

Supplemental Qualification Standard for GS-401 Fire Program Management Positions

within

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) - Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and National Park Service (NPS)

Revised as of 07/29/2019

This document supplements the requirements outlined in the [General Schedule Qualification Standards](#) published by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for General Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences Series, 0401 occupational series and must be used in conjunction with those requirements. This document provides guidance, internal to the agencies listed above, and it is intended for use when evaluating qualifications for Fire Management Specialist positions. Additional or clarifying information can be obtained from OPM's Operating Manual. This internal supplemental qualification standard is not meant to change or substitute for those requirements prescribed by OPM.

Basic Qualification Requirements: The OPM Qualification Standard for the 0401 series includes requirements as stated below. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide documentation or proof that he or she has met the applicable educational provisions described in this supplemental standard. No applicant may be placed in a position covered by the 0401 Qualification Standard for Fire Program Management without meeting A or B below.

A. Degree: Biological sciences, agriculture, natural resource management, chemistry or related discipline appropriate to the position.

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B. Combination of education and experience: Courses equivalent to a major, as shown in A above, plus appropriate experience or additional education which may be defined as at least 24 semester hours in biological sciences, natural resources, wildland fire management, forestry, or agriculture equivalent to a major field of study, **plus appropriate experience or additional education that is comparable to that normally acquired through successful completion of a full 4-year course of study in the biological sciences, agriculture, or natural resources.**

The quality of the combination of education and experience must be sufficient to demonstrate that the applicant possesses the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform work in the occupation, **and is comparable to that normally acquired through the successful completion of a full 4-year course of study with a major in the appropriate field. In addition to courses in the major and related fields, a typical college degree would have included courses that involved analysis, writing, critical thinking, research, etc.** These courses would have provided an applicant with skills and abilities sufficient to perform progressively more responsible work in the occupation. Therefore, creditable experience should have-demonstrated similarly appropriate skills or abilities needed to perform the work of the occupation.

Documentation of 401 series requirements: OPM revised the Operating Manual for Qualifications Standards for General Schedule Positions, Part E.4 – E.4(a) of the General Policies and Instructions effective February 15, 2005, to address the “Acceptability of Higher Education for Meeting the Minimum Qualification Requirements.” OPM revised the education requirement provisions based on Congressional, Department of Education, and OPM concern with the employment of people in the Federal government who have college degrees from non- accredited sources. Effective February 15, 2005, the issuance of the revised OPM qualifications standard restricted qualifying education (primarily) to colleges, universities and institutions. Anyone placed in a GS-0401 series position on or after February 15, 2005, had or has met the OPM qualifications standard in place as of that date.

While this revision applies to all GS positions, it has a significant impact on positions covered by the Department’s Supplemental Standard for Fire Management Positions under the GS-0401 Fire Management series. Prior to February 15, 2005, the OPM Operating Manual for GS Positions allowed credits from the USDA Graduate School, or other institutions determined to be equivalent on the same basis as study in accredited colleges, universities or institutions. At that time National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) was determined to be an equivalent institution. NWCG qualification requirements with the provision that the employee provided appropriate documentation or proof that he or she met the applicable educational provisions and the individual was already in the GS-0401 position as of February 14, 2005.

When the original supplemental standard for Fire Management Specialist was approved on July 29, 2002, the United States Department of Agriculture and Department of the Interior worked jointly to create a draft interpretive guidance for implementation. As a result of the revision, beginning on February 15, 2005 Departmental Human Resources Offices can now credit only educational coursework that is listed on an official transcript from an accredited institution, college or university¹. This means that NWCG coursework, and the Technical Fire Management (TFM) coursework that is not listed on an official transcript, or equivalent documentation, cannot be used even though prior to February 15, 2005, this course work was allowed.

Employees who met qualification requirements using NWCG courses, without academic transcripts, prior to February 15, 2005 and were either appointed, promoted, or reassigned into the GS-0401 by that date as Fire Management Specialists are not affected by these changes as long as they remain in their current positions. It must be noted that their current status under the GS-0401 standard is limited to the position and grade they currently hold. These employees must meet the combination of education and experience provisions, along with the positive education requirements for the GS-0401 series based on the new criteria if they wish to be reassigned, detailed or referred from a merit promotion certificate. The only exception would be a “career-ladder” promotion based on the competition held prior to February 15, 2005.

¹ In lieu of official transcripts from a college, university or institution, equivalent documentation is defined as a certificate or letter of completion signed by a professor, dean, or department head of an accredited college, university or institution. This certificate or letter of completion must indicate the name of the accredited college, university or institution, the name of the course, the academic level of the course (upper or lower division as indicated by the college, university or institution), and the number of semester hours awarded.

Specialized Experience Requirements: Specialized experience is that which equipped the applicant with the particular knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform successfully the duties related to fire program management. To be creditable, specialized experience must have been equivalent to at least the next lower grade level in the normal line of progression for the occupation in the organization.

See Attachment 1, “Staffing Guidance, GS-401 Fire Management Specialist” for additional information on experience and education.

The basic requirements for the type and level of experience and/or education apply to all applicants, whether their experience has been in the same occupation as the position being filled or in a related field. Positions in a related occupational field may differ significantly in the nature of the work and must be thoroughly evaluated to determine if the experience is qualifying for a GS-401 fire program management specialist.

