

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and ELSA Programs



Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22
Dallas, TX 75242

**Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code**

Appellant: [the appellant]

Agency classification: Support Services Specialist
GS-342-06

Organization: Research Work Unit [unit no.]
[area] Research Station
[location] Forestry Center
Forest Service
Department of Agriculture
[city, state]

OPM decision: Budget Technician
GS-561-07

OPM decision number: C- 0561-07-02

THIS DECISION WAS SUBSEQUENTLY RECONSIDERED AND MODIFIED. PLEASE SEE THE RECONSIDERATION DECISION, NUMBER C-0318-06-01.

/s/

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

4/20/98

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 changes the classification of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period after the date of this decision (5 CFR 511.702). The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description 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:

[the appellant]

Personnel Officer
[] National Forest Service
Department of Agriculture
[location of agency]
[a large city]

Director, Office of Human Resources
Management
U.S. Department of Agriculture
J.L. Whitten Building, Room 316W
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Introduction

On December 3, 1997, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. Her position is currently classified as Support Services Specialist, GS-342-6. However, she believes her position should be classified as Administrative Support Assistant, GS-303-7. The appealed position is assigned to Research Work Unit [# of unit], [district] Research Station, [location] Forestry Center, Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, [southern United States, city and state]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

As a result of a reorganization within the Forest Service, the appellant believes she now performs duties and responsibilities that were previously performed at the headquarters level. Some of these additional duties and responsibilities include: the requirement to assign budget object codes and tax identification numbers to procurement documents, the requirement to use third-party drafts in the procurement process, the responsibility for training employees on the electronic processing of travel and pay matters, the responsibility for dealing directly with the Department of Labor on OWCP claims, the responsibility to serve as fleet equipment contact person, and the responsibility to manage the Senior Citizen Service Employment Program. The appellant along with her supervisor believes that these additional duties and responsibilities warrant a higher grade. The appealed position is one of three identical positions located at the [location] Forestry Center. In February 1996, the appellant's supervisor and the two other work unit supervisors located at the Center submitted a request to the [district] Research Station personnel office to have all three of the Support Services Specialist positions classified as Administrative Support Assistant, GS-303-7. That request was disapproved on February 19, 1997. In his decision, the Personnel Officer indicated that only one "lead" GS-342-7 or GS-303-7 position could be supported for the Center. The three supervisors did not support this decision. They felt it would be more efficient to maintain a high level of expertise in each unit. The appellant disagreed with the personnel office decision and, therefore, exercised her right to file an appeal with OPM.

Position information

The appellant works under the supervision of the Project Leader of Research Work Unit [# of work unit] in the [location] Forestry Center. The unit has twenty-six employees, including the appellant and the Project Leader. The other staff members are scientists, clerks, technicians, Senior Citizen Service Employment Program employees, and a part-time student employee. The appellant supervises one clerical employee. Within this context, the appellant provides a variety of administrative services to the unit. A summary of the duties follows.

Budget

The appellant monitors the unit's expenditure of funds by keeping records of obligations and expenditures and reconciling those figures with accounting data. She keeps track of how money is being spent, does projections, and requests transfer of funds between subprojects as directed. She recommends adjustments in fund allocations consistent with Central Accounting System procedures. She monitors inter- and intra-agency cooperative agreements

and administers budgetary aspects of reimbursable funds associated with agreements. She generates spreadsheets and reports showing the status of expenditures and advises the Project Leader on the availability of funds in all accounts.

Procurement

The appellant is responsible for coordinating the purchase of supplies and equipment through open market purchase by blanket purchase orders, use of VISA credit cards, and third party-drafts. She serves as contact person on general office maintenance contracts and prepares and monitors rental agreements.

