

**OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT**  
**MERIT SYSTEMS OVERSIGHT AND EFFECTIVENESS**  
**DALLAS OVERSIGHT DIVISION**  
**CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION**

Under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code

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**Appellant:** [Appellant]  
**Position:** Program Assistant (OA), GS-303-6  
**Organization:** [Organizational location]  
Small Business Administration  
**Decision:** GS-303-5, title at the agency's discretion with parenthetical  
title "Office Automation"

**OPM decision number:** C-0303-05-02

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**Approved by:**

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon  
Bonnie J. Brandon  
Classification Appeals Officer

4/14/97  
Date

**Copy of decision sent to:**

Appellant

Director of Operations  
Office of Human Resources  
Small Business Administration  
409 3rd Street, SW., Suite 4200  
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Carolyn Smith  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

The appealed position is assigned to the [program area], Small Business Administration (SBA). The appellant's position was previously classified as Clerk (Office Automation), GS-303-5, on September 21, 1992. As a result of an appeal the appellant filed on February 13, 1995, the SBA reclassified the position to Program Assistant (Office Automation), GS-303-6, on July 9, 1995. By letter dated August 24, 1995, the appellant sought reclassification of his position to GS-1101-7. The SBA responded by letter dated October 23, 1995, notifying the appellant that his position remained properly classified as Program Assistant (OA), GS-303-6. Under provisions of chapter 51, title 5 of the United States Code, the appellant filed an appeal with this office requesting that his position be reclassified and upgraded to Business Opportunity Specialist, GS-1101-7/9/11/12.

This is the final administrative decision of the Government, subject to discretionary review only under the conditions and time limits specified in sections 511.605 and 511.613 of the Code of Federal Regulations and appendix 4 of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*.

The appellant stated that he does not think his position description is accurate. His statement is not supported, however, by the information obtained during the telephone interviews with him and his supervisor. The appellant's depiction of his major duties reveals no variation from the statement of major duties set forth in the position description. The fact that the position description is accurate was corroborated by the supervisor's characterization of the appellant's major tasks. The appellant's most recent performance plan, dated October 24, 1996, is compatible with his position description. Therefore, we find that the position description is adequate for classification purposes.

## **POSITION INFORMATION**

The [geographic area] Office, one of three out-stationed central office duty locations, is located in [geographic location]. In addition to the appellant, the Office staff includes a GS-1101-14 supervisor and three GS-1101-12 Business Opportunity Specialists.

The purpose of the appellant's position is to provide clerical and administrative support to the Office staff who are primarily engaged in evaluating and determining the eligibility of small minority businesses for participation in the 8(a) program. The Office also has responsibility for administratively handling the records of businesses that are being considered for termination from the 8(a) program or for graduation, as appropriate. Businesses may also exit the program by voluntary withdrawal. According to the appellant and his supervisor, two attorneys assigned to other SBA regional offices now make the decisions about involuntary terminations and graduations for [his] Office. The appellant's only involvement in the termination and graduation process is to

transmit records to the attorneys who are designated to perform the substantive review and decision process.

During the telephone interviews, the appellant and his supervisor described the major duties the appellant performs and the amount of time he devotes to accomplishing these duties. Although the appellant and the supervisor differed in the percentages of time and grouping of major tasks, there is sufficient commonality in their descriptions on which to base a classification decision. The following table summarizes the information provided by the appellant and his supervisor. The information is described in greater detail in the paragraphs that follow the table.

