

Position Classification Standard for Social Services Series, GS-0187

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SERIES DEFINITION

This series includes positions which require application of specialized program knowledge and service skills in providing assistance to individuals and families served by social welfare programs. This work involves such functions as obtaining selected background information through interviews and home visits, establishing eligibility to make use of agency resources, helping individuals identify needs that are related to services the agency can provide, explaining and encouraging the use of agency and community resources as means of dealing with identified problems, and making appropriate referrals to sources of additional help. These functions may be performed either (a) in conjunction with professional social work or (b) in conformity with agency procedural instructions and standards of service. Although these positions require a specialized knowledge of the social service program, they do not require a broad theoretical approach to social problems acquired through professional education in social work or in other recognized disciplines in the social sciences.

The fly sheet for this series, which was issued in June 1964, is rescinded.

EXCLUSIONS

Excluded from this series are:

1. Positions of professional administrators concerned with Federal participation in and support of social welfare and insurance programs of State, local communities, and voluntary organizations. (See the [Social Insurance Administration Series, GS-0105](#)).
2. Positions that involve professional social work. (See the [Social Work Series, GS-0185](#).)
3. Positions of vocational counselors and other specialists or consultants to whom agency clients are referred for specific services. (See the appropriate technical or professional series.)
4. Positions of social scientists engaged in providing professional correctional treatment to inmates of penal and correctional institutions. (See the [Social Science Series, GS-0101](#).)
5. Positions involving performance of clerical work in support of social service activities, such as posting information to case records and maintaining control files, payroll operations related to issuing assistance checks, correspondence service, receptionist duties, and the like. (See the appropriate clerical series.)
6. Positions involving quasi-legal work in developing, examining, adjusting, adjudicating, reconsidering or authorizing the settlement of claims. (See the appropriate claims examining series.)

7. Positions involving investigative work in connection with alleged or suspected violations of criminal or other statutes of the United States. (See the appropriate investigating series.)
8. Positions involving any combination of work related to social welfare when such work does not require application of specialized service skills. (See the appropriate technical or administrative series.)

GENERAL STATEMENT ON USE OF THE SERIES

The following explanation deals with the reasons for establishing the Social Service Series, GS-0187. To be aware of them will make it easier for readers to understand and make use of the series.

Until recently, occupational standards for positions in Federal employment defined all social service as one occupation, but made distinctions in the level of skill and knowledge required to work in different programs. Positions in a family service program required full professional qualifications in social work, for example, but positions in a program of service to inmates of penal and correctional institutions did not require comparable professional background. Historical patterns in the development of the occupation had contributed to these differences in treatment, but a factfinding study indicated that current needs were not being accurately reflected.

Some positions were found to require a high level of theoretical knowledge in any agency setting, and every agency recognized that its program needed to include professional services. On the other hand, a continuing shortage of social workers created staffing problems for agencies with historically professional settings, and it was becoming generally recognized that some of the work traditionally assigned to professional social workers could be performed by carefully selected employees who were trained by the agency.

To conform to present staffing needs, separate series have been established (a) for positions requiring professional social workers and (b) for positions in a second career line of social services requiring program knowledges and service skills. Both kinds of positions may be used in the social welfare program of any agency.

AUTHORIZED TITLES

Social Service Representative is the authorized title for positions in which there is direct responsibility for providing assistance and services on a regular continuing basis in assignments planned for that purpose.

Social Work Associate is the authorized title for positions that involve providing similar assistance and services as prescribed for individual cases by professional social workers in conjunction with professional treatment.

COVERAGE OF THE STANDARD

The Social Service Series, GS-0187 covers positions that require application of specialized program knowledge and skill in performing authorized services provided in connection with a program of social services, such as a program of child welfare, public assistance, family service, etc.

While the series includes positions in a variety of programs in different agencies, this standard relates specifically to positions of social service representatives in the public assistance program of the Department of Public Welfare of the District of Columbia. However, the information on grade levels characteristic of such assignments provides a basis for evaluating work of equivalent difficulty in other kinds of positions in the Social Service Series.

This standard describes only the levels for nonsupervisory positions in the program covered, i.e., GS-5, 7, 8 and 9. Patterns of assignment in other programs may result in a different grade-level pattern. Supervisory positions are evaluated by reference to the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#).

OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Social welfare programs have in common a number of objectives that involve helping individuals and families. The purpose which distinguishes a public assistance program from other social welfare programs (e.g., child welfare and family services) is that it provides eligible needy persons with supplementary income sufficient to enable them to obtain the necessities of life on a level of decency and health. Economic need is the basic eligibility consideration.

