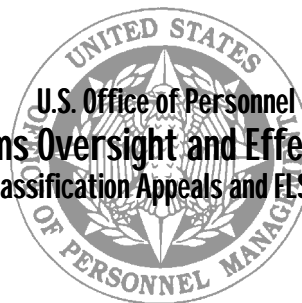


U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and ELSA Programs



Atlanta Oversight Division
75 Spring Street, SW., Room 972
Atlanta, GA 30303

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Social Services Assistant
GS-186-6

Organization: [Army]

OPM decision: Social Services Assistant
GS-186-6

OPM decision number: C-0186-06-01

Kathy W. Day
Classification Appeals Officer

Date: 9/30/98
rd# 0186061

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:

[Appellant's Union Representative]

[Appellant's Personnel Office]

Director of Civilian Personnel
U.S. Department of the Army
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Washington, DC 20310-0300

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Introduction

On June 17, 1998, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted an appeal for the position of Social Services Assistant, GS-186-6, [organization location]. The appellant is requesting that her position be changed to GS-8.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.). This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart F, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

General issues

The appellant believes the duties in her current position description, Social Services Assistant, GS-186-6, are identical to duties in the Lead Social Services Assistant, GS-186-8, position. She believes that her position should be classified at grade GS-8 also. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding her appeal.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to Position Number 98155. The appellant and her supervisor have certified the accuracy of the position description.

The primary purpose of the appellant's position is to assist the Relocation Assistance Manager in administering the Relocation Assistance Program (RAP) which serves members from all military branches, guard and reserve components, and all Department of Defense (DoD) personnel on detached or independent assignment away from military installations.

She provides comprehensive relocation-oriented briefings for military personnel and their families (in both group and one-on-one situations) which include issues such as entitlements, financial preparedness, spouse employment, cost of living, cultural adjustment, etc. She develops, maintains, and distributes the installation's welcome packet which provides information on community characteristics and services, employment, housing and medical facilities, education, and other information unique to the location. The appellant develops, coordinates, and provides sponsorship training to assist units in the development of unit sponsors; works with the youth sponsorship program; develops and implements specialized family services for bicultural families separated from the military sponsor due to duty requirements; provides services to families awaiting return of the military sponsor from unaccompanied tour; and coordinates and administers the installation's voting assistance program. She trains and directs the day-to-day efforts of volunteers who perform duties in support of the program. She also plans and implements the Standard Installation Topic Exchange Services (SITES) by receiving, checking, and assembling information for input into the computer system, making minor modifications, and performing searches as required. She collects and analyzes data for reporting purposes and prepares reports requested by higher headquarters.

The appellant works under the general supervision of the Community and Family Services Officer who provides overall objectives. A Lead Social Services Assistant is available to provide advice and guidance on controversial or unprecedented matters, however, the appellant manages her day-to-day responsibilities independently. The work is evaluated in terms of soundness of recommendations, research, adequacy, innovativeness and responsiveness of services provided.

Series determination

The agency placed the appellant's position in the GS-186 series. The appellant does not disagree with that determination.

The GS-186 series covers nonprofessional positions in support of counseling, guidance, and related social services work in social, employment assistance, or similar programs. The persons served by the programs may be individuals or families in the community or individuals in an institution, dormitory, or other Government facility. Duties may range from work that involves group leadership and giving practical guidance on day-to-day activities to residents in a Government facility to work that involves giving unemployed adults information and assistance on community job training or employment opportunities. The work requires skill in communicating effectively and working constructively with members of the group involved. The work also requires a practical knowledge of program requirements and procedures, and a practical understanding of some of the more routine methods and techniques of counseling. This series covers support positions in those programs where the emphasis is primarily on social or economic assistance, or nonprofessional counseling services.

The appellant provides information and guidance to military individuals and families on a variety of subjects associated with relocation including spouse employment opportunities, housing and medical facilities in the area, cost of living, community characteristics, etc., as well as referral information on community resources as needed. She provides information in briefings for groups or on an individual basis. The appellant's duties are most like those found in the GS-186 series.

The appellant's position is properly placed in series GS-186.

Title determination

For positions in grades GS-5 and above, the appropriate title is *Social Services Assistant*.

Standard determination

Social Services Aid and Assistance Series, GS-186, October 1982.

Equal Opportunity Assistance Series, GS-361, November 1980.

Social Services Series, GS-187, February 1965.

