

## Fact Sheet Field Assistant Authority

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### **General Information**

The Field Assistant hiring authority is a special excepted service appointing authority specifically granted to the Department of the Interior to fill technician positions performing work in the field or in a laboratory setting through the GG-7 level (or its equivalent) to meet temporary or seasonal workload needs. This authority is a great way to quickly fill positions involving short-term field or lab work. This authority cannot be used to fill positions such as those in the trades, crafts, or clerical fields. Employment under this authority may not exceed 180 working days in a service year (additional information regarding appointment limits can be found below).

The Field Assistant authority has specific qualification requirements separate from the typical OPM standards. These standards allow applicants to qualify based on previous field survey party experience, or sub-professional experience, or directly related college level education. Reference Appendix A for the Field Assistant qualification standards.

**Delegations of Authority:** Field party chiefs and heads of field offices are delegated the authority to recruit for positions filled under this authority. The hiring office is responsible for:

- Advertising available positions through the posting of a recruitment bulletin for a minimum of one work day in public locations such as State employee offices, post offices, veterans' organizations, colleges, universities, online job listings, etc. Draft recruitment bulletins must be reviewed by the servicing Human Resources Specialist prior to posting to ensure regulatory requirements are met;
- Reviewing each applicant's qualifications against the established field assistant qualification standards;
- Ranking qualified applicants in accordance with veterans' preference rules;
- Retaining records sufficient to allow a reviewer to reconstruct the recruitment and selection process for a period of 2 years from the date of selection or until reviewed by OPM, whichever occurs first;
- Initiating a personnel action through FPPS for each selectee;
- Forwarding a copy of the recruitment bulletin, list of applicants, qualification determinations, and certificate of eligibles to the servicing HR office for review before a job offer can be made to the selectee(s).

The service HR office will be responsible for handling the pre-employment process, i.e., advanced fingerprint check, initiation of background investigation, requesting any other required documents, etc.

**NOTE: Hiring managers who are interested in using this authority should first contact their [servicing Human Resources Specialist](#) to obtain a sample recruitment bulletin and other necessary forms.**

While under this appointment, the appointee:

- Does not acquire eligibility for non-competitive conversion to a permanent position;

- Will not be eligible for promotion, detail, change to lower grade, or reassignment to another geographic location;
- Will not be eligible for life insurance or retirement benefits but may be eligible to elect [health insurance coverage](#) in certain circumstances; and
- Will be eligible to earn annual and sick leave and be paid for holidays.

### **Eligibility Requirements**

In order to be eligible for a field assistant appointment, an individual must meet the following requirements:

- Be a US citizen;
- Submit an application package in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the recruitment bulletin; and
- Meet the established field assistant qualification standard (see Appendix A) for the position to which he/she has applied by the closing date of the posted recruitment bulletin.

### **Appointment Options**

This authority allows for a temporary appointment in the excepted service not-to-exceed 1-year and may be extended for 1 additional year for a total maximum duration of 2 years.

Appointment to a successor position (a position that replaces and absorbs the original position) is considered to be an extension of the original appointment. Appointment to a position involving the same basic duties, in the same major subdivision of the organization, and in the same local commuting area is also considered to be an extension of the original appointment.

**Work Day Limitation:** Field assistant appointments are limited to 180 work days in a service year. The service year begins with the date of the first appointment under the field assistant authority. The service year begin date does not change until a full year has passed since the last appointment date; in which case the service year begin date starts over. This means that a field assistant may work 180 days during the 1<sup>st</sup> year of their appointment under this authority and another 180 days during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year under this authority. Any day or part of a day in which work is performed or an employee receives pay, counts as a full day towards this limit, including days when an employee uses leave, or is entitled to receive pay for a holiday.

