

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

Philadelphia Oversight Division  
600 Arch Street, Room 3400  
Philadelphia, PA 19106-1596

**Classification Appeal Decision**  
**Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code**

**Appellant:** [appellant's name]

**Agency classification:** Research Plant Pathologist  
GS-434-13

**Organization:** Civil Rights Staff  
[agency component]  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
[institution]  
[location]

**OPM decision:** Plant Pathologist  
GS-434-12

**OPM decision number:** C-0434-12-01

/s/ Robert D. Hendler

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Robert D. Hendler  
Classification Appeals Officer

August 27, 2002

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Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 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* (PCS's), appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Since this decision lowers the grade of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the sixth pay period after the date of this decision, as permitted by 5 CFR 511.702. The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description (PD) and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

The personnel office must also determine if the appellant is entitled to grade or pay retention, or both, under title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.), 5 U.S.C. 5362 and 5363 and 5 CFR 536. If the appellant is entitled to grade retention, the two-year retention period begins on the date this decision is implemented.

**Decision sent to:**

PERSONAL

[appellant's name]

USDA/1890 Liaison Officer

[institution]

[address]

[location]

Director, Human Resources

[agency component]

U.S. Department of Agriculture

[address]

[location]

Acting Director of Human Resources Management

USDA-OHRM-PPPD

U.S. Department of Agriculture

J.L. Whitten Building, Room 302-W

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## **Introduction**

On January 16, 2002, the Philadelphia Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant's name]. His position is currently classified as Research Plant Pathologist, GS-434-13, with a working title of Agricultural Liaison Officer. The appellant believes the classification should be Agricultural Liaison Officer, GS-301-14. We received the initial appeal administrative report on March 15 and the final PD certification of accuracy on May 5. The position is in the Civil Rights Staff, [agency component], U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The appellant is stationed at [institution] ([acronym] in [location]). We have accepted and decided his appeal under 5 U.S.C. 5112.

## **General issues**

In his January 10, 2002, letter, the appellant stated that his position was classified as Agricultural Liaison Officer Interdisciplinary, GS-0000-13. He enclosed a copy of the body of a PD titled Academic Outreach/Agricultural Liaison Officer, GS-301-14, and requested that his position be reclassified as such. The appellant also enclosed letters supporting his promotion to the GS-14 position which stated that he was performing the work of that position.

By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM PCS's and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Other methods or factors of evaluation are not authorized for use in determining the classification of a position, such as comparison to a PD that may or may not have been properly classified. We will consider the supporting letters only insofar as they assist us in ascertaining the appellant's current duties and responsibilities.

Agency management has certified that the appellant's PD of record ([number]) is accurate. However, implicit in the appellant's rationale is that he is performing the duties and responsibilities in the GS-14 PD that he provided. A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position by an official with the authority to assign work. A position is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by an employee. Position classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the actual duties and responsibilities assigned by management and performed by the employee. An OPM appeal decision grades a real operating position and not simply the PD. Therefore, this decision is based on the actual work assigned to and performed by the appellant and sets aside all previous agency decisions.

## **Position information**

The appellant occupies one of approximately 17 identical additional positions located at various 1890 Land Grant institutions throughout the country and Tuskegee University. The purpose of the position is to provide liaison between and assistance to the assigned institution with USDA efforts in student recruitment and counseling, academic program development, teaching and research assistance, outreach, and natural resources management of university facilities.

The appellant serves as a liaison between [acronym] and USDA components to coordinate programs of mutual interest. For example, he coordinates USDA component participation in university job fairs, participates in information briefings hosted by USDA components, and works with the USDA State Outreach Council to achieve departmental goals by helping the Council identify and act on outreach issues. The appellant works with the [acronym] Small Farm Outreach Director at small farm conferences and attends others on his own providing information on USDA programs available to small farmers. He shares issues raised by small farmers with appropriate USDA officials, e.g., below market value rental of land.

