

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



Atlanta Oversight Division
75 Spring Street, SW, Suite 972
Atlanta, GA 30303

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

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Program Support Assistant
GS-303-6

Organization: Department of Veterans Affairs

OPM decision: Budget Assistant (OA)
GS-561-6

OPM decision number: C- 0561-06-01

Kathy W. Day
Classification Appeals Officer
November 4, 1997

Rdrive # 0561068A.AT

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).

Decision sent to:

Veterans Affairs Medical Center
Social Work Service (122)
1601 SW Archer Road
Gainesville, FL 32608-1197

Chief, Personnel Service
Veterans Affairs Medical Center
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Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel and
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Introduction

On August 15, 1997, the Atlanta Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [appellant]. Her position is currently classified as Program Support Assistant, Office Automation (OA), GS-303-6. However, she believes its classification should be Program Support Assistant, (OA), GS-303-7, or Budget Assistant, GS-561-7. The position is located in the Department of Veterans Affairs. We have accepted and decided her appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

To help decide the appeal, an Atlanta Oversight Division representative conducted a telephone audit of the appellant's position on September 25, 1997. The audit included interviews with the appellant, the classifier, and the appellant's immediate supervisor. In reaching our classification decision, we have reviewed the audit findings and all information of record furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official position description (PD) 573-1076.

General issues

The appellant believes that the coordination work of the Contract Community Nursing Homes (CCNH), Multi-State Contract (MSC), Adult Day Health Care (ADHC), and the Homemaker/Home Health Aid (H/HHA) programs requires a high level of budget and accounting skills. According to the appellant, 75 to 80 percent of the work she performs is budget and accounting work, and 20 to 25 percent is spent on clerical assignments. The appellant disagrees with factors 1, 4, 5, and 7 of the GS-561 series, and factors 3, 4, 5, and 7 of GS-525 series evaluation.

Position information

The appellant performs various duties relating to coordinating multiple programs, accounting, and obligating budgetary funds. She works closely with the Fiscal Accounting section and her supervisor to maintain all records related to the appropriated funds for the Social Work Service. The appellant coordinates the placement, movement, and follow-up of veterans; checks eligibility for patients; cross checks the accuracy of data in related budget forms; prepares budget requests and reviews contracts for accuracy; obligates funds and commits patients through the fee basis program; and prepares quarterly reports. She reviews budget estimates to assure amounts requested are within established ceilings and corrects inconsistent totals, subtotals and individual entries. She extracts and gathers budget data and information from a variety of documents, schedules, files, and reports. She consolidates budget estimates and organizes budget data by appropriation, account, object class and line item code for four programs.

The appellant adjusts figures in budget accounts to reflect changes in amount of funding and monitors the rate and amount of obligations and expenditures. She brings significant trends or deviations to the attention of her supervisor to preclude over-obligation of funds. She provides projected budget reports to management for planning. This involves processing and finalizing payments through the financial system programs, maintaining current figures on expenditures and balances, and maintaining accounting programs as control point clerk.

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

Series determination

The agency considered the GS-561 series, GS-525 series, and the GS-303 series. They believe that the nature of the appellant's work is not classifiable in any one series and have placed it in the GS-303 series.

The appellant's position involves the performance of a range of budgetary transactions necessary to record, process, track, and report on funding for four programs. Her position also involves placement of veterans and tracking the cost of individual veteran expenses associated with nursing home and day care, prescriptions and prosthetic equipment, and rehabilitative services. Although the appellant considers her work recording and tracking the veterans' expenses as accounting work, it does not involve the level of knowledge of accounting systems, policies, methods, and procedures typically associated with accounting technician work. We find that the budget duties represent the paramount work of the position and require the highest level of knowledge.

The GS-561 series includes clerical and technical work in support of budget analysis and administration when such work requires primarily knowledge of the procedures which facilitate budgeting as conducted in the Federal Service. The work requires practical understanding and skill in the application of administrative rules, regulations, and procedures associated with recording, reporting, processing, and keeping track of budgetary transactions, e.g., the credit, receipt, transfer, allotment, withdrawal, obligation, or outlay of funds.