**Exceptions to General Time Limits:** When a position involves seasonal work that totals less than 6 months (1,040 hours excluding overtime hours) in a service year, the time limits described above (i.e., 2-year max) do not apply. In order to apply this exception, it's very important that timekeepers track the exact number of hours that field assistants work. As long as the hours of work performed in a service year totals less than 1,040 hours, the field assistant position can continue to be filled under this authority indefinitely. If at any point the hours worked in a service year exceed 1,039 hours, the appointment will end on the established not-to-exceed date and the position cannot be filled again using this authority. Also, under this exception an individual may be employed for training for up to 120 days following the initial appointment and up to 2 weeks a year thereafter without regard to the service year limitation (1,039 hours). Hours spent training must be coded as such on the employee's time card (pay code TRN in QuickTime) in order to track them for audit purposes.

**Restrictions on Refilling Positions under Temporary Appointments:** In order to use a temporary appointment, the hiring manager must certify that the position (or its successor) hasn't

been filled by temporary appointment(s) in either the competitive or excepted service for an aggregate of 2 years within the preceding 3-year period.

**Position Descriptions:** Each individual appointed under the field assistant appointing authority must be assigned to a classified position description. Standard position descriptions have been developed for certain occupations for use in appointing individuals to field assistant positions and can be accessed at <http://www.usgs.gov/humancapital/hr/nationwidepd.html>. If the standard position description does not accurately describe the work to be performed by the field assistant or there isn't a standard position description for a particular occupational series, the hiring manager must submit a new position description to their servicing Human Resources Specialist for classification prior to appointment.

### **Requirements for Considering Displaced/Surplus Employees**

Provisions of the Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP)/Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan (ICTAP) do not apply to an excepted service appointment (reference 5 CFR 330.609(i) and 330.707(g)).

### **Probationary/Trial Period Requirements**

Individuals serving under a Field Assistant Appointment do not serve a probationary or trial period.

## Appendix A

<b>Qualification Standards Field Assistants, GG-1 through GG-7</b>					
<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Field Survey Party Experience</b>	OR	<b>Sub-professional Experience</b>	OR	<b>College Work Related to Field of Employment</b>
GG-01	None required	OR	None required	OR	None required
GG-02	None required	OR	None required	OR	None Required
GG-03	3 months	OR	1 year	OR	6 months
GG-04	6 months	OR	2 years	OR	1 year
GG-05	9 months	OR	3 years	OR	3 years college study (equivalent 90 semester/135 quarter hours) plus 3 months of lab or field work experience*
GG-06	1 year, 9 months	OR	4 years	OR	4 years college study (equivalent 120 semester hours/180 quarter hours) plus 3 months of lab or field work experience*
GG-07	2 years, 9 months	OR	5 years	OR	5 years college study (with 18 hours of graduate level course work or equivalent) plus 3 months of lab or field work experience*

\*Satisfactory completion of a field course of study may be substituted for the 3 months of field and/or laboratory experience.

### **Definitions of Experience**

**Field Survey Party** – Experience with a field survey party includes activity associated with making and recording geologic, hydrologic, biologic, or topographic field observations; collecting geologic, biological, or water samples for laboratory analysis; applying accepted data collection techniques and methods in the performance of field work in support of scientific investigations; and using a variety of surveying instruments and electronic or mechanical instrumentation in the making and recording of field measurements and observations designed to collect data for physical/ biological science investigations. Only time actually spent in the field can be credited when qualifying individuals under the field party experience option.

**Sub-professional Experience** – Sub-professional experience is defined as technical work performed in support of field or laboratory investigations relating to the biological sciences, physical sciences, or closely related disciplines which provided basic knowledge or skills in gathering, recording, and assembling scientific or engineering data; using scientific instruments to measure angles, degrees, weights, strengths, intensities, etc.; setting up and operating test apparatus, and manipulating quantitative data. Experience may include assisting professional employees with such duties as calibrating and operating measuring instruments mixing solutions, making chemical analyses, setting up and operating test apparatus, and compiling and processing scientific data. Experience as a laboratory mechanic or in a trade or craft may be credited as

experience when the work was performed in close association with physical or biological scientists or other technical personnel and provided a good working knowledge of appropriate scientific principles, methods, and techniques.

**Professional Experience** – Professional work experience in the physical and biological sciences may be credited in lieu of or in conjunction with sub-professional experience as defined above.