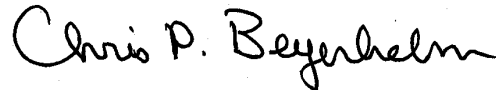


For: State and County Offices

Expanding the Key Program Technician (KPT) Position Availability

Approved by: Associate Administrator for Operations and Management



1 Overview

A Background

On August 12, 2013, Notice PM-2888, “Announcing the Key Program Technician (KPT) Permanent Position”, established permanent county office (CO)-8 KPT position.

KPT's serve as program experts for two or more programs, or they can be in related areas. Examples of related areas are Modernize and Innovate the Delivery of Agricultural Systems (MIDAS) or Geographic Information Systems (GIS). KPT's:

- work within their assigned county office that is within their assigned district, area, or throughout the state; an assigned county offices, within their assigned districts, area, or throughout the state; and
- provide a central resource for expert guidance, coordination, and assistance at the county office level with district-wide or statewide collaboration for assigned programs.

Note: KPT's may assist state office employees with training assignments.

Feedback has shown that KPT positions are very effective and beneficial. State offices have requested the expansion of the KPT program to allow for increased usage of the position.

B Purpose

This notice provides:

- the determination to expand the authorized use of the KPT positions,
- that KPT positions can be used for farm commodity programs or farm loan programs (FLP's),
- a standard KPT position description (PD), which has been classified for both the county office (CO) and general schedule (GS) positions,

Disposal Date	Distribution
March 1, 2016 5-6-15	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose (Continued)

- policies and procedures for establishing new KPT positions, and
- guidance for filling and using KPT positions.

C Contacts

For questions regarding this notice:

- county offices shall contact the state office administrative officer, and
- state offices shall contact Yolanda Provost by either of the following:
 - e-mail to yolanda.provost@wdc.usda.gov, or
 - telephone at 202-205-9282.

D Recruitment Process for New KPT's

New KPT positions shall be:

- filled using merit selection principles and equal employment opportunity (EEO) guidelines,
- filled within current ceiling and budget for the state, and
- headquartered at the employee's current county office or service center.

2 Filling KPT Vacancies

A Establishing KPT Positions

State offices are **not** required to establish KPT positions, but they are available at the State Executive Director's (SED's) discretion. KPT positions can only be established at the CO-08 or GS-08 grade level. State offices are authorized a maximum number of KPT positions, which are equal to the number of districts within the state.

KPT's are **not** limited to assisting within one district. It is the SED's discretion on how to organize and assign program and service areas.

Note: All KPT positions **must** be filled within the established ceilings and budgets for the state.

2 Filling KPT Vacancies (Continued)

B Advertising CO KPT Vacancies

State offices must request a vacancy for new KPT positions, which are to be posted on USAJOBS. To request a vacancy it must be added to the county office Vacancy Request Tracker located on DAFO's SharePoint site at <https://fsa.sc.egov.usda.gov/mgr/DAFO/Lists/County%20Office%20Vacancy%20Request%20Tracker/AllItems.aspx>.

The area of consideration is restricted to current, full-time, permanent county office employees. State offices **must** notify each county office, by e-mail, of the vacancy, including the USAJOBS vacancy number when the vacancy has posted.

Note: The e-mail must include the link to the USAJOBS vacancy announcement.

C Advertising GS KPT Vacancies

State offices shall request recruit actions for new GS KPT positions through Web52, following the current procedures established by HRD for filling federal positions.

The area of consideration should be restricted to FSA current, permanent employees statewide. State offices **must** notify each county office, by e-mail, of the vacancy, including the USAJOBS vacancy number when the vacancy has posted.

D Application Review Process

An interview panel must be established to review applicants. For CO positions, the panel membership shall include county executive directors (CED's). For GS positions, the panel membership shall include farm loan managers (FLM's), a district director (DD), and any others deemed appropriate as panel members. The panel must provide their recommendations to the SED, who will make the selection.

Note: Interview panel members cannot be someone who supervises any of the applicants.