He assists the university in understanding USDA programs and their potential use to the school. For example, from his access to information on emerging USDA programs gleaned from various sources, e.g., USDA component five-year strategic plans and conferences, he identifies the types of courses required to qualify for Federal positions and he provides information on the academic training courses required by applicants for employment in these programs. This may lead to curriculum changes that will make students more competitive in emerging job markets. The appellant provides information on the 1890 Capacity Building Grants (CBG's) program and assists interested university officials in locating USDA components and staff who might be interested in sponsoring competitive grants. The appellant reviews and advises on the content of grant proposals for subjects in which he is professionally qualified. At the behest of the school, he serves on committees and provides advice on agricultural and natural resource issues in his areas of expertise.

The PD of record contains information on the duties and responsibilities assigned by management and performed by the appellant and we incorporate it by reference into this decision. However, it overstates the scope, difficulty and complexity of the appellant's work. For the same reason, we find that the proposed GS-14 PD is not accurate. For example, the PD of record states that the appellant independently plans and completes work assignments formulating and developing strategies and plans within broadly defined objectives. The GS-14 PD states that he independently plans, manages and coordinates work necessary to meet program or functional objectives and, within broad administrative and program policy, revises program approaches as judged necessary. The record shows that the appellant performs operating level outreach and related work primarily at his assigned institution and with related minority communities. The appellant travels outside of the immediate area and addresses a variety of groups on 1890 and related USDA programs, e.g., meeting with farmers while attending USDA and other conferences. Although he functions as a resource to people on USDA organizations and programs, the appellant is not vested with the authority to represent or commit USDA or any of its components on program decisions, e.g., approve research grants. Instead, he plans and carries out activities to meet defined USDA program policies and goals, e.g., recruiting USDA/1890 Scholar candidates and mentoring selectees who attend [acronym].

We conducted an on-site audit with the appellant on July 19, 2002, and a telephone interview with the appellant's administrative supervisor, [name], [state name] State Director, USDA Rural Development and 2001 Chair of the [state name] State Food and Agricultural Council (FAC), on June 23. To clarify information in the record, we conducted telephone interviews with [name], Chair of the Executive Team for 1890 Liaisons on July 21; [name], [state name] State Director, USDA Farm Service Agency and 2001 FAC Chair, and [name], [acronym] Small Farm Outreach Director, on July 25; [name], former Acting Chair of the Executive Team for 1890 Liaisons on

July 24; [name], [state name] State Conservationist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and 2000 FAC Chair, and [name], Dean, School of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, [institution], on July 29; and [name], [state name] USDA Farm Service Agency Outreach Coordinator, on August 2.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The agency has classified the PD of record as interdisciplinary based on the need for professional credentialing in a professional and/or scientific series in agriculture or a directly related field. The position was classified to Plant Pathology Series, GS-434, based on the appellant's credentials and titled Research Plant Pathologist. The agency evaluation statement, however, allocates the position to the Miscellaneous Administration and Program Series, GS-301, because the work of the position is multifaceted with no one series predominant. It does not recognize the need for professional credentialing. The appellant's rationale is that he is performing the work of the GS-301-14 PD. During the on-site audit, however, the appellant said that advising on scientific curriculum issues, performing classroom work, and reviewing research grant applications require formal scientific training. He stated that he continues to perform research and publish in his area of specialization, plant pathology. The record shows, however, that personal research is not a requirement of the position. The appellant rarely performs research during official work time. Scientific classroom training is not a regular and recurring part of his work.

Based on the duties assigned to and performed by the appellant, we find that the position requires professional scientific knowledge and, based on the appellant's credentials, is properly placed in the GS-434 series. Because research is not a requirement of the position, the appellant's position is properly allocated as Plant Pathologist, GS-434.

