



Position Level Benchmarks for USPSCs

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 309

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POSITION LEVEL BENCHMARKS FOR USPSCs

INTRODUCTION

The benchmark characteristics for positions equivalent to GS-5 through GS-15 in this guide are designed to assist Requesting Offices, and COs to determine the GS-equivalent grade and corresponding market value for a UPSPC position. PSC positions may be classified below the GS-5 equivalent level, if necessary. The requesting office may consult with the EXO or Human Resources and Talent Management Office (HCTM) for guidance on such classifications. To meet the requirements of [AIDAR, Appendix D](#) and [ADS 309.3.2.1](#), the Requesting Office and Contracting Officer/Executive Officer (CO) must determine the level of a U.S. Personal Services Contractor (USPSC) position for work both in the U.S. and overseas. .

A. General Guidelines

When determining the GS-equivalent grade for the position, the Requesting Office must adhere to the following requirements:

- The benchmarks provided below contain generic characteristics for a position. If a position description includes duties or functions that are similar to these generic benchmarks, the position may be set at a given grade so long as the Requesting Office justifies the determination that the duties fall within the grade.
- If uncertain of a choice between two grades for a particular characteristic, select the lower of the two grades for that characteristic.
- In the event a position meets characteristics across multiple grades, the recommended position level must be at the GS-equivalent grade for which the position meets the highest number of benchmarks.
- If an equal number of characteristics apply across multiple grades, the lowest GS-equivalent grade must be selected as the position level.

B. Salary Level Benchmarks: Grades GS-5 through 15

1. GS-5

This level involves structured work in support of office operations. Clerical work is performed in accordance with established policies, procedures, or techniques. The work requires knowledge of an organization's rules, some degree of subject matter knowledge and skill in carrying out the full range of clerical assignments. Positions at this level normally require at least one year of substantive general office, administrative, or clerical experience.

Clerical work typically involves general officer or program support duties, such as preparing, receiving, reviewing, and verifying documents; processing transactions; maintaining tracking systems; maintaining office records; locating and compiling data or information from files; keeping a calendar and informing others of deadlines and other important dates; and preparing word processing or spreadsheet documents to present information or data to fulfill the duties of the position. Incumbents follow accepted practices in resolving nonrecurring problems and meeting deadlines.

Work is assigned by a supervisor, with on-the-job training provided as needed. Work is reviewed for accuracy, format, etc. and the supervisor is kept informed of work progress. Contacts at the GS-5 level are typically limited to Agency personnel to obtain and provide information of a procedural nature.

2. GS-9

Positions at this level require the exercise of analytical ability, judgment, discretion, and personal responsibility, and the application of a substantial body of knowledge of principles, concepts, and practices applicable to administrative and program issues or studies. While these positions do not require specialized education, they do involve the type of skills (analytical, research, writing, judgment) typically gained through a college level education consisting of two full years at the graduate level or a Master's Degree, or through three years of progressively responsible experience equivalent to this level. This kind of work is typically a service function which supports the Agency's mission or program. Work principally involves dealing with problems and relationships of a procedural nature, rather than the substance of work operations, issues, or other subjects studied.

Incumbents typically prepare program documentation; maintain tracking systems to monitor goals and expenditures; and draft recurring reports. Incumbents are required to brief managers on study findings and recommendations. These reports and recommendations influence decisions by managers concerning the internal operations of the organization and the activities studied.

Contacts at this level are typically made to obtain or exchange factual information and to provide advice to managers on non-controversial issues and concerns. Contacts are usually limited to immediate Agency personnel and include minimal substantive contacts with the general public.

The supervisor typically assigns projects and sets deadlines for completing the work. Findings and recommendations developed by the incumbent are reviewed for appropriateness prior to release or discussion with management officials.

Knowledge of established management/program principles, pertinent regulations, and internal guidelines, plus skills in conducting fact-finding studies, are required.

