

120 Howard Street, Room 760
San Francisco, CA 94105



**Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, U.S. Code**

Appellant:	[Appellant]
Position:	Administrative Officer GM-341-14
Organization:	Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service
Decision:	Administrative Officer GS-341-14; GM designation at agency discretion
OPM decision number:	C-0341-14-01

Signed by Denis J. Whitebook
DENIS J. WHITEBOOK
CLASSIFICATION APPEALS OFFICER

February 7, 1997
DATE

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision 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).

Introduction

On September 20, 1996, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [Appellant]. His position is currently classified as Administrative Officer GM-341-14. However, he believes his position should be graded at GS-15. He works in the Office of the Director, [installation], Agricultural Research Service (ARS), U.S. Department of Agriculture, [installation city, state]. We have accepted and decided his appeal under 5 U.S. Code 5112.

General Issues

The appellant notes that a redescription of his duties submitted to the ARS Headquarters Personnel Office on September 18, 1995 was graded at GS-15 but “. . . put on hold by the new Administrator until the Agency received their FY97 budget figures from the President’s proposal.” In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of the appellant’s position. Our decision will be based solely on the duties and responsibilities assigned by management and actually performed by the appellant. The ARS Administrator is within his authority to add or remove grade controlling duties from the appellant’s or any other subordinate position at any time. However, in classifying the duties assigned by management, we are obliged by law to classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S. code 5106, 5107, and 5112). This is the exclusive method for classifying positions. Thus, budget or position management concerns will not be considered in reaching our decision.

The appellant notes that a position similar to his own in the [installation] of the ARS is graded at GS-15. As noted above, since comparison to standards and guides is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant’s position to other positions as a basis for deciding his appeal.

In reaching our classification decision we have carefully reviewed all of the information of record furnished by the appellant and his agency, including his official position description (PD) 6P238.

Position Information

The appellant serves as the Senior Area Administrative Officer for the [installation] of the ARS. He oversees the provision of administrative management support to [installation] employees located in 20 major research locations and 48 total sites spread throughout 8 western states. The administrative management functions provided by the organization directed by the appellant include management analysis, personnel management, financial management and budget execution, procurement and contracting, facilities management, office automation, records and mail management, assistance agreements, and safety, health and environmental management. The appellant is the principal advisor to the area director in matters involving administrative management.

The appellant directs a staff of approximately 38 employees composed of specialists in each important field. The staff includes two full supervisory positions (the Budget and Fiscal Officer, and the Supervisory Procurement Analyst), and other staff members with important lead responsibilities. In addition, the appellant provides technical supervision and participates in the selection and appraisal of Location Administrative Officers resident at various sites throughout the [installation].

The appellant's PD and other material of record furnish much more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

Series, Title, and Appropriate Guide

The appellant spends nearly all of his time managing and supervising the organization charged with providing a variety of management services essential to the direction and operation of the [installation]. The paramount qualifications required for the appellant's position are extensive knowledge and understanding of management principles, practices, methods and techniques, and skill in integrating management services with the general management of the [installation]. The appellant's responsibilities include each of the five duties identified as typical of administrative officer positions. These duties include helping management identify financial, personnel, and material needs; managing the budget and fiscal function; counseling management in developing and maintaining sound organizational structures, methods, and procedures; advising management on personnel problems; and negotiating contracts, agreements, and cooperative arrangements with government agencies, universities, or private organizations (see pages 2-3 of the standard for the Administrative Officer Series GS-341). The appellant's duties and responsibilities meet the definition of the Administrative Officer Series GS-341. The prescribed title for all positions classified to the GS-341 series, supervisory and nonsupervisory alike, is Administrative Officer.

Positions classified in the GS-341 series differ greatly in their makeup and nature. Consequently, the classification standard for that series contains no grade-level criteria. The major duties and responsibilities of such positions are graded by application of standards related to the particular work performed.

In this case, the appellant spends nearly all of his time performing supervisory or closely related duties. Such duties are properly evaluated by using the OPM General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) dated April 1993. This guide is applied to determine the grade of General Schedule supervisory positions in grades GS-5 through GS-15. The appellant's nonsupervisory work, if any, cannot approach the GS-15 level and so cannot influence the final grade of his position. Therefore, we have based our evaluation on application of the GSSG.

Grade Determination

The GSSG uses six factors: Program scope and effect, Organizational setting, Supervisory and managerial authority exercised, Personal contacts, Difficulty of typical work directed, and Other conditions. Page 8 of the GSSG indicates that if one level of a factor or element is exceeded but the next higher level is not met, the lower level must be credited.