The agency and the appellant have used the Administrative Analysis Grade Evaluation Guide (AAGEG) for grade level determination. The AAGEG is used to evaluate nonsupervisory staff administrative, planning, and evaluative work that does not require specialized subject matter knowledge and skill or specialized educational preparation. The work requires a high degree of qualitative and/or quantitative analytical skills, the ability to research problems and issues, written and oral communication skills, and the application of mature judgment in problem solving. It can also be used to staff analytical duties of positions engaged in line management or program administration when other more directly applicable criteria are not available.

The appellant's work is not covered by the AAGEG since it requires specialized subject matter knowledge of USDA programs, policies, and procedures. Most of the appellant's time is spent on outreach functions using this knowledge, e.g., providing information on USDA programs to minority communities, recruiting minority students for USDA and related educational programs, and placing students in USDA and/or private agricultural and related jobs. These duties are closely related to and properly evaluated by application of the Public Affairs Series, GS-1035 PCS. This PCS contains criteria for evaluating work involved in establishing and maintaining mutual communication between Federal agencies and pertinent publics and carrying out communication requirements inherent in disseminating policy decisions. The work covers identifying communication needs and developing informational materials that inform appropriate publics of the agency's policies, programs, services and activities and planning, executing and

evaluating the effectiveness of information and communication programs in furthering agency goals. This work occupies a majority of his time.

The appellant's grants application review and other professional work is properly evaluated by application of the Research Grants Grade-Evaluation Guide (RGGEG). The RGGEG contains criteria for evaluating the grade level of professional and scientific positions primarily concerned with analyzing, evaluating, planning, organizing, coordinating, and approving scientific research programs and projects that are carried out in educational, research, and other institutions.

### **Grade determination**

The appellant is available to teach courses in his area of expertise and continues to perform personal research. Work must be performed on a regular and recurring basis for 25 percent or more of an employee's work time to control the application of a PCS and the classification of the position. Because these duties do not meet those requirements, they do not affect the classification of the appellant's position.

### ***Evaluation using the GS-1035 PCS***

The GS-1035 PCS is in Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under the FES, positions are evaluated by comparing the duties, responsibilities, and qualifications required with nine factors common to nonsupervisory General Schedule positions. A point value is assigned to each factor in accordance with the factor-level descriptions. For each factor, the full intent of the level must be met to credit the points for that level. The total points assigned for the nine factors are converted to a grade by reference to the grade conversion table in the PCS.

#### ***Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position***

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that an employee must understand to do acceptable work and the nature and extent of the skills necessary to apply that knowledge.

The appellant disagrees with his agency's crediting of Level 1-7, citing the description of that factor in the proposed GS-14 PD. We find that the appellant's work meets Level 1-7. As at that level, the appellant performs a wide range of outreach duties to multiple audiences that use oral and written communication principles, practices, techniques and methods; analytical methods; and interpersonal relations practices. The work requires skill in modifying standard methods and adapting approaches in conveying information aimed at enhancing the understanding of groups or individuals of the significant issues of USDA programs. Typical of Level 1-7, the appellant assesses public reaction and identifies the extent of understanding achieved to evaluate effectiveness of his outreach program efforts. The work requires knowledge and skill sufficient to explain significant issues to generally responsive groups and individuals interested in USDA programs, e.g., potential students and employees and small farmers. As at this level, the appellant is responsible for developing informational materials that increase communication with his various audiences. His work also requires knowledge and skill sufficient to conduct workshops, seminars and other meetings with nonprofit organizations, schools, State and local government agencies and cooperating companies to stimulate interest in his outreach efforts.

Illustrative of such work is the appellant's outreach to church groups and small farm organizations to enhance their knowledge of USDA programs, explain program requirements, and link them with appropriate USDA component staff members, e.g., recruiting students and meshing their educational backgrounds and interests with USDA components seeking to fill vacancies. As at Level 1-7, the appellant provides representatives of associations and societies with timely and accurate explanations of agency policies and regulations, providing feedback to the 1890 Task Force suggesting ways for improving program operations and sharing small farmer and other group concerns about program issues.