Grade determination

The GS-186 series does not include grade level criteria. The standard instructs that positions in this one-grade interval series should be classified by reference to the classification standard for the Equal Opportunity Assistance Series, GS-361, which is also a one-grade interval series. Users are also advised to consult the position classification standard for the Social Services Series, GS-187, as a secondary source.

Grade determination by reference to the Equal Opportunity Assistance Series:

The standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under the FES, positions are placed in grades on the basis of their duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required as evaluated in terms of nine factors common to nonsupervisory General Schedule positions.

A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor-level descriptions in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor levels. For a position factor to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor-level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor-level description in the standard, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect which meets a higher level. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

Under FES, positions which significantly exceed the highest factor level or fail to meet the lowest factor level described in a classification standard must be evaluated by reference to the Primary Standard, contained in Appendix 3 of the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards. The Primary Standard is the "standard-for-standards" for FES.

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 1-4.

Level 1-4 includes knowledge of a body of technical regulations and procedures and skill in applying them in a wide variety of situations. This level is typically characterized by an intensive knowledge of rules, operating procedures, and practices and the ability to apply this knowledge to many different kinds of conditions or factual situations. This knowledge is used to identify relevant information, select a course of action, or to provide advice, assistance or counseling.

Level 1-5 includes a thorough and detailed practical knowledge of a complex body of regulations, procedures, or precedent decisions in order to apply them in specific situations and answer complex

technical questions. This level also requires skill in fact finding and analysis to identify relevant information. This typically involves determining information needed, determining appropriate sources to solve the problem or answer the question, interviewing persons and reviewing documents, determining when enough information has been collected, comparing facts with principles and writing a summary.

Level 1-4 is met. The appellant provides advice and assistance to military personnel and their families concerning various aspects of relocating. She assesses the facts of the particular situation when providing one-on-one assistance and determines what information to provide and what regulations and procedures are appropriate, e.g., entitlement regulations so a soldier knows how much money he will have available for his move, what resources are available for child care overseas and who should be contacted for assistance, etc. The appellant must recognize when outside resource referrals are appropriate for a particular situation, e.g., counseling for spouse unusually stressed by move or financial counseling. She relies on a number of DoD regulations, operating procedures, past practices and experience to determine the correct course of action.

Level 1-5 is not met. This level deals with a level of technical complexity and degree of fact finding not present in the appellant's position. The issues for which the appellant must provide information and assistance are limited to those associated with relocation. Much of the information provided to and needed by the appellant's clients is standard in nature or readily available. There are a number of given facts about the appellant's client population that are pre-established since they are coming to her for a very specific reason, as well as standard orders and documents they bring with them. While she must be able to recognize when clients should be referred to additional outside resources or need a specific type of information they are not aware they need, she is not required to conduct the depth of fact finding and interviewing nor is she routinely required to analyze the kind of technically complicated situations intended at this level.

Level 1-4 is credited for 550 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.

At Level 2-3, the highest level described in the standard, the supervisor makes assignments by defining objectives and setting deadlines, and assists the employee with unusual problems which do not have clear precedents. The employee plans and carries out the successive steps, and handles problems and deviations in the work assignment in accordance with instructions, policies, previous training, or accepted practices in the program in which employed.

Level 2-3 is met. The appellant's supervisor establishes the overall program objectives; however, the appellant is responsible for independently carrying out her daily duties, keeping the supervisor

informed of activities or situations occurring in the program area as she determines necessary. The Lead Social Services Assistant and the supervisor are available to assist with unusual problems if the appellant requests help.

Level 2-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 3 - Guidelines:

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used, and the judgment needed to apply them. The agency credited Level 3-2.

At Level 3-2, guidelines consist of numerous oral and written office procedural guides that tell what to do and how to do a job. These guides are clearly applicable to most work situations. The employee uses judgment in selecting the appropriate guide or instruction to fit the circumstances or in selecting an alternative means of getting answers and information.

At Level 3-3, the guidelines consist of oral and written office procedural manuals, technical manuals, and a variety of technical instructions governing the program. The guides are typically general in nature or do not cover many areas of the work performed. Judgment is required to decide which guide applies to a particular situation or to apply general principles to specific situations. The employee uses discretion in deciding on the appropriate courses of action.