3. GS-13, 14 and 15

The Requesting Office must provide substantial justification for determining a position level at the GS-13, 14, or 15 grade level. A position at these levels typically includes responsibilities critical to Agency operations and management, and often includes inherently governmental functions. **A USAID USPSC may perform certain inherently governmental functions subject to the limitations in AIDAR Appendix D, sec. 4(b).** The Requesting Office must review work requirements for positions proposed at the GS-13, 14, or 15 levels for possible assignment to USDH employees and must ensure that the Position Description does not include duties that are listed as limitations in **AIDAR Appendix D, sec. 4(b)**, unless a specific exception or authorization has been obtained, as required.

Differences in characteristics between GS-13, 14 and 15 levels are far less distinct than those between the lower GS levels. The most significant differences are outlined in the first Summary Table in the areas of *Responsibility for Decision Making, Knowledge Level, Scope/Effect, Performance Guidelines, and Contacts*. Detailed benchmark characteristics provided in the second table for positions at these grades are to demonstrate the differences between salary classes.

4. Interpolating Between Grades GS 5, 9 and 13

The Requesting Office and CO can determine if a position falls above or below the grade levels described by extending the benchmarks as needed to meet specific performance requirements. In order to interpolate between the levels provided, the Requesting Office and CO must consider the following:

- The degree of responsibility for decision making assigned to the position;
- The level of resources allocated to the assignment;
- The complexity of the host government's organizational structure, and its effect on the incumbent's responsibilities;
- The level of management expertise in host-country offices;
- The stage of the activity (formative or established);
- The level of contacts outside the Agency;
- The level of work assignments (Is the assignment a portion of a larger study or activity, or an entire results package?);
- The level of supportive work in a professional or administrative field;
- The level of knowledge/experience required to perform work assigned; and/or,
- The level of supervision required over the position.

SUMMARY OF KEY DIFFERENTIATING CHARACTERISTICS FOR GRADES GS-13, 14, and 15

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISION MAKING	Performs under administrative direction with latitude for the exercise of independent	Performs under general administrative discretion with wide latitude for the exercise of independent	Performs under administrative discretion; work of significant difficulty which has

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
	judgment; exercises independent judgment in areas such as program/project management, though not a policy-maker	judgment; work of significant difficulty and responsibility; has formal decision making authority in broad program area	demonstrated leadership and exceptional attainments; typically serves as highest-level decision maker
KNOWLEDGE LEVEL	Requires mastery of an area of specialization	Requires mastery of an area of specialization but assignments are complicated by interconnected issues, multi-disciplinary approaches, conflicts among possible technical solutions, etc.	Requires mastery of a very broad field of expertise
SCOPE/EFFECT	<p>Considered an expert; consulted by specialists/senior specialists; when position requires development of regulatory or legislative proposals, incumbent is assigned a narrow program area</p> <p><i>Work may require team leader responsibilities, leading/coordinating work of other professional staff</i></p>	<p>Considered an expert and consulted by other experts; assignments reflect wide program area; projects range from regional to national impact</p> <p><i>Work typically requires formal team leader responsibilities for coordinating/directing work of other professional staff</i></p>	<p>Nationally known expert in broad field; resolves disputes that arise when leading experts disagree; work is of <u>national significance</u> or deals with problems that are rapidly evolving and have impact on a major department (ex., Department of State) or legislation</p> <p><i>Key responsibility of work is leading/directing (directly/indirectly) a substantial number of other professional/technical staff</i></p>
PERFORMANCE GUIDELINES	Available and applicable, but stated in general terms	Broadly stated/non-specific; judgment/ingenuity required to interpret and develop applications/guidelines	N/A
CONTACTS	Senior professionals/officials	Senior management officials	Highest level of officials (SES/corporate executive and above), and contacts may

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
			extend to international organizations