The appellant's work does not meet Level 1-8. The work that he performs does not require mastery of communication principles, methods, practices and techniques; analytical methods; and interpersonal relations practices to develop and apply new approaches to the most difficult and complex public affairs problems of an agency. This level of knowledge and skill is required to develop or evaluate information programs enhancing understanding among publics opposed or indifferent to agency programs, e.g., organizations opposed to USDA small farmer support and minority recruitment efforts. The appellant's outreach efforts are not inherently controversial and do not normally generate negative publicity. He does not regularly make on-the-spot presentations to audiences with opposing points of view or erroneous understanding of agency positions to achieve a more balanced perspective among these publics. His work does not require him to establish and maintain effective working relationships with individuals having opposing points of view and conflicting interests to explain a position while not criticizing other views or arousing damaging hostility. Instead, the appellant deals with audiences who are interested in receiving information about and/or using USDA programs and resources, e.g., potential applicants for 1890 Scholarships, [acronym] academics interested in receiving USDA grants, and agencies looking for minority students interested in employment. His audiences at job fairs, career days, small farm groups, community and other organizations, e.g., Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS), are receptive to the USDA program and benefits that he discusses. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 1-7 and credit 1,250 points.

### *Factor 2, Supervisory controls*

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct and indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work.

The agency has credited Level 2-5 and the appellant agrees. The PD of record reflects language typical of Level 2-5. It states that the appellant formulates and develops strategies and plans within broadly defined objectives. He independently evaluates objectives, analyzes comprehensive data, and determines appropriate action, criteria, standards, and techniques applicable to achieve desired results. He keeps the supervisor and USDA agency heads informed of significant progress or difficulties encountered in accomplishing objectives, and his completed work is evaluated for results.

Both Levels 2-4 and 2-5 describe positions of highly skilled personnel who carry out their work largely independently. At Level 2-4, the employee works within a program framework and receives project assignments. In contrast, Level 2-5 includes program authority with the employee responsible for designing the plans and strategies by which broad projects will be

undertaken, including campaigns, projects, studies, or other major program functions. At Level 2-4, work receives some degree of technical review for feasibility of the program approach. In contrast, review at Level 2-5 is for broader considerations such as impact on the overall program and achieving the functional program's objectives.

Decisions made by employees under administrative direction at Level 2-5 are generally afforded the full weight of agency policy once they are implemented. In contrast, the appellant implements the policies, priorities, and procedures directed by the 1890 Task Force. For example, the appellant developed and implemented procedures at [acronym] to review and refer 1890 Scholar applicants when previous unlimited referrals were revised to eight and then to five. The appellant's program and policy authority is precluded by the presence of the 1890 Task Force and its Executive Team. Unlike Level 2-5, the appellant is not delegated responsibility for major programs, e.g., developing new or substantially revised outreach programs like the 1890 Scholar initiative, including the allocation of staff and monetary resources. The appellant does not direct or control a staff, but he does control a small personal travel budget. Instead, he implements initiatives and continuing functions at the operating level to achieve outreach objectives and priorities determined at higher echelons in the agency, i.e., increased outreach to small farmers and assisting 1890 staff to find USDA sponsors and obtain CBG's.

Although the appellant's first- and second-level supervisors do not provide technical guidance to the appellant, they are required to judge whether his performance meets defined goals. Technical supervision includes the responsibility of accepting or rejecting work. In the appellant's case, this includes determining how well his outreach efforts are meeting defined management needs. Level 2-4 recognizes that some employees are delegated significant operational authority and completed work is reviewed in terms of satisfying expected results of projects or assignments, responsiveness, and conformance with agency policy. Level 2-5 includes responsibility for dealing with particularly sensitive or controversial issues that may be reviewed by program officials at headquarters levels. Recommendations for new projects and shifts in program objectives are evaluated in terms of resources available, program goals, or agency-wide priorities. As discussed previously, the appellant performs operating level outreach work. The 1890 Task Force and its Executive Team retains authority for dealing with any controversial or sensitive program issues, shifting program directions or objectives, and planning changes in program direction found at Level 2-5. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 2-4 and credit 450 points.