The appellant has provided information describing the complex mission of the [installation], the challenge of providing administrative support to a research organization, the difficulties encountered in dealing with the complex and sometimes conflicting environmental regulations of the [states], and the size and importance of the agriculture sector to the economies of the [states]. As noted earlier, we are obliged by law to classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guides. Therefore, we have been able to consider this information only insofar as it is relevant in comparing the appellant's work to that described in the various factors of the GSSG. Within these constraints, we have considered the information as fully as possible. Specifically, we have considered many of these issues explicitly in our discussion of factors 1, 3, 4, and 6 below. Other issues we deal with implicitly in our discussion of factors 2 and 5 below. For example, Factor 2 awards points based on the level of the position's direct supervisor. In the appellant's case, we will award Level 2-3 (the highest level available in the GSSG) reflecting the appellant's direct reporting relationship to a position in the Senior Executive Service (SES). The fact that the appellant reports to a position in the SES and the resulting relatively high point award is an implicit measure of the complexity of the appellant's program. Similarly, the award of a GS-12 level of base work under Factor 5 implicitly recognizes the complex nature of the programs directed by the appellant.

Factor 1, Program scope and effect

This factor contains two elements: Scope and Effect. We discuss each below.

Scope

The appellant's position fully meets and somewhat exceeds Level 1-2 criteria. As expected at Level 1-2, the appellant directs administrative and technical work. The appellant's position exceeds Level 1-2 criteria in that the [installation] West Area is larger than the typical agency field or area office described by the guide at Level 1-2.

The scope of the appellant's work meets Level 1-3 in some respects. For instance, the work directed has geographic coverage that encompasses a small region of several states. However, Level 1-3 is not fully met. The general factor level descriptions and their accompanying illustrations indicate that to meet Level 1-3, geographic coverage must be accompanied by a minimum total population serviced directly and significantly by the supervisor's organization. For instance, the first Level 1-3 illustration on page 12 of the GSSG discusses an organization that directly and significantly services a total population that is the equivalent of a group of citizens or businesses in several rural counties, a small city, or a portion of a larger metropolitan area. The appellant's organization directly and significantly services the roughly 1,300 employees of the [installation]. This population is far smaller than that of several rural counties, a small city, or a portion of a larger metropolitan area.

There is an alternative criterion for meeting Level 1-3. This involves providing complex administrative, technical, or professional services that directly and significantly affect a large or complex multimission military installation. The appellant's position falls short of this alternative criterion. In determining whether the [installation] is comparable to a multimission military installation we consulted the definition of a multimission military installation provided on page 4 of the GSSG. By definition, a multimission military installation involves either the support of a serviced population in excess of 4,000, or four or more of the following activities: a garrison; a medical center or large hospital and medical laboratory complex; multimillion dollar (annual) construction, civil works, or environmental cleanup projects; a test and evaluation center or a research laboratory of moderate size; an equipment or product development center; a service school; a major command; a supply or maintenance depot; or equivalent activities (see pages 4-5 of the GSSG). The appellant's position provides direct support to a population well below 4,000. The [installation] is comparable to a research laboratory of moderate size. However, the appellant's position does not provide administrative service to activities equivalent to four or more of those listed above.

The scope of work directed somewhat exceeds Level 1-2 but falls short of Level 1-3. As noted earlier, if one level of a factor or element is exceeded but the next higher level is not fully met, the lower level must be credited. The appellant's position is properly evaluated at Level 1-2 for Scope.

Effect

The appellant's position meets and somewhat exceeds Level 1-2 criteria. As expected at Level 1-2, the appellant's subordinate organization provides products and services that significantly affect office operations. The appellant's position exceeds Level 1-2 criteria in that the [installation] is larger than the area office expected at Level 1-2.

Level 1-3 criteria are not met. At Level 1-3 the work directly and significantly impacts a wide range of agency (i.e., Department of Agriculture) activities, the work of other agencies, or the operations of outside interests, or the general public. The appellant's subordinate organization

provides administrative service to the employees of the [installation]. The work directly affects the employees and managers of the [installation]. The work generally does not have a direct and significant impact on Department of Agriculture activities, the work of other agencies, the operation of outside interests, or the general public.

Level 1-3 may also be met by providing administrative service to a large complex multimission organization. For the reasons stated under Scope above, the [installation] is not equivalent to a complex multimission organization as this term is defined in the GSSG.

Since the effect of work directed by the appellant somewhat exceeds Level 1-2 but falls short of Level 1-3, it must be evaluated at Level 1-2 for Effect.