Since the position is graded above the GS-4 level, the proper title for the position is Budget Assistant, following the mandatory titling practices specified in the GS-561 standard. The position also requires the skill of a qualified typist and the use of office automation software and equipment. The Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide is used in combination with other standards or guides to evaluate positions classified in other series when office automation duties, which include word processing, are assigned to those positions. In accordance with the titling practices outlined on page 2 of the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide, the parenthetical title, Office Automation (OA), is added to the title of the position.

Title Determination

The appellant's position is properly titled and coded as Budget Assistant (OA), GS-561.

Standard Determination

Budget Clerical and Assistant Series, GS-561, March 1983.

Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide, November 1990.

Grade Determination

The GS-561 standard uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES), which employs nine factors. Under the FES, each factor level description in a standard or guide describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level. Our evaluation with respect to the nine FES factors follows.

Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that a worker must understand to do acceptable work, such as the steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts; and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply this knowledge.

The agency credited Level 1-3; the appellant believes Level 1-4 should be credited.

Level 1-3 requires detailed knowledge of procedures and regulations for the allotment and distribution of funds, and code structures of accounts of assigned activities. Knowledge is used to compare requests for funds with allowable funding limits in selected budgetary documents, and to verify that funds are available for the stated purpose. Knowledge of different object classes and line items is applied in determining where to locate funding information and in adjusting entries to reflect current status of funds in different accounts involving many different object classes and line items within the same appropriation or revolving fund.

The appellant meets Level 1-3. She maintains and monitors budget accounts for four programs. The accounts are for the funding of the Social Work program for the upcoming year. The appellant uses knowledge of budgetary procedures and processes to review, extract and analyze data for budget estimates; obligate and control funds; monitor fund levels and request additional funds; prepare budget reports; and to ensure sub-accounts balance within the budget. She uses knowledge of the accounting classification codes, structures, organizations and programs of the organizations to relate accounting transactions to budget accounts, to ensure obligations and expenditures are accurately reflected in accounts, and to provide information to management.

Level 1-4 knowledge typically includes: regulations which apply to the processing of requests for allotments to cover substantive, mission-oriented programs; procedures for transferring funds between accounts and object classes among different appropriations; requirements for reporting on budget execution; and/or methods for calculating labor costs. Knowledge is used to identify and extract budgetary information from many different source documents (e. g., accounting records, vouchers, job orders, payroll records, cost estimates, utility bills, and appropriations documents) when this requires considering the applicability of the information and the characteristics (e.g., accuracy and reliability) of the sources. Knowledge at this level is also used to compile, consolidate, organize, and summarize information about the budget of the employing organization in annual budget estimates and a variety of one-time and recurring reports.

Level 1-4 is not met. The appellant uses established processes and procedures to maintain budget accounts and to adjust accounts to reflect obligations and expenditures. There is no evidence in the appeal record that the appellant performs research of budget data and information. She extracts budget data and information from a variety of documents, forms or reports to reflect the status of accounts. Although she compiles the budget estimates for the program, the sources of budget data are extracted from documents with figures and costs such as vouchers, contracts, and other documents that are easily verified. The knowledge required of the position does not meet the full intent of Level 1-4.

Level 1-3 is credited for 350 points.

Factor 2, Supervisory Controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility for carrying out assignments, and how completed work is reviewed. The agency credited Level 2-3, and the appellant agrees.

At Level 2-3, the highest level described in the standard, the 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 employee independently plans and carries out the most difficult procedural and technical processing of budgetary transactions covered in available guidelines. The employee makes adjustments to the most complicated appropriated and/or revolving fund (industrially funded) accounts covered by guidelines without reference to the supervisor. At this level, employees may suggest alternative processes and procedures for accomplishing budgetary transactions. Completed work is spot checked by the supervisor or an employee of higher grade for net availability of funds and for overall conformance to budgetary policies, requirements, and procedures. Methods used by the employee in arriving at final balances are rarely reviewed.