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them.

Guidelines are agency policy statements or broad precedents and are applicable in establishing a general program direction or setting a tone but not totally sufficient for dealing specifically with the more complex, intricate or unusual situations, issues or problems encountered on a recurring basis.

The agency has credited Level 3-5 and the appellant agrees. The agency's evaluation statement says that there are few guidelines that cover the work performed. Available guidelines are very broad administrative policy with some regulatory guidance. The appellant reviews legislation

and other regulatory guidance and determines their intent in order to advise and assist those seeking research partnerships and capacity grants to further programs. He is considered an expert in his field, and his advice and guidance are readily sought by others in the liaison and outreach arena.

At Level 3-4, guidelines consist of policy statements or broad precedents and are applicable to establishing general program direction or setting tone, but are not totally sufficient for dealing specifically with the more complex, intricate or unusual situations, issues or problems encountered on a recurring basis. The employee is required to deviate from standard approaches in developing new ways to communicate the agency's message on controversial and sensitive issues where public reaction has been negative or indifferent and understanding of agency publics of information programs is essential to agency mission.

Many of the guidelines used by the appellant are typical of Level 3-3. Guidelines cover the program represented to the public, e.g., the 1890 Scholar application process, CBG procedures, and USDA component program procedures for loans and technical assistance. The sponsoring organizations are responsible for interpreting these procedures. However, guidelines covering the appellant's 1890 liaison program meet the threshold of Level 3-4. There are few guidelines covering outreach work. Most are of an informational or policy nature, e.g., the three defined goals of the CBG program initiated in 1990. The appellant must use judgment in applying this general policy guidance to specific situations, including answering unexpected questions from members of the audiences with varying degrees of knowledge. Although audiences are not hostile or indifferent, new audiences are frequently uninformed about USDA programs and/or misunderstand their purposes. The appellant must tailor his responses to resolve these misunderstandings and develop audience interest in USDA program opportunities which is vital to achieving outreach program goals.

The appellant's work fails to meet Level 3-5 where guidelines consist of general policy statements and statutory mandates, but there are no precedents applicable to unusual or sensitive public affairs issues or problems encountered in the employee's typical assignments. As discussed previously, the appellant does not routinely deal with unusual or sensitive issues. He uses established outreach methodologies, e.g., visits to minority schools, social organizations, interest-group societies, and job fairs to reach targeted USDA audiences. Unlike Level 3-5, his work does not require interpreting and adapting existing precedents and using them as a foundation for developing new approaches that coordinate and integrate various aspects of the agency's mission in creating a unified public affairs strategy or plan. He works within a program strategy established and controlled by the 1890 Task Force. Recognition by his peers as an authority within the 1890 Liaison community, e.g., issuing a letter on behalf of that community asking to meet with other liaison officials at a MANRRS conference, is not equivalent to being recognized as the agency authority in the development and interpretation of guidelines in the public affairs area. His work does not involve developing major campaigns or developing new and untried publicity programs. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 3-4 and credit 450 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 appellant disagrees with his agency's crediting of Level 4-4, citing the language in the proposed GS-14 PD. We find that the appellant's position meets Level 4-4. As at that level, he must apply advanced communication and analytical practices, methods and techniques to the solution of complex public affairs problems such as developing and presenting informational material to achieve understanding of various points of view or concepts from publics with varying levels of understanding and different interests and perspectives on the subjects. For example, he must explain USDA programs to groups with varying levels of knowledge of and interest in USDA programs. His work requires him to deal with the aftermath of court cases alleging discrimination by USDA against African-American farmers; develop minority interest in seeking employment in the department, e.g., scientific careers with limited minority populations, and improving 1890 school access to and competitiveness for research and other grants. Typical of Level 4-4, he uses information gathering techniques in collecting and analyzing public reaction to USDA programs; and develops recommendations for management in improving the agency's communication with targeted groups, e.g., feeding back issues and concerns uncovered at small farm conferences.

