

HUMAN RESOURCES MANUAL
Instruction 511-2: USE OF CAREER LADDER POSITIONS
Issuance Date: 12/15/2008

Material Transmitted:

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Instruction 511-2, Use of Career Ladder Positions, dated December 15, 2008.

Background:

This instruction provides the following:

1. Guidance to OPDIVs on criteria for establishing career ladder positions, including factors to consider and required documentation.
2. Provides prohibitive policy for the use of career ladder positions to the GS-14 and GS-15 level and process for exceptions.

This issuance is effective immediately. Implementation under this issuance must be carried out in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, bargaining agreements, and Departmental policy.

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INSTRUCTION 511-2

SUBJECT: USE OF CAREER LADDER POSITIONS

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511-2-00 PURPOSE

This document outlines the proper and improper uses of career ladder positions in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). It also provides prohibitive policy for the use of career ladder positions to the GS-14 and GS-15 level.

Where this policy conflicts with existing negotiated agreements, including applicable Merit Promotion Plans, the agreement takes precedence over this Instruction for covered employees.

511-2-10 REFERENCES

- A. 5 CFR Part 335 (Promotion and Internal Placement)
- B. 5 CFR Part 511 (Classification under the General Schedule)
- C. HHS Instruction 511-1 (Position Classification, May 2008)

511-2-20 DEFINITIONS

- A. Career Ladder Position. A position restructured to allow for entry at a lower grade level than the full performance grade level which allows for progression to the full performance level. Normally, a position is announced and filled on a competitive basis with promotion to higher grade levels made on a non-competitive basis. The career ladder refers to the range of grades to which the employee may be promoted non-competitively up to the classified full-performance level of the position. For example, a Human Resources Specialist, GS-201 position is classified at the full performance level of a GS-12. Since this is a two-grade interval series, the career ladder position could be established at the GS-5, GS-7, GS-9, or GS-11, leading to the full performance GS-12. If the position is announced as a GS-7 target GS-12, the incumbent may be non-competitively promoted from the GS-7, to the GS-9, to the GS-11, then to the GS-12.
- B. Non-competitive Promotion. After having entered a career ladder, an employee may advance in grade up to the full performance level without further competition, i.e. the employee does not have to re-compete for each subsequent promotion and the agency does not have to reannounce the position in order to promote the incumbent.

511-2-30 ESTABLISHING CAREER LADDERS

- A. Establishing career ladder positions can optimize efficiency, productivity and organizational effectiveness by broadening the pool of applicants when filling vacant positions; enhancing employee motivation and job satisfaction through planned employee development; reducing time to process promotions and administrative costs by providing non-competitive advancement within the career ladder; enhancing workforce retention by providing internal career opportunities; and lowering average human capital costs by including a range of pay levels.
- B. OPDIVs must consider the following factors when deciding to establish a career ladder for a position:
1. Size of Applicant pool. Career ladders are a useful tool when recruitment for the position is difficult at higher grade levels. Recruiting at lower grade levels can broaden the applicant pool.
 2. Availability of Training Staff. Career ladders should only be established when there is available senior staff with the breadth and scope of technical knowledge necessary to train the incumbent.
 3. Uniqueness of Duties. If a position requires unique, specialized qualifications where there is no staff available or knowledgeable to train or develop the incumbent, a career ladder will not be established.
 4. Risk Management. For a position where anything less than full performance would put the Department at risk, a career ladder will not be established.
 5. Supervisory Status. Career ladders should not be established for supervisory positions.
 6. Grade Level. Positions graded above the GS-13 level will not be established as career ladders. Rare exceptions may be made to this rule with justification and prior approval (see Section 511-2-40)
- C. Documentation. All requests to establish and fill career ladder positions at any grade level must include the appropriate documentation, to include:
1. A signed OF-8 from the manager with authority over the position;
 2. A Position Description (PD) or Statement of Differences for each intervening level in the career ladder that refers to the full performance PD.
 3. Appropriate job analysis relevant to each of the grade levels. Job requirements for trainee grade levels are normally not the same as for full performance grade levels.
 4. Appropriate criteria (e.g. questions from the automated recruitment system question library) that aligns with the job analysis.
- D. If a career ladder position is established and filled, supervisors/managers should:

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1. Provide employees increasingly difficult assignments and training to prepare them for the next higher grade.
2. Monitor training progress continuously to enable subsequent promotions in a timely manner.
3. Clearly communicate to applicants the normal expected span of time between subsequent promotions, especially if that time frame exceeds one year between grade levels.
4. Ensure funding plans accommodate subsequent promotions of employees selected below the full performance level.
5. Promote employees who demonstrate the ability to successfully perform the next higher level duties and responsibilities in the career ladder in accordance with the specific training agreement or collective bargaining agreements.
6. Provide remedial assistance to employees who are not ready for promotion to enhance their performance and future success.

511-2-40 USE OF CAREER LADDER POSITIONS TO GS-14 AND GS-15 LEVELS

- A. It is generally prohibited for Operating Divisions (OPDIVs) to establish and fill career ladder positions at any grade level with promotion potential to the GS-14 and GS-15 levels, except with approval from the Director, of the operating Human Resources organization which provides Human Resource services to that OPDIV. (See Section D).
- B. Positions at the GS-14 and GS-15 level require a unique combination of technical, managerial, and leadership skills. It is difficult to accurately predict success of any individual for the full performance GS-14 or GS-15 grade level who has not yet performed at the next lower grade for the target position.
- C. Establishing grade levels of high graded positions require considerable justification. Organizations able to employ a lower graded employee in a higher graded position billet are less likely to be able to support that requirement.
- D. Exceptions.
 1. Prior to the classification of any career ladder to the GS-14 or GS-15 level, written justification and approval must be obtained from the Director of the operating Human Resources organization with classification authority for the OPDIV as stated in HHS Instruction 511-1, Position Classification.
 2. A career ladder is established based upon a classification analysis that sufficient work exists for all employees on a regular and recurring basis at the full performance level to support the grade.
 3. Any OPDIV request to the HR Director for an exception to establish such a career ladder to the GS-14 or GS-15 level must contain justification based upon the following criteria:

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- a. Filling a mission critical need;
 - b. Recruitment and retention needs based upon external market factors; and
 - c. Geographic location considerations.
4. Any request from an OPDIV to the HR Director for a career ladder to the GS-14 and GS-15 levels must include the following documentation:
- a. The proposed full performance PD;
 - b. Statement of Difference for each grade level in the career ladder;
 - c. A copy of an OF-8 PD Cover Sheet signed by the manager who has direct authority over the proposed career ladder position;
 - d. A copy of the classification Evaluation Statement that analyzes and documents that the proposed PDs meet Office of Personnel Management classification standards and guides;
 - e. Justification signed by the OPDIV Head that clearly expresses the reason for this exception.