

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

PERSONNEL BULLETIN NO. 511-1

MAR 8, 1999

SUBJECT: Position Classification Policy

This Bulletin contains Department of Agriculture (USDA) policy for position classification. This Bulletin supplements Office of Personnel Management (O.M.) regulations, rules, and policies but does not replace or modify them. This Bulletin is meant to be read and applied within the context of the law and the OPM issuances.

Agencies having bargaining units are reminded to meet any labor-management obligations that arise as a result of this Bulletin.

Attachment

PRECEDENCE: This Bulletin supersedes Bulletin 511-1 dated, October 19, 1994.

INQUIRIES: Compensation and Employment Division, Curt Dahlke,
(202) 720-4963, Room 314-W, Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building

DISTRIBUTION: All DPM Holders

EXPIRATION DATE: December 31, 2005

POSITION CLASSIFICATION

I. Purpose

To describe Department of Agriculture (USDA) policy for position classification.

II. Department Policy for Position Classification

A. Classification Appeals to the Department of Agriculture

Mission areas must offer at least one level of appeal or review within the mission area to any employee unless the employee is a research scientist whose position is classified through a peer panel evaluation process. Research scientists may appeal a peer panel review decision directly to USDA.

If a USDA employee is not satisfied with a mission area's classification decision, he or she may appeal the classification of the position to which he or she is currently assigned. An appeal may be filed at any time. An appellant may file personally or through a designated representative. This applies to both white-collar and blue-collar positions.

The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) is USDA's final authority for all classification appeals filed with the Department. Classification appeals should be submitted in writing to the following address:

U. S. Department of Agriculture
Office of Human Resources Management
Personnel Policy and Partnership Division
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Room 47-W, Jamie L. Whitten Building
Washington, D.C. 20250-9603

I If an employee raises position-to-position consistency issues (e.g., an employee cites higher-graded positions which appear to the employee to possess substantially similar duties and responsibilities to his or to her own position), OHRM will decide the appeal based solely on published position classification standards.

If during the review of the appeal, OHRM uncovers substantial information indicating inconsistent classification practices, mission areas will be directed to conduct a review of potentially similar positions. In such instances, a mission area may be required to furnish a formal written report of its findings on the consistency issue and, as appropriate, an outline of its plan for corrective actions within a mutually acceptable time period.

The decision issued by OHRM is the final decision that an employee can obtain within USDA. Any further appeal by an employee must be directed to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

The mission area must implement the OHRM decision no earlier than the date of the decision and no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period following that date, unless a later date is specified in the decision.

Either the mission area or the appellant may request the Director of OHRM, to reconsider the final appeal decision after it has been issued, but the requester must establish a basis for reconsideration. A requestor will be deemed to have established a basis for reconsideration if new, relevant, and substantive facts concerning the position (which were not previously considered) are submitted in writing to the Director.

Any request for reconsideration of the OHRM decision must be submitted in writing to the Director no later than 45 calendar days following the date of the original decision. If either an appellant or a mission area wants to request a stay of the final decision, the reconsideration request must say so in writing and must show good reasons why the request should be granted.

If after reconsideration, the Director sustains the original decision, it must be implemented by the mission area as of the date specified in the original decision unless it directed the downgrading of an employee who was not entitled to retained grade or pay. In such situations, a new effective date will be established in the reconsideration decision.

B. Relationship of Classification Decisions to Other Personnel Activities

(1) Reclassifying Encumbered Positions to Higher Grades

Mission areas may promote incumbent employees based on the impact of an incumbent employee on his or her job. Mission areas may also promote incumbent employees based upon an accretion of higher-graded duties and responsibilities. In all such cases, mission areas must verify the underlying facts of each case and must document these facts in writing in an evaluation statement or an equivalent document. The mission area must also establish for the record that any noncompetitive promotion approved under this authority is fully consistent with all provisions of merit promotion rules.

(2) Reclassifying Encumbered Positions to Lower Grades

Agencies wishing to change an incumbent employee's position to a lower grade based on reclassification (e.g., gradual loss of higher level duties occurring over a period of six months or more) may do so, provided that reclassification does not conflict with an employee's rights under the laws and regulations governing reductions in force, adverse actions or performance-based actions.

C. Delegation of Classification Authority to Line Managers

Mission area Personnel Officers may delegate classification authority to the lowest practicable level of supervisory authority in a mission area but must obtain approval

from OHRM before doing so. OHRM approval will be contingent on a mission area's showing that the proposed delegation meets the following minimum requirements:

(1) Training

Proposed classification delegates must receive formal training on classification rules and procedures prior to any exercise of classification authority. Training may be offered by mission area personnel specialists or by contractors hired for this purpose.

(2) Accountability

The mission area must periodically conduct compliance reviews of classifications affected by classification delegates to insure consistency and accuracy.

D. Internal Classification Guides

Mission areas may develop and use internal classification guides to supplement OPM classification standards but only with the advance approval of OHRM. OHRM approval will be contingent on the mission area's showing that the proposed guide is consistent with controlling OPM standard

E. Record Keeping

Mission areas are encouraged to simplify the paperwork and record keeping procedures associated with position classification whenever possible. Mission areas may adapt any of the following practices without prior approval from OHRM.

(1) Use of Abbreviated Position Description Formats

Mandating the use of the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format for all position descriptions is neither endorsed nor recommended by OHRM. Abbreviated formats (i.e., multigrade position descriptions for trainee levels, checklist position descriptions, etc.) are encouraged. However, abbreviated position descriptions must include at least the following information:

- (a) A description of each major duty or responsibility (e.g., a regularly recurring duty or responsibility that occupies at least 5 percent of the incumbent's normal work effort).
- (b) A description of the position's accountability (e.g., the position's placement in the chain of command and level of individual responsibility for making decisions or commitments on behalf of the agency).
- (c) A description of any mandatory job-related competencies or qualifications (e.g., knowledge, skills, abilities, academic degrees, or other qualification requirements that must be used to screen applicants for initial entry into the position).

(2) Use of standard position descriptions and standardized evaluation statements.

(3) Use of electronic position description libraries or automated classification systems, provided that the system developer or vendor can demonstrate that the automated system is consonant with OPM classification standards.

(4) Use of labor-saving alternatives. Mission areas may rely on pen and ink changes or amendments as an alternative to the development of entirely new position descriptions or redescrptions when there are minor changes in a position's assigned duties or responsibilities.

Although simplification is encouraged, OHRM may direct a mission area to prepare more detailed position descriptions and/or evaluation reports in conjunction with classification appeals or oversight reviews.