Personnel

The appellant maintains employee development folders, which include position descriptions, performance records, and training records. The appellant prepares personnel actions. She provides information on insurance, retirement, leave, and other personnel related matters to unit employees. She serves as liaison with the Personnel Office on other matters that may arise.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency considered the GS-342 series, GS-561 series, and the GS-303 series. The agency believes that the nature of the appellant's work is classifiable to the GS-342 series. It believes the primary work of the position is classifiable to the GS-342 series, and therefore, concluded that the GS-303 series was not appropriate. We agree with the agency that the GS-303 series is not appropriate for the appellant's position. The GS-303 series should be used only when the work is not classifiable to any other series. While the agency recognizes that a significant portion of the duties of appellant's position is accurately described by the GS-561 series, it determined that the primary purpose of the appellant's position is not the accomplishment of budget clerical and assistant work, and the position was not classified in the GS-561 series. However, for grade level determination the agency applied the Budget Clerical and Assistance Series, GS-561 (dated March 1983), to the budget formulation and execution responsibilities of the position.

The appellant performs a variety of administrative work associated with several different occupational fields. The correct series allocation of her position is largely dependent on whether the work performed in these different functional areas is one- or two-grade interval in nature.

The Support Services Administration Series, GS-342, to which the appellant's position is presently classified, is a one-grade interval series. This series includes positions which involve supervising, directing, planning, or supporting service functions such as communications, procurement, property management, records management, facilities and equipment, and transportation. The Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, to which the appellant believes the position should be assigned, is also a one-grade interval series.

In the appellant's case, all of the work performed is clearly and immediately associated with various one-grade interval series. The appellant's procurement work consists entirely of purchasing items and services through such simplified purchase procedures as open market methods or competitive bid procedures. This work is classifiable to the one-grade interval Purchasing Series, GS-1105. The appellant does not solicit, evaluate, and award contracts using formal advertising and negotiation procedures as is required for assignment to the two-grade interval Contracting Series, GS-1102. The appellant's personnel work is of a limited nature, involving primarily the preparation and coordination of various forms for submission to the agency's personnel office. In addition, she provides information to unit employees concerning health insurance, retirement, leave, step increases, promotions, payroll, etc. This work is classifiable to the one-grade interval Personnel Clerical and Assistance Series, GS-203. There is no requirement that the appellant use the broad range of personnel knowledge, concepts, and principles or apply the wide variety of personnel regulations and procedures, as is typical of the two-grade interval Personnel Management Series, GS-201. Other miscellaneous administrative functions for which the appellant is responsible, such as property management, files management, library maintenance, vehicle records maintenance, and preparation of correspondence, are limited in terms of the nature of the work performed and the amount of time expended. These functions are classifiable to several different one-grade interval series.

In accordance with accepted classification principles and policies, mixed series positions are, as a general rule, classified in the series that represents the grade-controlling duties, assuming that series is appropriate in terms of the paramount qualifications required, sources of recruitment, reason for establishing the position, and background knowledge required. In this case, the appellant spends 50 percent of her time performing the budget-related duties previously described. The remainder of her time is divided among the other administrative functions. No one of these other functions constitutes a significant enough portion of time overall to be considered grade controlling. According to the appellant's supervisor, the budget duties constitute the principal knowledge and skills required for the position. Consequently, the appellant's position is properly classified to the Budget Clerical and Technician Series, GS-561. The authorized title for positions in the GS-561 series above grade GS-5 is Budget Technician. Because the appellant's position is graded above the GS-5 level, the appropriate title is Budget Technician. The GS-500 Job Family Standard for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work is used to determine the appropriate grade level. This standard includes the GS-561 series.

The appellant supervises one Office Automation Assistant, GS-326-05. However, her supervisory duties and responsibilities regarding this assistant position are not evaluated against the General Schedule Supervisory Guide, since this work does not meet the requirements for coverage under the guide. The primary reason is that the supervisory duties do not occupy at least 25 percent of the appellant's overall time.

Considering the above, the appellant's position is properly classified to the Budget Clerical and Technician Series, GS-561.

Grade determination

The GS-500 standard uses the Factor Evaluation System format, under which factor levels and accompanying point values are to be assigned for each of the following nine factors, with the total then being converted to a grade level by use of the grade conversion table provided in the standard.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information an employee must understand in order to do the work and the skills needed to apply that knowledge.

The appellant's position requires (1) detailed knowledge of Station and Project level budget procedures and requirements to compile and organize annual and on-going budget requests; (2) detailed knowledge of the Project's budget structure to make or request budget adjustments; (3) knowledge of reimbursable collection and expenditure accounts; (4) detailed knowledge of Project object classes, line items, and management codes to identify and cross check the accuracy and completeness of budget estimates presented in Project activities; and (5) knowledge of the agency's financial reporting system, particularly as it relates to reconciling accounts and making periodic reports on the status of funds.