Public assistance standards define basic necessities and set maximum allowances for food, clothing, and personal or household needs. Verified expenses are allowable up to these maximums under various specified conditions. Circumstances may justify such contingent items as transportation and health services. Regulations also provide standard procedures to be used in determining an applicant's income and making the required verification of his resources. Resources include such items as statutory benefits, contributions of relatives, cash reserves, and resources in kind. The applicant's total allowable requirements are itemized by the public assistance agency and are used to measure the adequacy of his total available resources, calculate his assistance needs, and authorize grants.

In addition to the basic eligibility factor of verified need, an individual must also meet the specific eligibility requirements of the program category under which he applies. These requirements range from a few readily verified circumstances for the categories of the aged and the blind, to relatively complex and involved requirements and limitations on conditions of

eligibility for aid to families with dependent children, including intangible family circumstances and relationships that may be difficult to verify.

To supplement direct financial aid, public assistance programs provide other forms of assistance in appropriate cases to help recipients become more self-sufficient, such as vocational guidance and training to increase employment potential of unskilled persons; or homemaker practice training classes to help mothers improve methods of home and family care. A variety of agency and community resources can be made use of in appropriate cases in order to help individuals and families achieve increased independence, self-care, and self-support and improved care and supervision of home and children. Explaining these resources and encouraging recipients of assistance to make appropriate use of them is a common form of service, as described in more detail in the following discussion of the work of social service representatives.

BASIS OF ASSIGNMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES

The line between the duties and responsibilities of social service representatives and those of professional social workers is not always a clear one because many of the same tasks are performed in both positions but with different insights and a different basis of judgment. Positions in the [Social Work Series, GS-0185](#), may involve performance of tasks similar to work performed by incumbents of positions in this series, but such tasks are incidental to professional casework. On the other hand, work in the Social Service Series, GS-0187, is performed for its immediate value as service and is typically limited to problems that do not require application of professional knowledges and insights of the behavioral sciences or the professional methods of social work practice.

The distinction between behavioral problems that require professional diagnosis and treatment and environmental problems that respond to specialized services is not well defined. Individuals who face serious problems of deprivation may be unable to handle themselves and their lives as well as they could under more hopeful circumstances. Such individuals may achieve improved social adjustments when their obvious deprivation problems are reduced. However, when a case is assigned to a social service representative, the purpose of the service is to help the individual find solutions to overt needs rather than to resolve personality problems. If such problems seem to be interfering with the person's ability to make use of available help, professional casework may be indicated and the social service representative is expected to make the necessary arrangements for such professional assistance.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES

The work of the social service representative deals with the combined economic and related needs of individuals assigned to him for service and both concerns are closely interwoven in his

activities. For simplicity of presentation, the following discussion divides the services related to public assistance into two categories:

- (1) *Establishing Eligibility for Financial Assistance*, which includes determining economic need and authorizing money payments and contingent items; and
- (2) *Identifying Related Needs and Providing Auxiliary Service*, which includes working with recipients who need and can use other forms of assistance and helping them to make use of any resources available to them to meet these needs.

Establishing eligibility for financial assistance

This involves meeting and talking to people who come to the agency to ask for help, explaining eligibility criteria, discussing needs, determining whether the applicant is eligible to receive assistance, establishing the kind and amount of assistance, and verifying periodically that an individual continues to be an eligible recipient.

A major problem in determining whether an applicant is eligible for assistance is the difficulty of developing information on which to base the decision. The public assistance agency serves only the most disadvantaged people. It must reach many who are not informed, articulate, or well equipped to deal with the technicalities of eligibility requirements.

The social service representative must work effectively with applicants who often do not know the answers to questions that affect eligibility and help them get the necessary information from other sources to develop a basis for decision as to what assistance can be offered. He must make every effort to achieve mutual understanding with the applicant and gain his active cooperation in exploring the facts of his case. He explains the basis of the assistance and makes applicants aware of their responsibility to report facts that could affect eligibility.

After a grant has been authorized, the social service representative reviews each recipient's case with him at regular intervals to verify that continuing eligibility exists or to make necessary adjustments. Whenever there is a determination of ineligibility, either initially, or when financial assistance is discontinued, he advises the person involved of the reason and of other resources available to him.

Identifying related needs and providing auxiliary services

Many recipients of assistance can never become economically self-sufficient. In some conditions of dependency such as old age or permanent and total disability, the role of wage earner is precluded. The auxiliary services performed by a social service representative involve helping these recipients work toward reasonable goals of independence and solve problems related to dependency. In some cases this may only be increased participation in community life for the aged or increased self-care for the physically handicapped.