With both Scope and Effect evaluated at Level 1-2, Level 1-2 is proper for Factor 1 overall.

Factor 2, Organizational setting

The appellant's position is properly evaluated at Level 2-3. As discussed at that level, his position is accountable to a position in the Senior Executive Service (SES). Level 2-3 is the highest level described in the GSSG.

Factor 3, Supervisory and managerial authority exercised

The appellant's authority is properly evaluated at Level 3-3b. To meet this level, a supervisor must exercise all or nearly all of the supervisory responsibilities described at Level 3-2c, plus at least eight of the 15 responsibilities listed under Level 3-3b. The information of record shows that the appellant exercises all ten of the supervisory responsibilities described at Level 3-2c. The appellant also exercises at least 11 of the 15 responsibilities listed under Level 3-3b. Specifically, his PD indicates that he carries out at least responsibilities 1 through 3, 5 through 9, and 13 through 15. Level 3-3b is fully met.

Level 3-4 is not met. Level 3-4 requires either the exercise of delegated authority to oversee the overall planning, direction, and timely execution of a program; or the exercise of final authority for the full range of personnel actions and organization design proposals recommended by subordinate supervisors (see page 19 of the GSSG). The appellant's subordinate organization does not reach the level of a program as this term is defined by the GSSG. A program is defined as applying the essential purpose for the establishment and continuing existence of an agency (see page 5 of the GSSG). Provision of administrative support for the [installation] of the ARS does not go to the essential purpose for the establishment and continuing existence of the Department of Agriculture (the term "agency" as used in the GSSG applies to the department level; see page 3 of the GSSG).

In the past several years, the appellant has not regularly exercised final authority both to implement significant organization design proposals and also to take the full range of personnel

actions. Among the reasons for this are the following. The appellant's subordinate organization has remained essentially unchanged in its basic organization for a number of years. This basic organization is along traditional administrative lines (e.g., budget and fiscal, personnel, procurement, real estate, computer support, support services, safety and health, engineering), is similar to the organization of comparable administrative offices in other ARS areas, and mirrors the functional organization of ARS headquarters. Level 3-4 criteria are not fully met.

Factor 3 is properly evaluated at Level 3-3.

Factor 4, Personal contacts

This factor contains two subfactors: Nature of contacts and Purpose of contacts. We discuss each subfactor below.

Subfactor 4A, Nature of contacts

The nature of the appellant's contacts warrants Level 4A-3. As described at that level, the appellant has frequent contacts with high ranking managers throughout the [installation]; staff at ARS headquarters; staff at other Federal agencies like GSA and OPM; and trade groups, universities, and agricultural associations.

The appellant's contacts fall short of Level 4A-4. The record indicates that unlike supervisors at Level 4A-4, the appellant does not frequently contact key staff of congressional committees; elected or appointed representatives of state and local governments; journalists of major metropolitan, regional, or national media; or other individuals fully equivalent in level and importance. For this level to be credited, preparation would typically need to include briefing packages or similar presentation materials, extensive analytical input by the employee and subordinates, or the assistance of a support staff.

Subfactor 4B, Purpose of contacts

The purpose of the appellant's contacts warrants Level 4B-3. Here we disagree with the agency evaluation at Level 4B-2. While the evidence in the Purpose of Contacts section of the appellant's PD is not explicit, we find that the nature of the appellant's work, the range of assignments, the competition for resources, and the inherent controversy encountered in the areas documented in the Major Duties section of his PD indicate that as is characteristic at Level 4B-3, a purpose of his contacts is to justify, defend, or negotiate in representing his subordinate organization, in obtaining or committing resources, and in gaining concurrence with required and proposed administrative actions. As discussed at Level 4B-3, his contacts involve active participation in formal meetings involving problems or issues of considerable importance to his subordinate organization.

At Level 4B-4 the purpose of contacts is to persuade persons to take actions related to the fundamental goals and objectives of the program under direction, or involve the commitment of major resources, when intense opposition is encountered. At Level 4B-4 persons contacted are fearful, skeptical, or uncooperative. The appellant's position does not meet these Level 4B-4 criteria.

Factor 5, Difficulty of typical work directed

The appellant supervises roughly 32 nonsupervisory positions engaged in the mission oriented work of his unit. Of these 32 positions, eight are graded at GS-12 (the highest nonsupervisory grade present in the appellant's subordinate organization). For purposes of this evaluation, we accept the agency's classification of all positions supervised by the appellant. We find that GS-12 represents at least 25 percent of the workload of the appellant's subordinate organization. With the highest level of base work evaluated at GS-12, the appellant's position warrants Level 5-7 (see page 24 of the GSSG). Neither the appellant nor the agency disagrees.

