



# United States Department of the Interior

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
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## Memorandum

To: Bureau Human Capital Officers  
Bureau Human Resources Directors/Officers

From: Jennifer A. Ackerman  
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Subject: Establishment of Wage Grade Developmental Jobs in the Federal Wage System

This memorandum establishes updated Department of the Interior (Department, Interior) guidance on human resources flexibilities governed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for establishing wage grade (WG) developmental jobs within the provisions of the Federal Wage System (FWS).

The Office of Human Capital (OHC), in collaboration with bureau subject matter experts (SMEs), is issuing specific guidance on establishing, training, and staffing wage grade developmental jobs for trades, crafts, and labor at the developmental Helper, Worker-Trainee, Support, Intermediate, and Apprentice levels. The purpose of this guidance is to highlight human resources flexibilities authorized by the OPM for developmental jobs in the FWS. This guidance supersedes Department subject memorandum *Classification of Positions in the FWS*, dated August 16, 2022.

Under the authority of OPM, [\*Federal Wage System Job Grading System\*](#), Federal agencies may develop a coordinated wage system for employees in trades and labor occupations. Public Law 92-392 provides an equitable system for fixing and adjusting the rates of pay for prevailing rate employees of the government. This system includes non-appropriated fund employees in jobs having trades, craft, or laboring experience and knowledge as the paramount requirement.

The common Job Grading Standard (JGS) covers jobs in the executive agencies as indicated in the [\*Operating Manual for the Federal Wage System\*](#). The basic guidelines for determining trades or labor jobs, and for distinguishing them from General Schedule (GS) jobs, are in [\*Section IV of the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards\*](#), published by OPM.

The policies and practices of the FWS are based on the principles that (1) wages shall be fixed and adjusted from time to time as nearly as is consistent with the public interest in accordance with prevailing rates; and (2) there shall be equal pay for substantially equal work and pay distinctions shall be maintained in keeping with work distinctions.

In keeping with its governing directives, the JGS follows: (a) a framework of key ranking jobs 2 to serve as the basic peg point of the grade structure; (b) job grading standards to provide the criteria for determining the relative work of jobs in terms of grades; (c) a job grading method to assure consistency in the application of job standards; and (d) a plan for coding and titling trades and labor jobs.

**Informal Training Programs:** Jobs of employees in informal training programs are established and classified by the followings:

**Trades Helper Jobs:** The JGS for Trades Helper jobs authorizes the classification of jobs which assist journey workers at grade 9 and above in one or more of the skilled trade occupations by performing the simpler and more routine duties of the trade and working with the journeyman as instructed. Some employees perform these tasks on a continuing basis while others perform them as a means of developing trade skills and gaining knowledge of the trade to move to intermediate and journey worker levels. Jobs graded by this standard have similar types of duties and tasks even though the work is in different trade occupations. Therefore, this standard does away with the need for separate grade level definitions of these types of jobs within each trade job grading standard.

Jobs where employees assist higher grade employees, at grade 8 and lower will be graded by the specific job grading standard for the occupation in which the employees work. All jobs that require mainly physical abilities and effort involving no knowledge of specific trade practices will be graded by the job grading standard for Laboring, 3502.

For Trades Helper jobs, the adjective title *Helper* should be added to the journey worker job title of the occupational in which the duties are performed (i.e., employees performing duties graded by this standard would have titles such as: Pipefitter Helper or Sheetmetal Worker Helper). All helper jobs in skilled trades occupations will be graded at grade 5.

**Intermediate Jobs:** The JGS for Intermediate jobs, *those less than Journeyman*, authorizes the classification of jobs which involve training or development of skills and knowledge of the trade. The jobs perform duties and tasks requiring more skills than the *Helper* level up to and including, under close direction, duties and tasks performed by the journey workers of a trade. These duties are performed to increase knowledge of the trade and develop skills for advancing to the journey grade.

Jobs graded by this standard have similar types of duties even though the work is in different trade occupations. Therefore, this standard does away with the need for separate definitions for these types of jobs within each trade job grading standard. Jobs which do not involve training or development of skills and knowledge differ from those covered by this standard so therefore will be graded by the specific job grading standard for the occupation in which the employees work.

**FWS Qualifications:** The FWS Qualification Guidance identifies a set of OPM approved job 3 elements, trades and labor jobs grouped into five categories. The most populous group has jobs emphasizing trade knowledge (i.e., jobs requiring skills and knowledge in a particular line of work). The other four categories: worker-trainee, support, apprentice, and high-level supervisor are jobs involving requirements common to a particular kind of job regardless of the occupation in which the job is located.

**Worker-Trainee:** *Worker-Trainee* jobs require the ability to do one simple task at a time, no skills and knowledge requirements. The basic qualification needed is the willingness to perform low-level work assignments. The duties may consist of several types of simple tasks over a period, one completion before new assignment included and only one set of approved job elements regardless of line of work.

**Support:** *Support* jobs authorizes the classification of jobs which require the ability to perform a series of simple tasks without the requirement of skills and knowledge of a particular line of work, where the ability to learn and advance is essential, e.g., helper-trainee.

**Apprentice:** *Apprentice* jobs includes a separate set of elements to learn and advance through three levels of apprenticeship: *Beginning level, Middle level, and Advanced level.*

*Beginning level* describes jobs which require the ability to perform simple tasks in the line of work under close supervision, which before being selected, must demonstrate potential for learning and advancing.