3 Actions After Selection

A Performance Element

A specific performance element regarding the duties of the KPT position will be added to the performance plan for all selected KPT's (Exhibit 1).

3 Actions After Selection (Continued)

B Example PD's

The standard PD for CO KPT duties and responsibilities is provided in Exhibit 2, and the standard PD for GS KPT duties and responsibilities is provided in Exhibit 3. Additional duties from existing PD's related to the KPT's specific work in the local office may be added as an addendum.

C Communications

Ensure that expectations and methods of communication are established between applicable state office employees and KPT's to foster effective collaboration.

Performance Element

The following specific performance element must be added to the performance plan for all selected KPT's.

Non-Critical Element	Individual Program Contributions to the State
	<p>ELEMENT: This employee serves as an initial contact point for Program Technicians within the State for resolving operational and policy program questions and problems in their assigned program areas. Develops and contributes creative ideas and solutions to program operations and/or issues resulting in added value to the State's products and services. Works with County and State Office coworkers to appropriately implement decisions. Collaborates with Program Technicians throughout assigned County Offices or Service Centers to ensure consistency with programs' execution. Willingly accepts and acts on constructive criticism.</p>
	<p>STANDARDS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regularly cooperates with coworkers and others in meeting commitments and accomplishing assigned work on time; such as, sharing information freely with no more than one to two exceptions. 2. Responds constructively to feedback within 24 hours, seeking ways to improve with no more than one to two exceptions. 3. Updates records that affect other programs in the office within timeframes established by management with no more than one to three exceptions. 4. Monthly initiates contact with County Executive Directors or farm loan managers of assigned offices to proactively assess programs' status with no more than one to two exceptions. 5. Fosters productive and cooperative working relationships by showing understanding, courtesy, tact, and politeness to others with no more than one to two valid complaints. <p>Note: Zero exceptions alone for these standards does not mean that you "exceed fully successful" for this element. In order to obtain "exceeds fully successful" for this element, there must be additional supporting evidence that shows you excelled beyond the fully successful requirements.</p> <p>RESULTS: The achievement of these standards will result in increased cooperation and cross training between employees fostering a harmonious and productive work environment. This aligns with "Crosscutting Management Objectives Supporting FSA Strategic Goals".</p>

Example CO KPT PD

The following example of this PD is provided for CO KPT activities. Identification of assigned programs and any additional duties from an existing PD, which are related to a KPT's specific work in the local county office, should be added in an addendum. The standard CO PD can be pulled from the PD library, position number "FSA-3187". The PD library is located at http://fsaintranet.sc.egov.usda.gov/ffas/HRD/Position_data/PD_Search.asp.

Title: Key Program Technician
Grade: CO-8

A. INTRODUCTION

Five to thirty percent of the time, the incumbent provides assistance to multiple County Offices by serving as the initial contact point for Program Technicians within the State resolving operational and policy program questions and problems. In addition, the incumbent serves as a program expert for two or more programs. This is the full performance level of the position. The position is FLSA nonexempt.

B. MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Receives, researches, and responds to assigned programs policy and operational problems, questions and issues originating in assigned County Office in the State. Such matters may include, but are not limited to, those involving program policies and legal, regulatory or policy requirements; contracts and other program documents and forms; program calculations and payments; GIS issues; and automated procedures ranging from those related to major software releases to individual error messages.

Identifies specific nature of problem or question and determines appropriate action to effect problem/question resolution. Provides clarification of handbook materials and detailed instructions for completing specific tasks. Issues verbal or written instruction and guidance and follows up to assure problems were correctly resolved. Keeps appropriate officials informed of problems and questions received as well as solutions provided. Refers questions for which an answer cannot be found to the County Executive Director, District Director, or appropriate State Office specialist.

Promotes consistent and uniform program interpretation and operations within the State. Issues e-mails to Program Technicians within the State to provide guidance on commonly recurring questions, citing handbook references when available. Conducts conference calls with Program Technicians within the State to share questions, comments and concerns. As needed, travels to other County Offices to provide assistance with complex problems and hands-on training.