Appellant's Allocation of Duties/Time		Supervisor's Allocation of Duties/Time	
Inputting into and maintaining data in the Consolidated Tracking System (CTS)	20%	Inventory control (includes CTS input and maintenance; files maintenance)	50%
Files maintenance and archiving records	20%		
Telephone inquiries and walk-ins	25%	Customer service (includes telephone inquiries and personal contacts)	15%
Responding to written inquiries	10%	Preparation of correspondence and sorting/distributing incoming mail	10%
Special projects, e.g., following up on active cases	15%	Special projects, e.g., accountability for cases	10%
Mail distribution, i.e., incoming and outgoing	5%		
Requisitioning supplies, equipment, and repairs	5%	Handling office supply ordering, supplies, and equipment	15%

The appellant estimates that he devotes 20 percent of his time to inputting and maintaining data in the CTS. When applications are submitted for the 8(a) program, the appellant makes CTS data entries which include, but are not limited to, the sequential case number, the specialist to whom the case is assigned, the date received, the name of the business, the type of business, a county code, the employer's taxpayer identification number, the legal structure, and whether there is a labor surplus or shortage. After cases are logged in and basic information is entered into the CTS by the appellant, Business Opportunity Specialists screen each case to determine whether

to accept it, reject it, or ask for additional information. These specialists personally handle their own requests for information, respond to specific queries about their requests, and prepare written explanations giving the rationale and justification for their recommendations. These explanations accompany the Letters of Decline and Letters of Approval that are transmitted electronically to headquarters for final action. The appellant estimates that he spends 20 percent of his time maintaining the Office's files and archiving records. When interviewed, the appellant's supervisor combined the tasks of entering data into the CTS, case assignment, and files maintenance into a category he labeled "inventory control." He estimates that the appellant spends 50 percent of his time performing "inventory control" duties.

The appellant estimates that 25 percent of his time is devoted to handling telephone inquiries and walk-in applicants. He stated that fewer individuals visit the office since it relocated in December 1996. Most contacts are now by telephone. The appellant stated that he responds to general questions such as explaining the 8(a) application process and informing applicants of the status of their applications. He refers requests for time extensions and specific inquiries about case adjudication to the Business Opportunity Specialists. Other nonroutine inquiries are referred to his supervisor. Most of the appellant's contacts are with applicants, their representatives, his co-workers, and individuals in SBA's Office of Congressional Affairs. The appellant's supervisor estimates the amount of time the appellant devotes to "customer service" as 15 percent. According to the supervisor, the appellant handles all routine inquiries such as queries about the status of cases and process flow. The supervisor stated that the appellant does not make substantive decisions about business opportunity issues nor do his duties involve much analytical work. All inquiries from outside SBA, including those from Congressional staffers, are handled by the supervisor.

Written inquiries are handled the same way as oral inquiries. The appellant stated that he prepares replies to correspondence using boilerplate letters and other standard paragraphs that have been developed locally over time or generated by the central office for recommended use. The appellant's supervisor composes all nonroutine general correspondence, including responses to Congressional inquiries, that require a tailored response. The Business Opportunity Specialists handle their own case work which includes tracking due dates and generating correspondence associated with adjudicating 8(a) program eligibility. The appellant provided 10 samples of correspondence he has initiated. The samples included brief standard letters to businesses declining consideration of reconsideration requests, letters of transmittal to other offices within SBA, memoranda to the appellant's supervisor, and letters to Congressional representatives giving chronological information about the status of certain 8(a) applications. Both the appellant and his supervisor estimate the amount of time expended on correspondence activities as 10 percent.

In performing his typing and data entry duties, the appellant uses a variety of computer software including XTree (a utilities program), WordPerfect, MS Word, Windows, Xchange for electronic mail, and sometimes MS-DOS. He uses a UNIX system to input CTS data and an electric typewriter to type forms and labels.

The appellant estimates that about 15 percent of his time is devoted to working on special projects. His supervisor places the time allocation at 10 percent. Both the appellant and his supervisor agree that special project tasks primarily involve accountability of case files, e.g., following up on active cases and submitting cases to central office attorneys for review and issuance of "Show Cause" letters.

The appellant allocates the remaining 10 percent of his time to mail distribution activities and to tasks associated with requisitioning supplies (e.g., copier paper, toner, office supplies) and maintenance and repair of equipment. His supervisor believes the percentage of time expended to keep the office "running" is closer to 15 percent.

The appellant receives all of his assignments from his supervisor. The appellant carries out his assignments independently after receiving general instructions and basic objectives from the supervisor.