Level 3-2 is met. The appellant uses a number of Federal and DoD regulations, rules, mission statements, procedures, and precedent decisions. These guidelines generally provide specific instructions concerning services to be offered and procedures to follow. Because of the limited program area, the guidelines, manuals, regulations, etc., are somewhat similar in nature. The appellant must exercise judgment in determining what guidelines apply to specific situations. In some cases, e.g., the bicultural program, the guidelines provide minimum requirements but the appellant is free to enhance and expand the program.

Level 3-3 is not met. This level entails using policies, precedents, and practices which more often than not are not completely applicable to the work because of the problem solving and complicated nature of the assignments or are not specific and which deal with matters relating to judgment and relative priorities rather than with procedural concerns. The appellant's client interviews are primarily to elicit specific factual information and to provide specific factual information or to make referrals to other resources where specialized help can be provided. Unlike this level, the appellant has many applicable guidelines and precedent cases to aid in her decision making.

Level 3-2 is credited for 125 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.

At Level 4-2, assignments are typically to solve routine problems of limited complexity, gather and provide factual information, or perform tasks in support of higher level specialists. Problems are of limited complexity because the facts are few in number, clear, undisputed, closely related to one another, and obtainable from a few sources. Problems are routine in that similar analyses and conclusions are regularly performed in the same or similar office or organization.

At Level 4-3, employees typically perform complete assignments or segments of large projects involving different and unrelated processes and methods. Assignments are usually to solve complex problems having interrelated facts, facts obtainable from a variety of sources, some disputed facts or ambiguous conditions, and one or more related issues. Problems generally are composed of many smaller problems and several cause and effect relationships. Decisions regarding what needs to be done require the employee to determine the relevance and importance of a large number of facts or questions and to make generalizations based on facts, conditions, and program requirements. The correct course of action must be chosen from many alternatives, and the employee applies a variety of accepted fact finding techniques and analytical methods.

Level 4-2 is met. The appellant's program area is limited to a narrow range of topics associated with relocation. The information she provides covers particular subject matter areas associated with relocation but which may vary in specific data because of different geographical locations involved or particular client situations. She provides factual information that is readily available, although sometimes time-consuming to obtain, and the problems she handles are normally not of a complex nature. The information she obtains from clients is primarily factual, limited to various aspects of their personal relocation situation which includes elements commonly associated with most relocation situations, and is undisputed.

Level 4-3 is not met. The appellant's work methods and processes, as well as the assignments she handles, are more standardized than typically found at this level. The facts with which she deals are related to one overall area, i.e., relocation, and are not of the complex, ambiguous nature described at Level 4-3.

Level 4-2 is credited for 75 points.

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 5-3.

At Level 5-3, the highest level described in the standard, the work requires treating a variety of routine problems or situations in conformance with established criteria. The work product typically affects specific record keeping or procedural practices, timeliness, or resolution of problems.

Level 5-3 is met. The appellant typically provides information and assistance to clients who are relocating to another geographical area or are coming into the area served by her. The questions and problems she handles and the information she provides are generally routine in nature and conform to specified program criteria, i.e., the SITES information, travel regulations, entitlements, housing, etc. Her work impacts family readiness and quality of life issues as she resolves problems or prevents potential problems associated with relocation.

Level 5-3 is credited for 150 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 6-3. We believe Level 6-2 is correct. The Primary Standard must be referenced in addition to the GS-361 standard to completely understand the differences between Levels 6-2 and 6-3.

At Level 6-2, as described in the Primary Standard, personal contacts are with members of the same agency but outside the immediate organization and/or members of the general public in a moderately structured setting. For example, the contacts generally are established on a routine basis, usually at the employee's work place. The exact purpose of the contact may be unclear at first. Typical of contacts at this level are those with persons seeking information where procedures must be explained.

At Level 6-3, the highest level described in the standard, personal contacts are with persons from outside the employing agency, and they include persons being interviewed. The Primary Standard further describes this level as including contacts which are not established on a routine basis, where the purpose and extent of each contact is different, and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact. Typical of contacts at this level are those with persons in their capacities as attorneys; contractors; representatives of professional organizations; news media; or public action groups.

Level 6-2 is met. The appellant has contacts with military personnel and their families in order to provide relocation information. The purpose of the contacts is well-established, and the information being provided is basically standard information on procedures, services available, new communities, the impact of relocating, employment for spouses, etc.

Level 6-3 is not met. The appellant does not routinely have contacts with the media, public action groups, attorneys, etc., where the roles of the parties are developed as the contact progresses or where the purpose of each contact is different.