Routine services performed for various recipients usually include giving needed information and advice on such matters as use of subsidized school lunches, well baby clinics, home management aids, adult education classes, health services, etc., and encouragement to make appropriate use of them.

More individualized services may involve planned work with individuals who can make use of specialized counseling, vocational guidance and training, or other resources within the agency or the community in order to attain increased economic independence and achieve other improvements in their way of living, or to prevent or lessen deterioration.

To remain eligible for financial assistance, some recipients must accept recommended treatment or training which will make it possible for them to regain or increase their earning capacity. For example, some individuals with handicaps and disabilities are expected to keep appointments and follow through with suitable plans for medical treatment and vocational training. It is the responsibility of the social service representative to exhaust all reasonable means of obtaining the individual's cooperation in following recommended treatment. If the recipient refuses treatment or fails to follow through with the service plan, the social service representative refers the case to the professional staff together with pertinent social and medical information.

Service to disabled or handicapped adults with a good employment history and a desire for self-support might include referral for training and help in obtaining employment. For aged persons living in unsafe or hazardous conditions, service might involve enlisting the help of relatives in finding or maintaining safe conditions or providing sheltered care. Services to help a family disrupted by desertion might include the use of specialized agency and community resources to effect reconciliation with the deserting parent or to obtain support. Homemaker or housekeeping services might be provided to make it possible for an individual to continue a good deal of self-care or to remain at home rather than go into an institutional living arrangement or be separated from the family group.

BASIS OF CLASSIFICATION

Two classification factors have been used to evaluate the difficulty, responsibility and qualification requirements of the work described in this standard. They are: (1) *Nature and Range of Assigned Cases* and (2) *Level of Responsibility*.

Nature and range of assigned cases

This factor recognizes differences that are related to the range of cases assigned, the skills and knowledges required to perform the work, the difficulty of personal contacts involved, and the guidelines available in policies and regulations.

Level of responsibility

This factor takes into account the kind of supervision and guidance received and the degree of authority to make decisions that affect individuals and families using assistance.

These factors are not isolated in the grade-level portion of this standard. It would be awkward to treat them separately because within each grade supervision must be related to the difficulty of the service required in different types of cases.

This standard implicitly distinguishes a progression of service requirements in terms of characteristics of cases assigned, as follows:

- Routine service provided in cases involving only relatively limited problems related to eligibility for financial assistance;
- Conventional service provided in cases involving common problems that have well-established patterns of service (e.g., aid to the blind);
- Individualized service provided in cases that require assistance plans based on full consideration of all particulars of the individual situation and the needs involved (e.g., vocational rehabilitation of physically handicapped);
- Concentrated service provided in cases involving complicated problems of serious need that require a flexible program of responsive continuing assistance (e.g., health and welfare of several children in a seriously deprived, fatherless family).

NORMAL ASSIGNMENT PATTERN

For practical administrative reasons the case of any particular individual or family is usually assigned to one social service representative on a continuing basis. The circumstances of the individual or family may change and the problems they face may be reduced or intensified. In general, these changes in circumstances imply changes in assistance needs and service requirements. Such developments may be serious enough to require reassignment of the case for special service or professional casework. Usually, they can be accommodated without reassigning the case by modifying the kind and amount of supervision and the authority to make decisions.

The following example illustrates the progression in independence of decision normally expected at the different grade levels in dealing with an individual case in which changing circumstances alter service requirements.

(Note: The case used for illustration is not intended to exemplify a particular level of complexity. Cases cannot be conclusively categorized as to level, since the complexity of any particular case may increase or decrease over a period of time. The classification of any social service representative position should be based on an evaluation of the total assignment in terms of the difficulty and responsibility factors discussed in the grade-level descriptions in this standard.)

Illustration

During the first phase of this hypothetical case the father is temporarily disabled by an injury and the family is making constructive use of financial assistance and requires only the usual related services. Responsibility for the case might be carried by a GS-7 or a GS-8 employee.

For purposes of this illustration, it is assumed that the service requirements of the case change appreciably because medical complications develop that make the father's condition more serious and indicate long-term disability. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the social service representative to help the family deal with problems resulting from this longer term disablement of the father.

In these circumstances, a GS-8 social service representative would proceed on his own initiative to review the medical facts and the financial and other implications of the situation with the family. He would help the family make plans to deal with the longer term disablement and reach a tentative understanding as to how agency and community resources could best be used to help the family. In these same circumstances, a GS-7 employee would perform similar work with the family, but he would not proceed on his own initiative; he would follow his supervisor's advice and guidance at the outset of the appreciable change and throughout the case thereafter as to how to help the family deal with the situation most effectively. The GS-7 social service representative would receive substantial guidance in developing a plan of assistance and service.