As at Level 4-4, his decisions on what needs to be done are based upon an analysis of the need for modifying standard communication practices and approaches such as analyzing reaction to information programs from a variety of groups having different interests and goals from the agency, e.g., analyzing feedback from presentations to improve future briefings. The appellant's work requires making decisions on which of a variety of oral and written communication methods and approaches to employ. These decisions affect how he presents and explains programs and policies in a logical and clarifying manner to achieve an understanding from the agency's publics, some of whom have differing interests, on the programs or policies advocated by the agency. He adjusts the content and approach to briefings based on the educational level of the audience, knowledge of and experience with USDA, and perception of the Federal government.

The appellant's work does not meet Level 4-5 which includes developing new methods, strategies and communication plans covering the complete spectrum of the organization's programs. This involves presenting information on a wide variety of subjects using the full array of written and oral presentation formats and techniques, establishing and maintaining effective working relationships in achieving understanding with groups indifferent to or having opposing points of view to programs and policies, and developing, from an analysis of varied and conflicting reaction from the agency's publics, recommendations on the formulation and articulation of agency policy in communicating agency programs more effectively. These outreach planning and development functions are vested in higher levels of the agency, e.g., the USDA Office of Outreach and the 1890 Task Force. Those offices evaluate the appropriateness of existing strategies and plans in the light of changes in program emphasis or content, including statutory or technological changes, and shifts in public reaction to or understanding of the programs. Unlike Level 4-5, the appellant's outreach is not routinely to groups opposed or

indifferent to agency programs as discussed previously. His conveying of information on technical and statutory program changes, e.g., changes in USDA areas of research is not equivalent to developing strategies to deal with hostile reactions to changes in financial support typical of Level 4-5. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 4-4 and credit 225 points.

#### *Factor 5, Scope and effect*

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work (i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment) and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization. Only the effect of properly performed work is considered.

The appellant disagrees with his agency's crediting of Level 5-4, citing the language in the proposed GS-14 PD. We find that the appellant's position meets Level 5-4. In addition to dealing with well-precedented outreach matters, e.g., explaining the benefits of USDA programs to interested groups typical of Level 5-3, the appellant plans and carries out his efforts to advance both [acronym] and broader USDA outreach policies and goals. His contacts with schools and organizations outside of Delaware, work with minority societies, e.g., MANRRS, and efforts to connect [acronym] researchers and students with USDA organizations throughout the country, reflect the design of approaches to deal with outreach efforts in a variety of program areas. Typical of Level 5-4, the work contributes to the effectiveness of outreach program objectives in reaching underserved publics and achieving other 1890 program objectives, e.g., increasing minority interest and employment in USDA.

The position does not meet Level 5-5 where the purpose of the work is to identify the causes or reasons for public misunderstanding or indifference to agency programs and policies and to develop alternative communication strategies that enable the agency to establish and maintain mutual understanding with the general public or other specialized publics. As discussed previously, the appellant uses well-established outreach methods to communicate with groups targeted by program officials. Devising alternative outreach strategies, e.g., creating the 1890 Scholar and CBG program, are tasked to and performed by higher echelons within the agency. While helpful in achieving the public policy goals of civil rights, the 1890 program is only one part of a multifaceted outreach strategy to reach and support underserved groups. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 5-4 and credit 225 points.

#### *Factor 6, Personal contacts*

This factor includes face-to-face contacts and telephone and radio dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. Levels of this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place (e.g., the degree to which the employee and those contacted recognize their relative roles and authorities).