## **SERIES AND TITLE DETERMINATION**

The appellant's position is concerned primarily with providing clerical and administrative support to the Office staff who are engaged in making 8(a) program eligibility determinations for minority small business applicants. This represents the primary reason for the position's existence.

All positions for which the appellant provides support are classified as GS-1101 Business Opportunity Specialists in the GS-1100 Business and Industry Group. The GS-1100 group includes all classes of positions the duties of which are to advise on, administer, supervise, or perform work pertaining to and requiring a knowledge of business and trade practices. The appellant's position is appropriately not classifiable to the GS-1101 series because he neither performs a combination of work characteristic of two or more series in the GS-1100 occupational group nor performs other technical work that is properly classified in the GS-1100 occupational group.

The appellant's position is a mixed series position in that it requires office automation and general clerical knowledges and skills in addition to knowledge of 8(a) program processes, policies, and procedures. The appellant uses office automation technology, including data input and word processing, to accomplish his work; however, the paramount work requirement of the appellant's position is to provide program assistance to the supervisor and Business Opportunity Specialist staff of the Office. For this reason, the GS-326 series is not the appropriate series for classifying the

appellant's position. However, it is appropriate to add the parenthetical title "Office Automation" to positions that are excluded from the Office Automation Clerical and Assistance Series when such positions require significant knowledge of office automation systems and the services of a fully qualified typist are required to perform word processing duties. Because the appellant's position requires significant knowledge of automation systems and the services of a qualified typist, "Office Automation" is properly appended to the position's title.

The appellant performs clerical and assistant work that requires a knowledge of methods and procedures that are part of a program area, i.e., tasks associated with determining 8(a) minority business program eligibility. Because the work is properly not classified in any other series, it is appropriate to classify the appellant's position in the GS-303 series. No titles are specified for positions in this series; therefore, SBA may construct a title, using the instructions contained in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*. The title must include the parenthetical title "Office Automation."

## **GRADE LEVEL DETERMINATION**

Because the appellant's position is properly classified in the GS-303 series, the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work issued in June 1989 is used to evaluate the grade level of the appellant's position. The guide describes general characteristics to be applied using a three-part format:

- (1) The definition of the grade level as spelled out in the *law* (5 U.S.C. 5104).
- (2) A description of the grade level concept pertaining to clerical and assistance work written in narrative format in terms of two evaluation factors: *Nature of Assignment* (which includes the elements knowledge required and complexity of the work), and *Level of Responsibility* (which includes the elements of supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts).
- (3) General work example to illustrate each grade level.

The total criteria (i.e., the law, the evaluation factors, and the work examples) are applied to determine the appropriate grade and assign the highest level which the work being evaluated most closely matches.

### **The Law**

At the GS-5 level, work is performed under general supervision and is difficult and responsible office, business, or fiscal administration work which requires considerable

training and supervisory or other experience; a broad working knowledge of special subject matter; and the exercise of independent judgment in a limited field.

At the GS-6 level, work is performed under general supervision and is difficult and responsible office, business, or fiscal administration work which requires considerable training and supervisory or other experience; a broad working knowledge of a special and complex subject matter, procedure, or practice; and the exercise of independent judgment to a considerable extent.

The appellant's position is fully described as being responsible office work that is performed under general supervision. To perform the work associated with the 8(a) program, the appellant must be knowledgeable about SBA practices and procedures for operation of the 8(a) program. This requires considerable training and experience in performing the work. The appellant responds to general inquiries about 8(a) application processing and the status of applications that are in process. In performing his duties, the appellant applies a working knowledge of district office functions and the functions of other central office staff who are involved in approving 8(a) applications and terminations and graduations of 8(a) participants. The appellant enters data into the CTS from the screening and demographics sections of 8(a) applications. He must have a working knowledge of special subject matter, i.e., the 8(a) program, and he must apply independent judgment to a limited portion of the 8(a) program. The appellant is not required to have a working knowledge of a complex subject, procedure, or practice, nor does he exercise independent judgment to a considerable extent. The appellant's work is compatible with the *law* as stated for GS-5 level work. The complexity of the appellant's work and the degree of independent judgment he applies fall short of that envisioned at the GS-6 level.