The appellant meets Level 2-3 where the 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. She is responsible for independently performing her work based on guidelines, policies, and past experiences. She identifies problems and makes recommendations for potential solutions in resolving budgetary transactions. The supervisor depends on the appellant to maintain the complete budgetary procedures for four different control points. The supervisor approves the obligation and reviews budget reports for overall conformance to budgetary policies and requirements. The methods used for the work are rarely reviewed.

There is nothing in the record to indicate that the appellant exceeds Level 2-3; therefore 2-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used, and the judgment needed to apply to them. The agency credited Level 3-3, and the appellant agrees.

At Level 3-3, the highest level described in the standard, a wide variety of general procedural guidelines for the work are available, but guidelines may not specifically cover all aspects (e.g., documents, forms, adjustments) of the assignment. Guides characteristically include definition of account codes, procedures for obtaining, transferring, and distributing funds, program and financial records, job order logs, OMB and Treasury Department circulars, and agency and organizational reporting forms and procedures. The employee applies a thorough understanding of procedures for the formulation and/or execution of a budget when interpreting and applying guides. In addition, work of this level requires that the employee independently adapt guidelines as necessary to cover new and unusual work situations. This may involve adapting or deviating from procedural instructions to complete assignments with short deadlines; to react to major shifts in program funding; to process transactions for which no clear procedures have been established; and/or to process actions involving conflicting guidelines.

Level 3-3 is met. The appellant's primary budget work involves the procedural processing of budgetary transactions for the CCNH, MSC, ADHC, and the H/HHA programs which are governed by established guidelines. A thorough understanding of procedures for the formulation and/or execution of the budget is required. 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 VA manuals, regulations, directives, and policies that provide definitions of account codes; procedures for obtaining, transferring, and distributing funds, program and financial records; and agency and organizational reporting forms and procedures. She uses judgment to interpret and apply the guidelines and adapt or deviate from the required procedures for specific cases or problems.

There is nothing in the record to indicate that the appellant exceeds Level 3-3; therefore 3-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work. The agency credited Level 4-2; the appellant believes that Level 4-3 should be credited.

At Level 4-2, the employee identifies the appropriate budget accounts, object classes, line items, codes, and activity symbols for job orders, vouchers, cost estimates, funding requests, reimbursements, and/or similar transactions; enters or extracts cost information according to type of transactions (i.e., obligation, expenditure, reimbursements or transfer of funds); and verifies that all necessary procedures have been followed in documenting transactions. Typically, the employee must

recognize the difference between account codes, line items, object classes, and types of transactions (e.g., obligations vs. expenditures, allotments vs. transfers of funds). Actions to be taken involve adjustments to account balances to reflect the effects of budgetary transactions (i.e., gains and losses to accounts). Responses may differ in terms of source documents, types of entries, account codes, number of line items, dollar amounts, or similar characteristics of a clear-cut factual nature.

The appellant meets Level 4-2. The essence of the appellant's work involves budgeting for one type of appropriated fund. The appellant extracts, compiles, verifies, and summarizes budgetary information in related forms and documents furnished by social workers in connection with the budget process. Decisions concerning the processing of requests for allotments require comparing amounts requested with account balances by object class and line item. Decisions require arithmetical calculation of totals, subtotals, and/or percentages when extracting and comparing data from related forms, schedules, and worksheets.