Factor 6, Other conditions

The appellant's position meets the criteria of Level 6-4a. As expected at that level, he supervises administrative work of at least GS-11 difficulty. His position also meets each of the five examples listed under 6-4a.

The GSSG provides three descriptions of work that meets Level 6-5 (see paragraphs a., b., and c. on pages 28 and 29). The appellant's position does not fully meet any of these three descriptions.

The appellant directly supervises three GS-12 general engineers, one GS-12 industrial hygienist, one GS-12 safety and occupational health specialist, one GS-12 realty specialist, and one GS-12 computer programmer analyst. The appellant indirectly supervises one GS-12 contract specialist. Thus, the appellant meets one of paragraph a.'s criteria: supervision of significant administrative work comparable in difficulty to the GS-12 level. However, paragraph a. contains a second criterion: the work must require significant and extensive coordination and integration of a number of important projects or program segments which involve major recommendations which have a direct and substantial effect on the organization managed. The GSSG provides seven illustrations. A position must meet at least three of the seven illustrations in order to warrant Level 6-5a. It is important to recognize that these descriptions apply to the management of the appellant's subordinate organization. This can be confusing because the appellant, by virtue of his position as administrative officer, is an important advisor to management on issues affecting the Pacific West Area as a whole. His duties as an advisor to other managers are not properly credited here, first, because the essential nature of the duties constitute advice rather than decisions and, second, because such advice does not relate to the management of his subordinate organization. The appellant's subordinate organization is relatively stable, with groups of specialized employees performing duties not easily reconfigured. Further, each specialized unit (personnel, procurement, budget, engineering, realty, safety) has headquarters components with

substantial, and often controlling interest in the essential manner in which the work is performed. Thus, while the appellant has great influence over the day-to-day work of his unit, and the recommendations his subordinates supply in response to specific cases, the nature and lines of authority for field administrative functions allow little ability for the appellant to engage in the major changes and restructuring discussed in any of the seven illustrations. We find that the appellant's position meets none of the seven illustrations supplied on page 28. The criteria of Level 6-5a are not met.

Level 6-5b assumes that the difficulty of the work supervised is GS-13. The appellant's organization includes no nonsupervisory GS-13 positions. The criteria of Level 6-5b are not met.

Level 6-5c includes positions that manage work through subordinate supervisors who each direct substantial workloads comparable to the GS-11 level. The appellant's subordinate organization includes two full supervisory positions, the Budget and Accounting Officer and the Supervisory Procurement Analyst. The Budget and Accounting Officer supervises one GS-9, one GS-7, and 3 GS-6 positions. The substantial nonsupervisory workload of the budget and fiscal unit cannot exceed GS-9. The Supervisory Procurement Analyst supervises one GS-12, two GS-11, 3 GS-9, and four positions graded at GS-7 and below. A substantial workload is generally defined as at least 25 percent. The one GS-12 position does not represent a substantial workload. GS-11 does. Level 6-5c requires that subordinate supervisors *each* direct substantial workloads comparable to GS-11. In this case, we find that one subordinate supervisor does supervise substantial work at the GS-11 level, and the other does not. The criteria of Level 6-5c are not met.

We note that most of the GS-12 and GS-11 nonsupervisory positions in the appellant's organization report directly to him. These direct reports are properly considered under Level 6-5a, as we have above. Level 6-5c considers only work managed through subordinate supervisors.

While the appellant's position meets, and in some respects exceeds Level 6-4 criteria, Level 6-5 criteria are not fully met. Therefore, the appellant's position warrants Level 6-4.

Summary

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

Factor	Level	Points
1. Program scope and effect	1-2	350
2. Organizational setting	2-3	350
3. Supervisory and managerial authority exercised	3-3	775
4. Personal Contacts		
4A. Nature of contacts	4A-3	75
4B. Purpose of contacts	4B-3	100
5. Difficulty of typical work directed	5-7	930
6. Other conditions	6-4	1,120
Total points:		3,700

The 3,700 total points fall within the GS-14 range (3,605 to 4,050) of the point-to-grade conversion chart on page 31 of the GSSG. The adjustment conditions on page 32 do not apply. Therefore, the final grade of the appellant's position is GS-14.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Administrative Officer, GS-341-14. The agency is responsible for deciding whether the appellant should be GM, in accordance with section 531.202(e) of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.