The agency credited Level 4 for this factor in applying the AAGEG. By pointing to the GS-14 PD, the appellant requested Level 6-3, equivalent to Level 3 in the AAGEG. We find that the appellant's work meets Level 6-3. At that level, his initial contacts with groups outside USDA, e.g., social organizations, schools, professional organizations, and college and university officials require that each party establish their respective roles during the contact. For example, the

appellant may contact groups to provide general briefings or to recruit for specific positions and/or employment programs. While the appellant meets with some officials typical of Level 6-4, e.g., U.S. Senators and high-level county and State government officials, these contacts are not frequent within the meaning of the position classification system. Most of his contacts are with staff members typical of Level 6-3. Unlike Level 6-4, the purpose of contacts with high-level officials is relatively easily to establish, e.g., contacts during periodic tours, conferences, dinners, and breakfasts structured to cover program issues and initiatives. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 6-3 and credit 60 points.

#### *Factor 7, Purpose of contacts*

This factor covers the purpose of personal contacts, which may range from factual exchange of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints or objectives.

The purpose of the appellant's most demanding contacts meets Level 7-3, where the purpose is to clarify agency activities and policies to specialized groups or other interested people. Typical of this level, the appellant negotiates and coordinates matters of mutual interest, seeking to motivate groups to take advantage of USDA programs, pursue careers in science and agriculture, and seek employment with USDA. He seeks cooperation from USDA components, seeking sponsors for research grant applicants from 1890 institutions. His liaison work in establishing a memorandum of understanding for a three-plus-two pre-Forestry Bachelor of Science and Master of Science program at [acronym] and [school name] and between [acronym] and [name] High School evidence the degree of persuasion to gain compliance with program goals and objectives found at Level 7-3. Unlike Level 7-4, the appellant is not regularly required to defend significant or controversial agency actions, negotiate or mediate among groups or people with divergent viewpoints, or convince program managers to change or modify decisions involving significant or controversial issues. Program issues of this nature are controlled and decided at higher echelons in the agency.

Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 7-3 and credit 120 points.

#### *Factor 8, Physical demands*

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed upon the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and physical exertion involved in the work.

Level 8-1 work is sedentary and presents no special physical demands. Level 8-2 work involves considerable walking, stooping, bending, and climbing. The appellant's work is sedentary and free of special physical demands.

We evaluate this factor at Level 8-1 and credit 5 points.

### *Factor 9, Work environment*

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required.

Level 9-1 work is in an office setting. Level 9-2 work involves moderate safety risks or discomforts that require special precautions, e.g., working at accident sites, construction sites, or experimental areas. The appellant's work is performed in office or equivalent settings and requires no special safety precautions.

We evaluate this factor at Level 9-1 and credit 5 points.

### *Summary*

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

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Points</b>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-7	1,250
2. Supervisory controls	2-4	450
3. Guidelines	3-4	450
4. Complexity	4-4	225
5. Scope and effect	5-4	225
6. Personal contacts	6-3	60
7. Purpose of contacts	7-3	120
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
	<b>Total Points</b>	<b>2,790</b>

A total of 2,790 points falls within the GS-12 grade level point range of 2,755-3,150 points on the Grade Conversion Table.

### ***Evaluation using the RGEG***

The RGEG uses two factors to determine the degree of difficulty, complexity and level of responsibility of such positions: Assignment characteristics and Level of responsibility. The application of the RGEG requires that we consider the appellant's organization which varies substantially from illustrations in the RGEG. Rather than working in an organization responsible for evaluating and approving research grants, the appellant performs preliminary reviews of potential CBG grant applicants. Therefore, the organizational situations described in the RGEG are not germane to our analysis of the appellant's work.

### *Assignment characteristics*

This factor reflects the nature and scope of functions carried out by the individual scientists; the complexity, novelty and scope of the subject matter assigned; the kind and degree of technical and managerial judgment required; and the extent and intensity of scientific knowledge involved

in carrying out the assignment. It is the scope of the functions performed and the technical and managerial judgment exercised in performing these functions together with the relative expertise of scientific knowledge involved that reflect levels of difficulty and complexity.