### **Nature of Assignment**

At the GS-5 level, assignments consist of performing a full range of standard and nonstandard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of nonrecurring problems. The work includes a variety of assignments involving different and unrelated steps, processes, and 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. Completing 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, and business practices to perform the more complex, interrelated clerical processing procedures.

At the GS-6 level, clerical work typically entails processing a wide variety of transactions for more than one type of assigned activity or functional specialization. Work requires comprehensive knowledge of rules, regulations, and other guidelines relating to completing assignments in the program area assigned. This knowledge is



usually attained through extensive, increasingly difficult, and practical experience and training in the subject matter field. The work also requires ability to interpret and apply regulatory and procedural requirements to process unusually difficult and complicated transactions.

Technical assistance work at the GS-6 level requires considerable evaluative judgment within well-defined, commonly occurring aspects of an administrative program. The work may involve providing direct assistance to specialists by performing a segment of their work, or it may involve responsibility for a stream of continuing processes based on direct application of established practices and criteria. Assignments requiring evaluative judgment are narrowly focused, address a single action, and are relatively clear cut. The employee usually deals with problems or situations that remain stable and resemble past problems or situations. 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. Work typically involves identifying issues, problems, or conditions and seeking alternative solutions based on evaluation of the intent of applicable rules, regulations, and procedures.

The appellant's position falls short of performing the nature of assignments envisioned at the GS-6 level in that the work performed does not require applying regulatory and procedural requirements to unusually difficult and complicated transactions. The appellant is not tasked with identifying issues and seeking solutions based on his evaluation of the intent of applicable rules, regulations, and procedures. He does not provide direct assistance to the Business Opportunity Specialists by performing a segment of their work. He captures data for the CTS from two nontechnical sections of 8(a) applications, i.e., the screening section and the demographics section. This is not the kind of substantive work specialists perform so it cannot be considered performance of a segment of specialist work. In completing transactions, the appellant typically selects a course of action from a number of possibilities. The work he performs includes a variety of assignments which require the appellant to understand the issues involved and determine what procedure to follow and in what order. The nature of the appellant's assignments is at the GS-5 level.

### **Level of Responsibility**

At the GS-5 level, the supervisor assigns work by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines. 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. Contacts are with a variety of persons within and outside the agency for the purpose of receiving and providing information relating to the work.

At the GS-6 level, the supervisor reviews completed work for conformance with policy and requirements. The clerical 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. The employee is regarded as an expert source of information 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. The employee must often make adaptations to cover new and unusual work situations. As an assistant at this level, guidelines are available but are often not completely applicable to the assignment. The employee must use judgment in interpreting and adapting guidelines to specific cases or problems. Contacts are with employees in the agency, in other agencies, and users of the agency services. The employee provides information, explains application of regulations, or resolves problems relating to the assignment.

The appellant's level of responsibility most closely matches that described at the GS-5 level since extensive instructions, regulations, and precedents apply to the work he performs. A number of procedural problems may arise which require the appellant to determine which of several alternative guidelines to use. The appellant's supervisor oversees all of the appellant's assignments and personally handles complex issues and inquiries. The appellant's level of responsibility does not rise to the GS-6 level in that he is not recognized as an authority on processing transactions within a complicated framework when there are often no clear precedents. The appellant is not required to often make adaptations to cover new and unusual work situations. The appellant's level of responsibility equates to the GS-5 level.

### **General Work Example**

The work examples described in the Grade Level Guide at the GS-5 level most closely match the appellant's nature of assignments and level of responsibility.

### **DECISION**

Under each of the three factors of the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work, i.e., the *law*, the *nature of assignments* and *level of responsibility*, and the *work examples*, the appellant's position is assigned the GS-5 level. Therefore, the appealed position is properly classified in the GS-303 series at the GS-5 grade level. The agency may construct the title of the position with "Office Automation" included as a parenthetical designation.