At Level 4-3, assignments involve working with different and unrelated appropriated and/or revolving fund accounts, each of which is subject to different rules, regulations, and procedures. Generally, the assignments also include responsibility for a number of accounts, object classes, and line items of diverse and different nature (e.g., supplies, services, revenue, equipment, contracts, grants, utilities, etc.). Where the work involves preparation of reports, it is often necessary to gather and consolidate information from a wide variety of management and budget documents (e.g., accounting records, payroll records, vouchers, bills, job order files, and workload reports) to prepare a completed report. Decisions concerning the type of information needed or the best source for the information depend upon such variables as the accounts, types of transactions, amounts of funds involved, purposes for which funds are used, and the rules for processing transactions, or the kind of report being prepared. A considerable volume of data may have to be extracted and rearranged, and object class data may have to be interpreted and reorganized to arrive at the desired end product. The work requires the employee to identify and consider financial relationships among the various accounts serviced to locate those factors (e.g., procedures or other requirements) which affect the amount, availability, and use of funds. At this level the employee extracts and arranges budgetary data from a wide variety of forms and records based upon a general knowledge of the purpose or end product for which data is to be used.

The appellant does not meet the full intent of Level 4-3. The work does not involve the complexity of processing, decisions, and transactions used when the work involves different and unrelated appropriated or revolving fund accounts. Her program areas are different but the funds are the same kind of funds subject to same rules and regulations. The appellant's work does not include the intricacy of tasks, steps, and methods as defined at this level.

Level 4-2 for 75 points is credited.

Factor 5, Scope and Effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, as measured by the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization. The agency credited Level 5-2; the appellant believes Level 5-3 should be credited.

At Level 5-2, the employees maintain detailed records of budgetary transactions (e. g., allotments, sub-allotments, obligations, expenditures, reimbursements, and transfers of funds) in the accounts of assigned activities. These records may take the form of ledgers, worksheets, or files which display the current status (i.e., availability and amount) of funds in each account by object class and line item. Work typically involves adjusting account balances to reflect the effects of budgetary transactions. Maintenance of records and worksheets affects the accuracy and reliability of budget estimates, allotments of funds for designated purposes, reports on budget execution, and/or evaluation of budgetary accomplishments and practices of others. Work also affects the timely availability of funds for line or administrative programs. Work may affect the accuracy of budgetary information furnished to program managers, or to fund granting and reviewing officials.

The appellant meets Level 5-2. The appellant is responsible for extracting, verifying, compiling, maintaining and computing a variety of budget data and information for four program accounts; reporting on the status of funds; and assisting the chief in the formulation and execution of the budget for these programs. The purpose of the work is to maintain the control point accounts and to provide accurate budgetary information for the efficient management of the Social Work Service. The work affects the Social Work Service's funding and the ability to perform and accomplish the missions of the organization for the following year.

At Level 5-3, positions are typically found in budget or program offices with responsibility for the overall review, coordination, and consolidation of budgetary activities of subordinate budget or program offices. The purpose of the work is to consolidate, organize, and maintain an extensive system of budgetary information relating to accounts, appropriations, revolving funds, and reporting requirements. Work may also involve resolving procedural problems in the processing of budgetary transactions relating to the appropriation, obligation, reimbursement, or transfer of funds which could not be resolved by clerical personnel at lower levels within the organization. Work affects the quality, quantity, and accuracy of a significant portion of the budgetary data in the organization's records, and may also affect the timely distribution of allotments of funds to subordinate budget and program offices, or the submission of budget estimates covering annual operating expenses of an organization in field or headquarters location.

Level 5-3 is not met. The appellant's work does not involve an extensive system of budgetary information as described at this level or the resolution of problems which other personnel could not resolve. The budget information system maintained by the appellant is best characterized as small to moderate in size, consisting of four control point accounts made up of different sub-accounts and

object classes that cover a single appropriation. There are no lower level budgetary personnel in the activity.

Level 5-2 is credited for 75 points.

Factor 6, Personal Contacts

This factor measures face-to-face contacts and telephone dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. The agency credited Level 6-2, and the appellant agrees.

At Level 6-2, the highest level described in the standard, contacts are with persons in the same Federal agency, but outside the immediate employing organization or office. People contacted are generally engaged in different functions, missions, and kinds of work (e.g., accounting, data processing, budget, program, and/or administrative personnel). Those contacted may be at different echelons within the agency (i.e., field, district, or regional offices; or headquarters level). This level also includes routine contacts with persons engaged in budgetary work in other Federal agencies.