The supervisor would give close guidance and review to all aspects of work with the family. He would ask for frequent reports on the progress of the family and watch for evidence of need to modify the plan of assistance or to reassign the case to a higher level employee for service.

On the other hand, when the appreciable change occurred, the GS-8 employee would be expected to develop a plan of assistance and service, and to discuss this plan with his supervisor. In this instance, the plan might call for use of agency resources in helping the family work toward recovery of the disabled father. After the supervisor approved the plan, the GS-8 employee would not require continuing guidance in working with the family. He would take whatever action might be indicated to help the family carry out the plan based on his own judgment, e.g., explain and interpret the medical diagnosis and prescribed treatment, explain and encourage the use of needed physical therapy, work out plans and make referrals for vocational rehabilitation.

If the family follows the plan, supervision of the GS-8 employee is usually limited to reviewing reports of progress in periodic conferences. However, if the GS-8 social service representative recognized that despite his and the family's efforts serious problems were becoming apparent, he would discuss these developments with the supervisor and ask his advice and guidance. Such a development might be that the father no longer carries out his expressed intentions to take exercise that is imperative for him to recover the use of his body and avoid becoming totally and permanently incapacitated. The social service representative knows that this new trend in the case may signify that the father has lost his will to work towards his own recovery and despairs of recovering. He knows also that this can lead to very serious consequences. The consequences may be a further breakdown in the social and economic well-being of the entire family. He does

not know whether the problem will resolve itself (e.g., father will pass a normal plateau in his progress) or whether this change indicates complications that could require special service or professional casework.

Depending upon the particulars of the case and the alternatives available, the supervisor might (a) give the GS-8 social service representative close supervision and guidance in working with the family, (b) reassign responsibility to a GS-9 social service representative who had demonstrated unusual skill and judgment in working with families confronted by such problems, or (c) refer the case to a social worker for professional assessment of the family's needs.

If the case were assigned to a GS-9 social service representative either at the time of the change in diagnosis or at the point of recognized family difficulty in carrying out plans, (1) the GS-9 employee would need to have the supervisor's approval before putting into action such plans as he considered suitable to help the family cope with the new problems resulting from the father's longer-term disablement, and (2) he would recommend professional casework and provide supporting medical and social information on the case if he found that he was unable to keep the family working effectively toward the father's recovery.

Ordinarily, the GS-8 social service representative handles problems created by changing circumstances of individuals and families he serves, but he receives more supervision and guidance in dealing with unusually serious problems than would be required at grade GS-9.

SOCIAL SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE, GS-0187-05

This is the beginning level of assignment where social service representatives become familiar with the range of applications received, the process of acting on them, the governing regulations and basic procedural guides used in the agency program, and the objectives of interviewing applicants.

The initial period of on-the-job training includes instruction in matters pertaining to conditions of eligibility for each category of authorized assistance, correct application of regulations to specific cases, standards of service, and relationships with other public and voluntary agencies. For their first assignments, new employees are started on the least complicated determinations which require a minimum of development of relevant information and work under continuing close supervision and guidance.

As the GS-5 social service representative demonstrates understanding of basic responsibilities and procedures, routine phases of work are performed with less guidance from the supervisor and more advanced work is assigned for training. He begins to apply policies, procedures, and guides without specific instruction in selected cases of limited difficulty, and recommends action to authorize, revise, continue or discontinue financial assistance.

He performs various functions involved in determination of eligibility, such as interviewing applicants, making telephone and written inquiries to establish needed background information, arranging for medical examinations and being responsible that appointments are kept and results

reported, making home visits to observe conditions, etc. He studies each case assigned, develops pertinent information on applicant's circumstances and needs, maintains records of facts on individual cases, prepares recommendations, and submits required reports. He discusses tentative determinations with the supervisor who reviews conclusions for soundness, and for understanding of individual problems and agency responsibility for service.

Basic functions are usually performed with very little assistance. Closer guidance is received in working with complicated determinations in categories of assistance for which eligibility criteria are involved and difficult to apply. The supervisor is usually available to answer technical questions or take over interviews that require advanced program knowledge and interviewing skill.