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 7-2.

At Level 7-2, the purpose of personal contacts, in addition to exchanging factual information, is to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts; to resolve administrative problems; to interview or counsel persons; or to influence or motivate persons who are basically cooperative.

At Level 7-3, the purpose of the contacts is to influence, negotiate, or otherwise resolve strongly held differences of opinions. At this level, as further described in the Primary Standard, persons may be fearful, uncooperative, or dangerous, and the employee must be skillful at persuasion or negotiation.

Level 7-2 is met. The appellant exchanges factual information, interviews military sponsors and their families and counsels on various aspects of relocating. The persons seeking assistance are cooperative and desire help and information.

Level 7-3 is not met. The appellant does not deal with uncooperative or dangerous persons nor does she have to influence or negotiate with the individuals she assists.

Level 7-2 is credited for 50 points.

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. The agency credited Level 8-1.

At Level 8-1, the work is generally performed sitting at a desk. However, there may be some travel outside of the office; carrying of light items such as paper or books; driving an automobile, riding public transportation, etc. No special physical demands are required.

Level 8-1 is met. The appellant performs her work while sitting at a desk.

Level 8-1 is credited for 5 points.

Factor 9 - Work Environment:

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings, and the safety precautions required. The agency credited Level 9-1.

At Level 9-1, the work environment involves everyday risks or discomforts which require ordinary safety precautions typical of such places as offices, conference rooms, training rooms, etc. The work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

Level 9-1 is met. The appellant's work is performed in a clean, well-lighted office, and typically involves the everyday risks and discomforts of an office environment.

Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

| SUMMARY | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| FACTOR | LEVEL | POINTS |
| 1. Knowledge Required By The Position | 1-4 | 550 |
| 2. Supervisory Controls | 2-3 | 275 |
| 3. Guidelines | 3-2 | 125 |
| 4. Complexity | 4-2 | 75 |
| 5. Scope and Effect | 5-3 | 150 |
| 6. Personal Contacts | 6-2 | 25 |
| 7. Purpose of Contacts | 7-2 | 50 |
| 8. Physical Demands | 8-1 | 5 |
| 9. Work Environment | 9-1 | 5 |
| | TOTAL | 1260 |

A total of 1260 points falls within the range for GS-6, 1105 points to 1350 points, according to the grade conversion table in the standard.

Grade determination by reference to the Social Services Series:

Two classification factors are 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* 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* 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.

At the GS-5 level, the social service representative is familiar with a range of applications received, the processes involved to act on them, the governing regulations and procedural guides, and the objectives of interviewing applicants/clients. Basic, routine cases and cases of limited difficulty are handled with little assistance. The representative develops pertinent information on client circumstances and needs, maintains records of facts, prepares recommendations, and submits reports.

At the GS-7 level, the social service representative performs the full range of services involved in establishing eligibility for assistance. He/she initiates action to authorize, revise, continue or discontinue assistance based on the results of interviews, home visits, correspondence, etc., and maintains contact with an assigned group of individuals to keep up-to-date records, make progress reports, and re-evaluate. The representative must keep informed of the client's situation, explore possible solutions to problems, give advice and information, and appraise progress, as well as develop plans of assistance to deal with a variety of individualized services for each client. He/she meets regularly with the supervisor to evaluate the progress of cases, and the supervisor is available to provide technical guidance as needed. Complex problems of serious need, i.e., having serious consequences, are more closely supervised.

The appellant exceeds the GS-5 level but does not fully meet the GS-7 level. She works with a range of cases/clients all needing assistance with relocation and refers to various government and DoD regulations, rules, and procedural guidance to perform her duties. However, she works more independently than described at GS-5. The GS-7 level describes casework involving a broader range of client problems requiring deeper exploration of the client situation, i.e., interviews and home visits, as well as long-term follow-up to assess progress and re-evaluate situations. Although the appellant receives less supervision than described at this level, the fact that contacts with her clients are normally limited in both number of visits and variety of information exchanged, and the fact that she is not required to follow-up with clients or assess progress as described prevents crediting the GS-7 level.

The GS-5 level is exceeded but the GS-7 level is not fully met. Therefore, the GS-6 level is credited.

Summary

The appellant's position is evaluated at the GS-6 level by reference to both the Equal Opportunity Assistance Series, and as a secondary source, the Social Services Series.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Social Services Assistant, GS-186-6.