓	✓	N/A
Determines best approach for solving budget shortages or other issues.	✓	✓	N/A
Exercises significant responsibility in dealing with officials of other units or organizations.	✓	✓	N/A
Assures equity among units, groups, teams of performance standards and rating techniques developed by subordinates.	✓	✓	N/A
Makes decisions on work problems presented by subordinate supervisors.	✓	✓	✓
Serves as the senior HR advisor for a multi-mission agency engaged in research, development, test, evaluation, and maintenance functions on a national and/or international scale.	N/A	N/A	✓
Integrates the interests of key internal and external stakeholders, including Congress, Administration and the public, when developing strategic business plans.	N/A	N/A	✓
Formulates new HR concepts, principles, and methods.	N/A	N/A	✓
Advises top agency management officials on the development and implementation of innovations related to any HR technical area.	N/A	N/A	✓
Counsels top agency officials who may appear before Congressional committees and the national media concerning the agency's HR program.	N/A	N/A	✓

Training Areas

Federal Benefits Programs (i.e., CSRS/FERS retirement, Thrift Savings Plan, health, life, vision, dental, and long-term care insurance, Flexible Spending Account Program)

Injury Compensation

Federal Work-Life Balance Programs

Contracting Officers Technical

Representative Agency Policies and

Procedures

Workforce

Planning

Mentoring

Employees

Improving Employee Performance and Productivity

Conducting Employee Performance Appraisals in Accordance with Agency

Systems Identifying and Assisting Employees with Unacceptable Performance

Training Individuals Making Career Transitions (e.g., non-supervisory to manager, or manager to executive)

Critical Developmental Activities

Developmental Activities for Expert or Supervisory Positions

To Strengthen General Competencies

- Lead a team working on multiple projects.
- Act as a subject matter expert (SME).
- Acquire resources or support from outside organization for a project.
- Mentor others informally or formally, providing technical and career guidance.
- Share knowledge of lessons learned with your team and management.
- Serve as an advisor to teams working on high visibility projects.
- Develop relationships with customers to understand the customer base.
- Expand your professional network (including contacts with people in industry, academia, and other relevant organizations) through joint projects, participation in workshops, memberships in professional and trade associations, and internal and external customer relationships.
- Present invited talks or papers at technical conferences.
- Maintain awareness of trends and state-of-the-art in your field.
- Interview someone who is faced with pressure to make decisions constantly. Ask him or her to describe the criteria he/she uses to evaluate the quality of potential decisions, the methods/techniques he/she uses to make decisions, and the lessons he/she has learned about thinking through decisions.
- Evaluate proposals with the guidance of senior staff members.
- The next time you face a major policy or procedure change, find a way to access a broad range of ideas. Pose difficult challenges and ask for others' thoughts or related experience.
- Participate on a workforce planning team.

To Strengthen Technical Competencies

- Counsel employees, survivors, and management on the full range of retirement and benefits issues (e.g., discontinued service retirement, disability retirement, reemployed annuitants, etc.).
- Develop benefits guidance/education materials for the workforce.
- Train and educate agency personnel on benefits policies and procedures.
- Develop benefits and/or work-life policies.
- Research and address complex employee benefits issues.

- Prepare responses to employee enrollment reconsideration requests and/or special retirement coverage requests.
- Update agency policies to reflect changes in federal employee benefits regulations and laws.
- Serve as a resource to others to resolve complex benefits issues.
- Develop and/or review the impact of legislative or regulatory proposals involving broad aspects of Federal employee retirement or insurance benefits programs.
- Develop and implement agency-wide benefits strategies (e.g., the Retirement and Financial Education and Literacy strategy).
- Develop, obtain approval for, and implement benefits flexibilities to address workforce structural requirements (e.g., Voluntary Early Retirement Authority, Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments, Mandatory Separation Exemptions).
- Audit the quality/completeness of benefit enrollments and/or retirement applications. Implement process improvements or quality controls.

Additional Developmental Activities for Supervisory Positions Only

- Find an opportunity to clearly communicate your vision and the values of your organization or workgroup, along with the message that you expect people to excel.
- Gain commitment from necessary players and maintain their support throughout a change process.
- Pay attention to advances or changes in technology. Look for ways that new or different technology could improve your work processes or the quality and/or efficiency of your work.
- Identify people who hold similar positions to yours. Choose one or two who share common job concerns or problems, and meet with them informally to ask for ideas on resolving problems and expediting work flow.
- Establish contact with other federal agencies for benchmarking opportunities, lessons learned, and innovative approaches for accomplishing objectives.
- Contribute to processes that create and support a diverse environment (e.g. hiring and training).