*Middle level* describes jobs which require the ability to perform less difficult of the common tasks in the line of work under close supervision, which before selected, must possess the level of skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to demonstrate potential to perform work.

*Advanced level* describes jobs which require the ability to perform common tasks in the line of work under close supervision, which before being selected, must possess the level of skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to demonstrate potential to do the work.

**High-Level Supervisory:** *High-level supervisory* jobs require the ability to supervise groups of workers through one or more levels of subordinate supervisors.

### **Classification, Staffing, and Workforce Development:**

**Position Description:** Developmental jobs are established for entry level permanent appointments leading to the journeyman level which develop employees for the target level job. When establishing a developmental job, a full job description (JD) is required for each grade within the progression including the target journeyman level. JDs for each grade must meet adequacy standards.

The following standard language must be included in the *Introduction* section of the PD:

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*“The incumbent works under closer than normal supervision at the **trainee** level performing assignments designed to provide the competencies, skills, and experience required to perform the more complex work at the journey man level. The work increases in difficulty, complexity, and responsibility as the incumbent gains experience and demonstrates a full comprehension of the target level gr. As a **trainee**, this position may be eligible for non-competitive promotion to the target position upon meeting the following requirements: (1) The incumbent demonstrates the ability to perform at the target grade level; (2) Higher-level work exists at the target grade level; (3) Increased responsibilities are assigned; (4) The supervisor recommends promotion; and (5) the incumbent completes all required training and conditions of employment. Consequently, promotion is not guaranteed. As a **trainee**, the incumbent must perform work under the direct supervision and oversight of a journey level position. This position may not report to a non-journey level position.”*

**Training Plans:** Training plans are realistic, well-researched, and clearly written developmental tools which outline a path for a career with upward mobility leading to journeyman level opportunities. When establishing a developmental job within the FWS, a training plan must outline the specific developmental job duties designed to help the employee acquire the competencies of the target journeymen level assignment. Training plans should be reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure training activities originally identified are meeting developmental goals and are being completed. The training plan should include:

- On -the -Job Training (i.e., daily instruction and guidance designed to prepare the employee to assume progressively more difficult, responsible, and productive work, which constitutes at least 50 percent of the developmental activities);
- Amount of formal training (i.e., on -line training, and/ or classroom training) needed to increase knowledge of the trade and develop skills for advancing to the journeyman level;
- Appropriate sources and content of developmental activities and formal interactive training and expected timeframes for completion of developmental activities and training; and
- The *journeyman position (incumbent)* identified to direct the employee and provide instructions on new assignments; as the employee's skill and knowledge increases, he/she receives less direction until proficient to perform the journey worker job.

**Job Opportunity Announcement:** The JOA should identify all grades within the developmental job including the target journeyman level job, i.e., WG-07 and WG-09. The following language should be included in the JOA:

*“The incumbent works under closer than normal supervision at the **trainee** level performing assignments designed to provide the competencies, skills, and experience required to perform the more complex work at the journey man level. The work increases in difficulty, complexity, and responsibility as the incumbent gains experience and demonstrates a full comprehension of the target level position. As a **trainee**, this position may be eligible for non-competitive*

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*promotion to the target position upon meeting the following requirements: (1) The incumbent demonstrates the ability to perform at the target grade level; (2) Higher-level work exists at the target grade level; (3) Increased responsibilities are assigned; (4) The supervisor recommends promotion; and (5) the incumbent completes all required training and conditions of employment. Consequently, promotion is not guaranteed. As a **trainee**, the incumbent must perform work under the direct supervision and oversight of a journey level position.”*

JOAs must include complete and clear instructions on how to apply. Application/resume must be received through an automated system (USA Jobs). Applicants must submit all other required documentation to substantiate their eligibility for which they are applying.

**Open Continuous Announcements:** HR Offices may use JOAs without specific closing dates (up to one year) to advertise recurring vacancies or in situations where recruitment is expected to be difficult. When a sufficient number of candidates apply for consideration, the HR Office may establish a register for a period no greater than six months, from which they may consider candidates for applicable vacancies. Cut-off date(s) must be identified on the JOA. The following statement must be included within the JOA:

*“Initial consideration will be given to candidates whose applications have been received before the first cut-off date. Qualification requirements must be met for those applications submitted by the first cut-off date.”*

The benefit of using *Open Continuous Announcements* (OCAs) is that it allows hiring managers more immediate access to pools of qualified candidates.

**Pathways Program:** [Personnel Bulletin 13-04](#), The Department of Interior Pathways Program, establishes procedures and guidance on the use of the Pathways Programs and how the Department will appoint and employ individuals under the three Pathways Programs: Internship Program, Recent Graduates Program and Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program. Positions that are classified to the Federal Wage System must be classified as student trainee in the xx01 series of the appropriate occupational group.

**Inquiries:** Any Department employee or employee representative seeking further information concerning this memorandum may contact their respective servicing HRO. Bureau Headquarters HR staff may contact [DOI\\_Office\\_of\\_Human\\_Resources@ios.doi.gov](mailto:DOI_Office_of_Human_Resources@ios.doi.gov).

**Attachments:**

Sample WG Position Description  
Sample Training Plan