UNDERSTANDING JOB SERIES AND THE GENERAL SCHEDULE (GS) PAY SCALE

This resource was created by current Presidential Management Fellows (PMFs) to help Finalists understand what “Job Series” and “Pay Scale” means in layman’s terms. Pay Scale is defined by Pay Grade and Step. See the various links referenced below for general policies and guidance on the topic.

The General Schedule (GS) is the Federal Government’s most common position classification system. This document will explain each of the numbers and what they mean in PMF appointment opportunities.

JOB SERIES: (Occupation Group/Job Series: GS-0343-12-01)

The Occupation Group and Job Series describes what it is the job entails. For the example here, “0343” is the Job Series (Management and Program Analyst), within the “0300” Occupational Group (General Administrative, Clerical, and Office Services Group). The “0343” is the most common Job Series for PMF postings and accounts for approximately a quarter of Classes of 2017-2020 postings. The other Occupation Groups and Job Series that appear in a given year’s job announcements will depend on the agencies’ needs. Some of the common ones found in the analysis of 2017-2020 postings include:

- 0100 - Social Science, Psychology, and Welfare Group. Specifically series 0101 (Social Scientist) and 0130 (Foreign Affairs).
- 0300 - General Administrative, Clerical, and Office Services Group. Specifically series 0301 (Miscellaneous) and 0343 (Program Analyst).
- 0400 - Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences Group. Specifically 0401 (General Natural Resources and Biologist).
- 0500 - Accounting and Budget Group. Specifically 0560 (Budget Analyst).
- 0600 - Medical, Hospital, Dental, and Public Health Group. Specifically 0685 (Public Health Program Specialist).

The Occupation Groups and Job Series are maintained by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and used across the Federal Government. More information about them can be found at OPM’s website at: https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/classifying-general-schedule-positions/.

PAY SCALE: Pay Grade (GS-0343-12-01) and Step (GS-0343-12-01)

If the Job Series and the Occupation Group tells you what you will do in the job, then the Pay Grade and Step will tell you how much you will be paid. OPM produces the nationwide Salary Tables by Geographic Locations.

Every year OPM publishes a new set of Salary Tables in line with approved budget, which may include an increase to the base pay reflecting inflation. Some agencies have their own classification and pay systems.

Federal employees will never be paid less than the base pay for the grade and step identified, and depending on their locality they may be paid much more. To view the tables for 2020, go to the OPM website at: https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/. The website will default to the current calendar year.

Below is the base GS Salary Table for 2020. The Base table covers the general salaries not identified geographically and serves as a default.
Below is the 2020 GS Salary Table for the “WASHINGTON-BALTIMORE-ARLINGTON, DC-MD-VA-WV-PA” geographic area, which accounts for more than half the 2017-2020 PMF job announcements:

Grades are numbered 1-15 and serve as salary bands. Most PMF positions start at Grade 9, Step 1 (GS-9-01), unless there is work experience to support starting at a higher grade and the position covers multiple grade levels. Finalists can only be initially appointed to the GS-9/11/12 (or equivalent) and promote as high as a GS-13 (or equivalent) during the fellowship; assuming the position has a career ladder and promotion potential.

For the examples below, the position must have promotion potential to a higher grade. All Fellows must obtain 1 year of specialized experience at their current grade level before being minimally eligible for a promotion. Promotions are at the supervisor’s discretion and, generally, a Fellow must have a current performance rating of minimally successful.

- **GS-9**: This is the typical rate that PMFs are hired at. With no additional specialized experience, this is the grade that applies to Finalists and Fellows holding advanced degrees other than a PhD (e.g., master’s or professional degrees).

- **GS-10**: Exists but is used infrequently. See the following Federal Times article that explains this at: [https://www.federaltimes.com/management/hr/2020/07/01/why-there-are-so-few-gs-10-positions-in-government/](https://www.federaltimes.com/management/hr/2020/07/01/why-there-are-so-few-gs-10-positions-in-government/).
• **GS-11:** This is the rate that PMFs holding PhDs (e.g., doctorates) are generally hired at, when they have no additional specialized experience. After one year at the GS-9 grade level, PMFs are generally minimally eligible for promotion to a GS-11.

• **GS-12:** This is the rate that advanced PMFs are generally hired at. Outside of the Washington, DC metro area, a GS-12 can be the full performance level for many non-supervisory positions. After one year at the GS-11 grade level, PMFs are generally minimally eligible for promotion to GS-12.

• **GS-13:** In the Washington, DC metro area, a GS-13 can be the full performance level for many non-supervisory positions. After one year at the GS-12 grade level, PMFs are generally minimally eligible for promotion to GS-13.

• **GS-14:** This is the grade generally reserved for highly specialized and valued non-supervisory positions, as well as more junior supervisory positions.

• **GS-15:** This is the highest grade available for Federal employees, typically reserved for supervisors or managers, and extremely specialized and valued non-supervisory positions. Any advancement past this grade would be going into the Senior Executive Service.

Each grade level has **Steps**, which are numbered 1-10 and allow for regular and automatic pay raises. Employees can move up from Steps 1-3 annually, Steps 4-6 every other year, and Steps 7-9 every three years. Generally, a new employee will be hired at step 1, but you may be able to negotiate a higher step; this is based on experience, qualifications, and at the hiring agency’s discretion. A step increase is commonly referred to as a WIGI (Within-Grade Increase). Steps are not necessarily automatic as they require your supervisor’s approval and a minimally successful performance level.

**Other factors:**

• **Resume:** Ensure your resume includes all relevant work and volunteer experience and the amount of time you spent on each of those experiences, this helps an agency HR office potentially qualify you for higher salary grades. Federal resume writing tips can be found on the USAJOBS website at: [https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/faq/application/documents/resume/what-to-include/](https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/faq/application/documents/resume/what-to-include/).

• **Salary Match:** If you have previous work experience and want to try to match your previous salary, you must submit proof to the agency HR office; they will not be able to match your salary without it. You can ask about this, but it is at the agency’s discretion.

• **Superior Qualifications** is the process by which agencies may submit a request to negotiate your initial salary above a Step 1 for the grade level. Your resume must be able to support these types of requests; these are rare and agencies may have policies in place where making this request may not be possible. Additional information can be found on OPM’s website at: [https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/superior-qualifications-and-special-needs-pay-setting-authority/](https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/superior-qualifications-and-special-needs-pay-setting-authority/).

• **Full Performance Level:** Most PMF positions have a “career ladder” of 9/11/12/13 with a Full Performance Level (FPL) of a GS-13. To move past a position’s FPL a Federal employee will either need to be hired for another job or compete for a more advanced version of their job. Finalists should inquire about a position’s career ladder when considering a position. The FPL for the PMF position is identified in the PMF job announcement. A Fellow initially hired into a PMF position with an established FPL cannot reappoint to a different PMF position/agency with a higher FPL; this is because the Fellow did not initially compete for the newer position.