Level 6-2 is met. The appellant has daily contacts with persons in the same Federal agency and outside the immediate employing organization or office. People contacted are generally engaged in different functions, missions, and kinds of work (e.g., accounting, clinical, patients, hospital personnel, and/or administrative personnel). Those contacted may be at different echelons within the agency. This level also includes routine contacts with persons engaged in budgetary work in fiscal and accounting offices in other Federal agencies.

There is nothing in the record to indicate that the appellant exceeds Level 6-2; therefore Level 6-2 is credited for 25 points.

Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts

In General Schedule occupations, the purpose of personal contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, and objectives. The personal contacts which serve as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the contacts which are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6. The agency credited Level 7-1; the appellant believes Level 7-2 should be credited.

At Level 7-1, the purpose of contacts is to obtain, clarify, or provide information concerning the status of funds in budgetary accounts (e.g., allotments, sub-allotments, obligations, and expenditures), and the procedures for obtaining, using, or replacing funds.

The appellant meets Level 7-1. The purpose of the her contacts is to obtain, clarify, or provide information concerning the status of funds in budgetary accounts and the procedures for obtaining, using, or replacing funds.

At Level 7-2, the purpose of contacts is to coordinate and provide advice or instructions on procedures for the preparation, maintenance, and submission of budgetary forms, schedules and reports (e.g., budget estimates, quarterly reports on budget execution, or budget requests). Contacts require persuading others to follow recommended methods, practices, and procedures, and to meet established deadlines.

The appellant's position description does not indicate that she persuades others to follow recommended methods, practices, and procedures, and to meet established deadlines on a regular basis; nor does she advise others on budget preparation.

Level 7-1 for 20 points is credited.

Factor 8, Physical Demands

This factor measures the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee in performing the work assignment, including the agility and dexterity required, and the extent of physical exertion. Neither the appellant nor agency disagree.

The appellant performs work which is sedentary, performed for the most part while seated comfortably at a desk or table. A moderate amount of standing and walking is required when attending meetings and conferences. This compares to Level 8-1, where the work is primarily of a sedentary nature, although the employee may occasionally carry light items such as books, files, and reports from one office to another. Typically, the work is performed while comfortably seated at a desk or table.

Level 8-1 for 5 points is credited.

Factor 9, Work Environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings, and the safety precautions required. Neither the appellant nor agency disagree.

The appellant's work is in an office setting. Her work environment is essentially as described at Level 9-1, where the work is normally performed in an office setting with no unusual risks or discomforts. The work area is properly heated, lighted, and ventilated. Work environment for the appellant's position is properly credited at Level 9-1.

Level 9-1 for 5 points is credited.

SUMMARY		
FACTOR	LEVEL	POINTS
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-3	350
2. Supervisory Controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and Effect	5-2	75
6. Personal Contacts	6-2	25
7. Purpose of Contacts	7-1	20
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
	TOTAL	1105

A total of 1105 points falls within the range for a GS-6, 1105 to 1350 points, in accordance with the grade conversion table on page 4 of the standard.

Evaluation of the Office Automation Work:

The office automation work is evaluated against the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide, which is also written in the FES format. These duties do not impact the grade of the position, therefore, an abbreviated evaluation follows:

FACTOR	LEVEL	POINTS
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-3	350
2. Supervisory Controls	2-2	125
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and Effect	5-1	25
6. Personal Contacts and 7. Purpose of Contacts	1a	30
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
	Total	740

A total of 740 points equates to a GS-4, 655 to 850 points. Therefore, in accordance with the grade conversion table on page 7 of the guide, this part of the appellant's work is graded at GS-4.

The budget work equates to GS-6, and the office automation work equates to GS-4. The budget work is grade controlling, therefore, the position is properly graded at GS-6.

Decision

This position is properly classified as Budget Assistant (OA), GS-561-6.