As at the GS-11 grade level, the appellant brings knowledge of the organization and conduct of basic and applied research in a subject-matter specialty of a discipline or program. He is expected to apply knowledge of subject-matter areas and basic familiarity with the fundamentals of scientific research methodology to matters involving the scientific administration of research grants and contracts. This requires him to be familiar with the kinds of research being carried on in subject-matter areas, the kinds of projects which his agency has supported, and the kinds of projects supported by other agencies. The appellant's work closely matches the GS-11 grade level illustration in which the scientist conducts preliminary screening of proposals to ascertain if such research is normally supported in this particular program (or agency). For proposals which may be of interest, he ascertains the completeness and clarity of the proposal such as the problem statement; sufficiency of data about methods and techniques to be utilized; justifications for equipment requested; where, when, and by whom work will be carried out; and other similar matters which are used to evaluate the scientific worth of the proposal. As at this grade level, the appellant provides factual information about the funding agency's policies and procedures to grantees, applicants and potential applicants, and to other agencies. He uses this same knowledge of USDA and related programs to advise [acronym] and others on curriculum and course development issues.

The appellant's position does not meet the GS-12 grade level where scientists select research proposals to be funded that typically have direct application to the agency's mission, e.g., developing a new pesticide that eliminates the undesirable attributes of other pesticides. The scientist reviews applications for completeness, studies the literature in order to place the proposed research project in its relationship to the research being done in the subject matter area, prepares for site visits as necessary by compiling background information on prior or current proposals, identifies inconsistencies in data, etc., and furnishes advice and assistance to applicants and consultants concerning the agency's policies, procedures, etc. The GS-12 scientist reviews progress reports on currently supported studies to pinpoint relationship and effect on new or renewal proposals, analyze the information and data derived from these sources and present the technical and scientific aspects of applications to their superiors, to committees of consultants, and to others with tentative recommendation of possible action. The scientist must be familiar with other related research activities funded by his or her own and other agencies, and those carried on under nongovernmental auspices and must be able to evaluate the research model on which a project is based and to assess the value of the project's objectives to his or her agency's mission. Although the appellant is qualified to perform these functions in his personal area of expertise, these functions are not vested in the appellant's position. Decisions made at the GS-12 grade level are vested in CBG and other grant approval organizations. Therefore, this factor is credited at the GS-11 grade level.

#### *Level of responsibility*

This factor reflects the nature and extent of guidelines available; supervisory control exercised over the position; nature and extent of personal contacts; and responsibility for program development.

Unlike GS-11 grade level scientists, the appellant is not given assignments with general instructions about what may be wanted and is not expected to call matters about which he is not certain or which he encounters for the first time to his supervisor's attention. His grant review work is not reviewed for technical adequacy and conformance with procedures and practices applicable to the program and subject involved typical of the GS-11 grade level. However, this greater freedom from supervision is for assignments that fall short of GS-12 grade level responsibility. The appellant is not responsible for the depth of investigation, analysis, and evaluation necessary to make scientifically valid recommendations involved in grant approval found at the GS-12 grade level. At that level, the scientist makes recommendations on the scientific worth, feasibility, and possible impact of new and renewal proposals. In the appellant's situation, these decisions are made by other USDA organizations. As at the GS-11 grade level, the purpose of appellant's contacts with potential applicants, scientists in USDA components or agencies is to exchange factual information primarily for the purpose of helping the applicant develop a proposal likely to receive funding. The appellant's curriculum development contacts similarly concentrate on exchanging information, e.g., advising [acronym] officials on qualification and education requirements for Federal positions. Because the appellant's assignments do not entail the more intensive proposal analysis and review of the GS-12 grade level, his work does not require the tact necessary to avoid unduly influencing or seemingly to criticize the methodology, results, etc., involved at that grade level. Therefore, this factor is credited at the GS-11 grade level.

### *Summary*

In summary, since both factors are credited properly at the GS-11 grade level, we find that the portion of the appellant's work covered by the RGGEG is evaluated properly at the GS-11 grade level.

### **Decision**

Based on the above analysis, the appellant's position is properly classified as Plant Pathologist, GS-434-12.