Interprets and applies draft procedures. Determines actions needed for implementation when final procedures are issued. Participates with State Office specialists in developing and testing operating instructions, State notices, checklist and similar issuances. Recommends changes to clarify instructions, identifies better ways to accomplish program tasks and assures consistency of operations. Notifies appropriate officials of repetitive or recurring problems. Consults with State Office specialists to resolve conflicts between program notices and handbooks based upon personal experience and problems and questions referred by others.

Example CO KPT PD (Continued)

Serves as the training specialist for assigned programs within the assigned County Offices in the State. Leads training sessions and/or travels to specific County Offices to provide onsite training. Recommends training for new procedures and for refresher courses. Maintains awareness of knowledge and experience levels of Program Technicians in the State so as to provide guidance and assistance and to assess training needs.

Performs other duties as assigned.

C. EEO AND CIVIL RIGHTS RESPONSIBILITIES

The employee is responsible for knowing and supporting equal opportunity and civil rights policies; performing assigned duties in full compliance with the letter and spirit of equal opportunity and civil rights laws and regulations; ensuring bias-free written and oral communications; and respecting and valuing differences of other employees and clients.

D. SUPERVISION RECEIVED

Assignments outside the incumbent's headquarters County Office are coordinated with the County Executive Director, who keeps the District Director informed on issues of district-wide concern. Because one of the major objectives of the position is to provide assistance to multiple County Offices by responding to technical program issues, the employee works with a high degree of independence, setting assignment priorities, exercising judgment and initiative to research and respond to problems and questions, and referring to a higher level only those matters which are unusually complex.

E. KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

The work requires thorough knowledge of assigned programs policies and regulations, operating procedures and precedents and skill in applying this knowledge to a wide variety of complex problems and issues referred by Program Technicians within the State. Such knowledge may have been gained through additional training and/or extensive practical experience in the assigned program areas. The incumbent must have the knowledge and skills to accurately identify the nature of problems presented, conduct necessary research to determine the appropriate means for resolving the problems and communicate the necessary procedures for problem resolutions to Program Technicians with varying levels of expertise.

The incumbent must also have excellent communication skills to work with State Office Specialists and to provide training to Program Technicians within the State.

Example GS KPT PD

The following example of a PD is provided for GS KPT activities. Identification of assigned programs and any additional duties from an existing PD, which are related to a KPT's specific work in the local office, should be added in an addendum. The standard GS PD can be pulled from the PD library, position number "FSA-3181". The PD library is located at http://fsaintranet.sc.egov.usda.gov/ffas/HRD/Position_data/PD_Search.asp.

Classification Title:	Key Program Technician
Organizational Title:	
Series & Grade:	GS-1101-08
Organizational Location:	Farm Services Agency
	DAFO/State Offices
OGE 450:	Not Required
Position Sensitivity:	1N
Competitive Level:	0100
Drug Testing:	Not Required
Supervisory Code:	Non-Supervisory (8)
FLSA Status:	Non-Exempt (N)
Bargaining Unit Status:	Bargaining Unit (BU)
Full Performance Level:	GS-08

INTRODUCTION

This position is located in a County/Service Center Office, State Office, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations (DAFO), Farm Services Agency (FSA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The incumbent provides assistance to multiple County Offices or Service Centers by serving as the initial contact point for Program Technicians within the State resolving operational and policy program questions and problems. In addition, the incumbent serves as a program expert for two or more areas related to farm programs, farm loan processing, or loan servicing in the local office.

This is the full performance level of the position. The position is FLSA nonexempt.

PRINCIPAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIESProgram Technical Expert (65%)

Performs a wide range of technical and administrative duties related to assigned farm or farm loan programs at the field office level, County Office or service center. Serves as the field office technical expert in the administration of procedures, regulations, and operations including automated operations of the assigned program areas. Provides information to producers or borrowers concerning the provisions of the programs and explains program provisions, benefits, and options to clients. As applicable, handles signup operations, receives requests, assists applicants in completion of forms and agreements, discusses new and revised agreements, receives soil conservation plans, develops and maintains applicant files and records, reviews program or loan applications for completeness, determines need for additional information, advises producers or borrowers on program or loan requirements, and/or notifies producers or borrowers of approval or disapproval.