**DETAILED BENCHMARK CHARACTERISTICS
FOR GRADS GS-13, 14, and 15**

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISION MAKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performs under administrative direction, with latitude for the exercise of independent judgment, work of <i>unusual</i> difficulty and responsibility requiring extended professional, scientific, or technical research training and experience which has demonstrated leadership and <i>marked</i> attainments in professional, scientific, or technical research, practice or administration. • Exercises independent judgment in areas such as program/project management and influences program policy by reason of recognized expertise in the particular field of development assistance, although not a policy-maker • Work requires the exercise of discretion, judgment, and personal responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performs under general administrative discretion, with wide latitude for the exercise of independent judgment, work of <i>significant</i> difficulty and responsibility along special technical, supervisory, or administrative lines, which has demonstrated leadership and <i>unusual</i> attainment • Work may include areas such as planning and executing major professional, scientific, technical, administrative, fiscal or other specialized programs that demonstrates unusual attainment, with wide latitude for exercise of independent judgment and decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performs under general administrative direction, with wide latitude for the exercise of independent judgment, work of <i>significant</i> difficulty and responsibility along special technical, supervisory, or administrative lines, which has demonstrated leadership and <i>exceptional</i> attainments • Work may include areas such as planning and directing/executing specialized programs of marked difficulty, responsibility and <u>national significance</u>, along professional, scientific, technical, administrative, fiscal, or other lines, requiring extended training and experience which has demonstrated leadership and <u>exceptional</u>

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
			<u>attainments</u>
KNOWLEDGE LEVEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires mastery of an area of specialization, science, learning professional or administrative field to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply experimental theories and new developments to problems not susceptible to accepted methods Knowledge acquired through education equivalent to the graduate or higher degree level with significant study in or pertinent to the specialized field, as distinguished from general education, or five years of progressive responsible experience equivalent to this level in the professional or technical field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires mastery of an area of specialization but assignments are complicated by interconnected issues, multi-disciplinary approaches, conflicts among possible technical solutions, etc. Other knowledge levels are the same as GS-13 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires mastery of a very broad field of expertise Requires mastery of a professional or administrative field to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply experimental theories and new developments to problems not susceptible to accepted methods Knowledge acquired through education equivalent to the graduate or higher degree level with significant study in or pertinent to the specialized field, as distinguished from general education, or five years of progressive responsible experience equivalent to this level in the professional or technical field Generates and develops new hypotheses and theories
SUPERVISORY CONTROLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisor sets overall objectives Incumbent and supervisor together develop deadlines, projects and work to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisor provides administrative direction in terms of broadly defined missions or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same as GS-14

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
	<p>be done</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incumbent independently plans, designs, and carries out project, studies, and programs • Completed work is reviewed only from an overall standpoint in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements, or expected results • Technical problems are generally resolved without reference to supervisors. 	<p>functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incumbent independently plans, designs and carries out project, studies, and programs • Results of the work are considered technically authoritative • There is no higher level official technically responsible for administering the program/project 	
PERFORMANCE GUIDELINES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative policies and precedents are applicable but are stated in general terms (i.e., Agency policy). Guidelines are scarce or of limited use • The incumbent uses initiative and resourcefulness in deviating from traditional methods or in researching patterns and trends to develop new methods, criteria or proposed policies • Technical work at this level requires expertise in specialized fields. Assignments include providing technical advice in the formulation of overall country programs and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidelines are broadly stated and non-specific (e.g., basic legislation) • Judgment and ingenuity is required to interpret the intent of guides and to develop applications/guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 Same as GS-

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
	<p>strategies and in the planning, development, design, evaluation, and implementation of activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignments are generally received in terms of general objectives. 		
COMPLEXITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duties are significantly varied and require many different unrelated processes and methods that are applied to a broad range of problems/situations that require a substantial depth of analysis • Decisions that must be made involve major areas of uncertainty in approach, methodology, interpretation and evaluating processes • There are continuing changes in program, technological developments, unknown phenomena, or continuing requirements • The work requires originating new techniques, establishing criteria, or developing new information • Incumbents typically identify and develop ways to resolve problems or cope with issues which directly affect the accomplishment of principal program goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as GS-13 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duties are significantly varied and require many different unrelated processes and methods that are applied to a broad range of problems/situations that require a substantial depth of analysis • Decisions involve largely undefined areas and issues and require extensive probing and analysis to determine the scope of the problem • There are continuing changes in program, technological developments, unknown phenomena, or conflicting requirements • The work requires originating new techniques, establishing criteria, or developing new