SOCIAL SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE, GS-0187-07

At grade GS-7, social service representatives perform the full range of services involved in establishing eligibility for assistance. They make initial and continuing eligibility determinations in all types of cases and authorize grants to those who are eligible. They develop pertinent information through interviews, correspondence, and home visits to support authorization of assistance to eligible individuals or to terminate applications of persons who are ineligible. They are responsible on a continuing basis for conducting regularly scheduled reviews of cases to update information on changes in the recipient's circumstances which affect his needs.

Social service representatives at this level are responsible for initiating action to authorize, revise, continue, or discontinue assistance as appropriate based on the results of reviews of circumstances of recipients. They have continuing responsibility for maintaining contact with an assigned group of individuals receiving assistance in order to develop current factual information on individual cases, initiate correct and timely agency action as required, and keep up-to-date progress records on the cases assigned. Typically, the GS-7 social service representative schedules his work and his time to provide appropriate services in working with the individuals assigned and to meet deadlines for reviews, reports, and referrals. He makes home visits frequently enough to know the family and its members, to keep informed of their circumstances, to help them explore possible solutions to their problems, to give information, advice, and encouragement, and to appraise progress.

In working with individualized problems and needs that are present in his cases, the GS-7 social service representative recommends plans of assistance and service for prior approval of the supervisor. He identifies such problems and discusses the particular circumstances of the individual case with his supervisor to reach agreement on suitable assistance and service. In such cases, the service plan is approved before the GS-7 social service representative proceeds with service activities. He receives technical guidance from the supervisor through regularly scheduled conferences to evaluate progress of cases and adapt the service to changing circumstances.

An example of a specific problem requiring individualized services would be need for appropriate information, advice, referral services, etc., to help a dependent adult recognize and deal with failing health and decreasing ability to care for himself in his present living arrangements.

Occasional responsibility for working with cases that involve complex problems of serious need (i.e., that can have serious consequences for the individual or family using assistance) does not take a position out of this class. However, if such problems arise and the case is not reassigned, the GS-7 social service representative receives continuing close supervision and guidance of all decisions and service activities related to the case.

SOCIAL SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE, GS-0187-08

GS-8 social service representatives work with considerable independence in providing assistance and service in a wide range of cases. Assignments may include cases of individuals and families who are facing serious and complicated problems of deprivation. However, typically positions at grade GS-8 are characterized by continuing responsibility for service decisions affecting a wide range of cases rather than by the presence of responsibility for unusually complex cases.

Positions at this level are distinguished from those at grade GS-7 by additional responsibility for (a) identifying needs and providing individualized assistance and service appropriate to a variety of specific problems in a wide range of cases without prior approval of his supervisor, and (b) developing recommendations for planned use of agency resources and auxiliary services that are appropriate in difficult and complicated cases.

In working with a wide range of cases that involve a variety of individualized problems of a less serious nature, the GS-8 social service representative takes the initiative in developing and implementing an appropriate plan of assistance and service and keeping the supervisor informed of any unusual problems that arise.

Supervision is usually limited to discussing progress of more serious cases in regularly scheduled conferences and a sampling review of case records and reports. If the social service representative is not satisfied with the progress of a case, he brings it to the supervisor's attention and asks for advice. If he thinks the plan should be modified, he proposes appropriate changes and gives the supervisor his reasons.

When he is working with cases that involve complex problems of serious need, the GS-8 employee explores possible solutions with the individuals concerned and recommends plans to his supervisor for suitable programs of supplementary assistance and service. These plans are based on supporting information that the social service representative has developed independently. After proposed plans are discussed and approved, he is responsible for carrying out the services and reporting progress in periodic conferences.

SOCIAL SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE, GS-0187-09

At grade GS-9, assignments of social service representatives are based on recognition of demonstrated superior skill and proven sound judgment in working with serious and complicated assistance problems that do not require professional casework.

Distinguishing characteristics of positions at this grade are (1) assignments which include a preponderance of cases that have been selected for special service because they involve circumstances in which a family using assistance is facing serious problems that require unusual service skill and judgment, and (2) authority to make decisions as to appropriate assistance and service in these very difficult cases on a continuing basis without prior approval of the supervisor.

The GS-9 employee takes the initiative in providing assistance and service and keeping the supervisor informed of the progress of cases assigned to him. The judgment of the GS-9 social service representative is relied upon to plan programs of assistance and service for individuals and families he works with, make continuing appraisals of progress of plans, give sustained effective help and encouragement, and evaluate changes in the family's or individual's situation that may affect assistance planning.

The GS-9 social service representative consults with his supervisor on unusual questions when he wants his conclusions reexamined or when he feels that adequate precedents for a proposed action have not been definitely established. Supervision is received mainly through review of reports and through periodic discussions of progress of assigned cases.