Superior academic achievement (S.A.A.): According to the Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions Operating Manual, this provision covers advanced trainee positions that provide opportunities for advancement upon attaining required job skills and knowledge, require no prior experience, and have work classified at two-grade intervals. The superior academic achievement provision applies to both initial appointment and in service placement actions. It is to be used to determine eligibility for applicable GS-7 level positions of persons who have completed (or expect to complete within 9 months) all the requirements for a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university.

Graduate Education in Lieu of an Advanced Degree: According to the Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions Operating Manual, care must be exercised in determining credit for post-baccalaureate education. Such education must show evidence of progress through a set curriculum or program leading to an advanced degree. It is OPM's intent that 2 years of graduate study be substantially equivalent to a master's degree, and 3 years be substantially equivalent to a Ph.D. degree. Graduate-level credit should not be given for undergraduate level course work unless it is a requisite part of the graduate-level curriculum. If an applicant had to complete under-graduate course work as a prerequisite for pursuing an advanced degree, that undergraduate-level study should not be credited as graduate education.

Experience and education requirements for GS-7 and above:

In addition to meeting the basic entry qualification requirements, applicants must have specialized experience *and/or* directly related education in the amounts shown in the tables below:

Grade/ Positions	Education	Specialized Experience
GS-7	<p>1 year of graduate-level education</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>or</i></p> <p>Bachelor's degree with Superior Academic Achievement</p>	<p>One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least the GS-5 grade level is required in addition to meeting the basic qualification requirements.</p> <p>Description of GS-05 level work experience to qualify for GS-07: Experience must demonstrate an understanding of fire behavior relative to fuels, weather, and topography and how fire affects natural and cultural resources. Examples of experience may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performed duties which provided a basic understanding of wildland fire management concepts, theories and practices including the assessment of fire effects on cultural and/or natural resources. • Assisted other fire management staffs in the development of complex presentations; presented or conducted simple presentations of fire management concepts, topics, information. • Researched technical reports and/or other sources to obtain information used by higher graded professionals; applies basic formulas to routine calculations; • Participated in the development and/or implementation of wildland fire management plans. Carried out initial attack incident management strategies and tactics to meet the stated resource objectives.
GS-9	<p>Master's (or equivalent graduate degree)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>or</i></p> <p>2 academic years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to a master's degree</p>	<p>One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least the GS-7 grade level is required in addition to meeting the basic qualification requirements.</p> <p>Description of GS-07 level work experience to qualify for GS-09: Experience must demonstrate an understanding of fire behavior relative to fuels, weather, and topography and how fire affects natural and cultural resources. Examples of experience <u>may include</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildland fire activities (such as planning and/or implementing prescribed fire or managing wildfires) to ensure resource objectives can be met from a fire management standpoint. • Developing and/or implementing initial attack incident management strategies and tactics to meet the stated resource objectives. • Implementing mitigation measures during wildland fire activities to protect sensitive habitats, endangered species, sensitive plants, or cultural values.

<p>GS-11</p>	<p>Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree</p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p>3 academic years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to a Ph.D. degree</p>	<p>One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least the GS-9 grade level is required in addition to meeting the basic qualification requirements.</p> <p>Description of GS-09 level work experience to qualify for GS-11. Experience <u>must include</u> Fire Program Management elements such as described below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing, reviewing and evaluating fire management plans for ecological soundness, or consistency with land management goals and/or potentially adverse impacts to cultural and natural resources; • Conducting field inspections before and after prescribed or wildfires to determine if resource objectives were achieved and/or to evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken; and, • Analyzing the ecological role of fire and its use and/or exclusion, and smoke management. <p>In addition to the Fire Program Management elements listed above, appropriate experience must have included EITHER prescribed fire/fuels management –OR- fire management operations as described below:</p> <p>Prescribed fire/fuels management: Examples of this type of experience <u>may include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional forest or range inventory methods and procedures (e.g., Brown’s planar intercepts for dead and down fuels; live fuel loading assessments); • Analysis of fuel loadings and determination of appropriate fuel treatment methods (i.e. prescribed fire, mechanical, chemical, or biological treatments); • Land use planning and environmental compliance; • Evaluation of prescribed burn plans or fire management plans to ensure fire containment is possible and identification of appropriate suppression contingencies if fire containment is not obtained. • <p>Fire management operations: Experience in analyzing and/or applying fire management strategies in <u>at least five of the following activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilization and/or dispatch coordination • Fire prevention and education • Training • Logistics • Equipment development and deployment • Fire communication systems • Suppression and preparedness • Aviation
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GS-12 and above	Not applicable	<p>One year of specialized experience equivalent to at least the next lower grade level is required in addition to meeting the basic qualification requirements.</p> <p>NOTE: The supervisor of the position to be filled in consultation with an HR Staffing Specialist develops the specialized experience requirement when recruiting for positions grades GS-12 and above.</p>
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Other Requirements for Fire Positions:

Medical and Physical Requirements: Medical and physical requirements must be met for positions that have duties that are of an arduous or hazardous nature.

Program Oversight and Evaluation: Bureaus and equivalent organizations will include review of the Fire Program Management positions under the 0401 series in their internal personnel management evaluation programs.