The appellant's position meets Level 1-4. At this level, the technician has a knowledge of a wide variety of interrelated steps, conditions, and procedures or processes required to assemble, review, and maintain complex accounting, budget, or other fiscal transactions (e.g., reconciling accounts in accounting systems involving extensive subdivision of accounts, frequent and varied adjustments to accounts, or extensive balancing and reconciling of detailed summary accounts; resolving problems in balancing accounts, adjusting discrepancies, developing control records, verifying the accuracy of budgetary data, adjusting dollar amounts by line item and object class, and preparing reports on the status of funds).

The position does not meet Level 1-5. In addition to Level 1-4 knowledge, the work at this level requires in-depth practical knowledge of accounting or other financial management technical methods, techniques, precedent cases, and procedures to resolve especially difficult or sensitive problems. Typically employees at this level use a knowledge of accounting methods, procedures, and techniques to conduct difficult and responsible analysis and determinations within a complete accounting system to validate transactions and to perform research to resolve inconsistencies. In addition, this level requires a knowledge of the interrelationships of various accounting systems applications and computer file systems and content to resolve problems of processed transactions (e.g., knowledge of computer master file systems, document processing, and the effects of transactions on existing records to modify normal automated processes in existing accounts while protecting historical data). The modifications may be characterized by complicated adjustments such as carry back and carry forward and restricted interest cases. An employee at this level uses knowledge of related financial regulations and rulings covering diverse types of transactions to typically function as a technical authority for the resolution of an extensive range of issues or

problems. Further, employees at this level work with systems development personnel to locate and resolve accounting transaction problems in the accounting system or evaluate and verify the range of accounting transactions to determine the adequacy of the system. Employees at this level may also assist in the development of new accounting and management systems.

There is no evidence that the appellant performs work comparable to that described at Level 1-5. The appellant does not work with systems development personnel to locate and resolve accounting transaction problems in the accounting system. She does not have the degree of responsibility or knowledge requirement equivalent to Level 1-5 where employees evaluate and troubleshoot the parameters of accounting transactions, compile extensive worksheets to study causes, or conduct analyses for new system developments. She is not required to deal with especially difficult and sensitive problems. Further, the appellant's position does not require the in-depth analysis that is described by the standard at this level.

Level 1-4 and 550 points are credited.

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 completed work.

The appellant's position meets Level 2-3, the highest level described in the standard. At this level, 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.

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 the most difficult procedural and technical processing of budgetary transactions in accordance with available guidelines and precedence. For example, the appellant adjusts the current operating budget as shifts in and between subprojects are needed throughout the fiscal year. The appellant transfers funds in and out of the general fund and provides budget status reports to the staff. Further, the appellant informs the Project Leader and staff of existing or pending allocations being exceeded, as well as surpluses that may be occurring, and requests that money be carried over from one fiscal year to the next. The appellant's work is reviewed for technical accuracy, accomplishment of objectives, and adherence to policies.

Level 2-3 and 275 points are credited.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of the guidelines used and the judgment needed to apply them.

At Level 3-3 (the highest level described in the standard), guidelines are the same as those described at Level 3-2 but, because of the complicating nature of the assignments, they lack the specificity, frequently 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.

The appellant's use of guidelines corresponds to Level 3-3. The appellant works with a wide variety of general procedural guidelines, some of which may not specifically cover all aspects of the assignment. Guides include Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, and local manuals, regulations, directives, and policies that provide definitions of account codes; procedures for obtaining, transferring, and distributing funds; program and financial records; and agency organizational reporting forms and procedures. Other guidelines used by the appellant are associated with procurement, payroll, contracting, travel, and property management regulations. The appellant uses judgment to interpret and apply guidelines and to adapt or deviate from the required procedures for specific cases or problems. For the appealed position, the nature of the guidelines used and the judgment needed do not exceed Level 3-3.

Level 3-3 and 275 points are credited.

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.

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 at this level 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 (oral and written) and reviews regulations and manuals.