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
	and objectives. Incumbents may develop new ways to resolve major problems, or plan the most significant aspects of professional or scientific programs.		information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignments are of considerable breadth and intensity and require the participation and support of others • The work requires a continuing effort to establish concepts, theories or programs, or to resolve unyielding problems
SCOPE AND EFFECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work involves establishing criteria, formulating projects, assessing program effectiveness, or investigating or analyzing a variety of unusual conditions, problems or questions • Work product or service affects a wide range of agency activities, major activities, industrial concerns or the operations • Work typically includes planning, organizing, directing, designing and coordinating programs and/or projects, requiring creativity and support efforts of others; or work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work involves isolating and defining unknown conditions, resolving critical problems, or developing new theories • The incumbent is recognized as an expert to the experts and his/her work affects the work of other experts • The work directly affects the development of major aspects of administrative or professional programs or Missions, or the well being of a substantial number of people • Work <i>typically</i> requires formal responsibilities for leading teams, guiding and coordinating the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work involves isolating and defining unknown conditions, resolving critical problems, or developing new theories • The incumbent is recognized as an expert to the experts and his/her work affects the work of other experts • The work directly affects the development of major aspects of administrative or professional programs or Missions, or the well being of a substantial number of people • The work involves planning, developing and carrying out vital programs which

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
	<p>entails conducting evaluations to determine the feasibility of various advanced approaches to define concepts and criteria for future programs or to resolve major controversial problems in current programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work may require working as a team leader, guiding and coordinating the work of other professions or technical staff • Typical assignments require developing detailed plans, goals, and objectives for the long range implementation and administration of the program, or developing the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the program. • Completed work is reviewed for feasibility in relation to requirements, and for conformance with overall policy and program objectives. • Recommendations of incumbents at this level are normally accepted by others as those of a specialist. • Typical of this level 	<p>work of other professional or technical staff</p>	<p>are essential to the mission of the Department (i.e., beyond Agency-level) or affect substantial numbers of people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Key responsibility</i> of the work is to lead, direct and otherwise affect a substantial number of other professional or technical staff

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
	are professional or technical assignments involved with project or program management, and with project development.		
PERSONAL CONTACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacts are with individuals or groups from inside and outside of the Agency • Contacts typically take place in moderately unstructured settings (i.e., not routine coordination meetings) • The role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact • Typical contacts are those with senior level professionals, contractor representatives and representatives of professional organizations • Provides technical advice in the area of specialty in formulation of related higher-level programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacts are with individuals or groups from inside and outside of the Agency • Contacts typically take place in moderately unstructured settings (i.e., not routine coordination meetings) • The role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact • Typical contacts are those with attorneys, contractor executives, representatives of professional organizations, the news media or public action groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacts are with high ranking officials (SES, corporate executive or above) at the national and international levels from outside the department (i.e., beyond the Agency level) • Officials contacted are relatively inaccessible • Various parties may be unclear as to the role and authority of the other parties • Contacts are conducted under differing ground rules • Contacts typically include Members of Congress, leading representatives of foreign Governments, presidents of large national & international firms, nationally recognized representative of the news media,

	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
			presidents of national unions, state governors, and mayors of large cities
PURPOSE OF CONTACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To influence/motivate people or groups. The people contacted may be fearful, skeptical or uncooperative The incumbent must be skillful in determining the appropriate approach in negotiating and persuading others, and in establishing rapport in order to gain and relay information. Typically, incumbents consult with other professional or technical personnel, and user organizations, to develop the objectives in mre detail and to reconcile conflicts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To influence, motivate, control or direct people or groups. The people contacted may be fearful, skeptical or uncooperative The incumbent must be skillful in determining the appropriate approach in negotiating and persuading others, and in establishing rapport in order to gain and relay information, including decision makers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To justify, defend, negotiate and settle matters involving significant or controversial issues among decision makers The work usually involves active participation in conferences, meetings, hearings or presentations involving problems or issues of considerable consequence or importance The people contacted typically have diverse viewpoints, goals or objectives, and therefore the incumbent is required to achieve a common understanding among the various parties and create a satisfactory solution that addresses their various objectives and concerns.

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