The degree of complexity of the appellant's position is comparable to Level 4-3. The appellant identifies, compiles, organizes, verifies, and maintains a variety of budgetary data relating to the assigned fund accounts (appropriated and reimbursable). These accounts cover a variety of expenditures related to administrative expenses. Each account has different regulations, rules, and

procedures. The appellant prepares a variety of recurring reports that require extracting information from budget documents, accounting records, and invoices. The budget and expenditure control activities are complicated by annual, special, and cooperative agreement funds that support the different operating programs of the Research Work Unit. The operating programs of the unit are relatively stable; however, adjustments are required several times a year because of changes in project costs, changes in program direction, and other unforeseen situations. The appellant frequently performs her duties within short timeframes.

The position does not meet Level 4-4. Level 4-4 is distinguished from Level 4-3 by (1) more variety and complexity of examinations, transactions, or systems involved; (2) the nature and variety of problems encountered and resolved; and (3) the nature of independent decisions made by the employee. 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. The work involves 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. 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.

The appellant's work does not meet the full intent of Level 4-4. Although the appellant's budget preparation and administration duties require consideration of variables and relationships in accounts and accounting transactions, the work does not entail unreliable or conflicting data and program considerations as envisioned at Level 4-4. While the appellant makes independent decisions and uses judgment, her activities are guided by timeframes, budget reports, plans, and schedules that have been predefined and established. Further, the interpretation, testing, and analysis expected at Level 4-4 exceed that required of the appealed position.

Level 4-3 and 150 points are credited.

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.

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.

The scope of the appellant's work is comparable to Level 5-2. The appellant is responsible for compiling and consolidating annual budget estimates for Research Work Unit 4111, monitoring spending for these accounts, making periodic reports on the status of funds, and resolving problems related to the verification of amounts reflected in accounts. The work affects the accuracy, timely submission, and adequacy of the unit's annual budget submission, the maintenance of proper spending within these funds, and the adequacy of information the unit staff has on the availability of money.

The position does not meet Level 5-3. At this level, the purpose of the work is to apply conventional practices to treat a variety of problems in accounting, budget, or financial management transactions. Issues might result, for example, 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 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 and 75 points are credited.

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

The appellant's primary contacts are with staff within her research unit, other research units, headquarters, other Forestry Sciences Laboratories, and other Federal agencies. In addition, contacts are with private vendors and contractors. These contacts are comparable to Level 2 of the personal contacts factor, which describes contacts that are with employees within the same agency but outside the immediate organization. At this level, contacts may be with other agency employees who are providing requested information and/or with members of the general public in a moderately structured setting. For example, contacts may be with individuals who are attempting to expedite transactions. The appellant's contacts do not fully meet Level 3 where contacts are with individuals from outside the agency who represent the budget and program interests of other Federal agencies, contractors, or congressional staff members.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts is to obtain or clarify information, coordinate the timely submission of information needed to compile budget submission and programming documents, and provide advice and assistance on budgetary related data within her unit. In addition, the appellant assists others in gathering and locating information. This is comparable to Level b where the purpose of contacts is to plan and coordinate actions to correct or prevent errors, delays, or other complications occurring during the transaction cycle. The purpose at this level may be to obtain a customer's cooperation in submitting paperwork or other information, to request others to correct errors in documentation or data entry, or to assist others in locating information. The purpose of the appellant's contacts does not exceed Level b. That is, the appellant is not required to use persuasion

to obtain information or take corrective action in situations where individuals are skeptical, uncooperative, or threatening, as described at Level c.

Credit of Level 2b for Factors 6 and 7 equates to 75 points.

Factor 8, Physical demands

The work is primarily sedentary and requires no special physical demands. Level 8-1 and 5 points are credited.

Factor 9, Work environment

The appellant's work is generally performed in an office setting involving everyday risks or discomforts. Level 9-1 and 5 points are credited.

Summary

In sum, we have evaluated the appellant's position as follows:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. Personal contacts and 7. Purpose of contacts	2b	75
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
Total points		1410

The total of 1410 points falls within the GS-7 point range (1355-1600) on the grade conversion table provided in the standard.

Decision

The position is properly classified as Budget Technician, GS-561-7.