Example GS KPT PD (Continued)

Reviews and maintains program or loan notices, handbook amendments, and similar materials. Notes changes in program policies and regulations and determines impact of such changes upon existing office operations and procedures.

Prepares correspondence and informational items related to assigned programs. Develops and prepares recurring and ad hoc program reports including funds control as applicable. Applies judgment in solving problems or taking appropriate action where precedents do not exist as well as uses program knowledge to interpret or analyze operating requirements in addition to performing or overseeing clerical/technical processing work. Refers matters requiring higher level authority or interpretation to appropriate higher level employees.

Key Program Technician Duties (35%)

Receives, researches, and responds to assigned program's policy and operational problems, questions, and issues originating in the assigned County Offices or Service Centers in the State. Provides assistance on matters which include, but are not limited to, those involving program policies and legal, regulatory, or policy requirements; loan applications and re-amortizations; loan and grant closings; contracts and other program documents and forms; program calculations and payments; GIS issues; and automation procedures ranging from those related to major software releases to individual error messages.

Identifies specific nature of the problem or question and determines appropriate action to effect problem/question resolution. Provides clarification of handbook materials and detailed instructions for completing specific tasks. Issues verbal or written instruction and guidance and follows up to assure problems were correctly resolved. Keeps appropriate officials informed of problems and questions received as well as solutions provided. Refers questions for which an answer cannot be found to the County Executive Director, Farm Loan Manager, District Director, or appropriate State Office specialist.

Promotes consistent and uniform program and interpretation and operations within the State. Issues e-mails to Program Technicians within the State to provide guidance on commonly recurring questions, citing handbook references when available. Conducts conference calls with Program Technicians within the State to share questions, comments, and concerns. As needed, travels to other County Offices or Service Centers to provide assistance with complex problems and hands-on training.

Interprets and applies draft procedures. Determines actions needed for implementation when final procedures are issued. Participates with State Office specialists in developing and testing operating instructions, State notices, checklist, and similar issuances. Recommends changes to clarify instructions, identifies better ways to accomplish program tasks, and assures consistency of operations. Notifies appropriate officials of repetitive or recurring problems. Consults with State Office specialists to resolve conflicts between program notices and handbooks based upon personal experience and problems and questions referred by others.

Serves as the training specialist for assigned programs within the assigned County Offices and Service Centers in the State. Leads training sessions and/or travels to specific County Offices to provide onsite training. Recommends training for new procedures and for refresher courses. Maintains awareness of knowledge and experience levels of Program Technicians in the State so as to provide guidance and assistance and to assess training needs.

Performs other related duties as assigned.

Example GS KPT PD (Continued)

EEO RESPONSIBILITIES

The employee is responsible for knowing and supporting equal opportunity and civil rights policies; performing assigned duties in full compliance with the letter and spirit of equal opportunity and civil rights laws and regulations; ensuring bias-free written and oral communications; and respecting and valuing differences of other employees and clients.

FACTOR LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS**Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position, Level 1-5, 750 points**

Comprehensive working knowledge of assigned programs, policies, and regulations, operating procedures, and precedents governing farm programs, farm loan processing, and/or loan servicing in order to resolve a wide variety of complex problems and issues referred by Program Technicians within the State, promote consistent and uniform program and interpretation and operations within the State, and perform a wide range of technical and administrative duties related to assigned farm or farm loan programs at the field office level.

Comprehensive working knowledge of, and the skill to apply, analytical and evaluative techniques to accurately identify the nature of problems presented, conduct necessary research and fact-finding, and determine the appropriate means for resolving problems and to participate in developing and testing operating instructions and similar issuances, recommend changes to clarify instructions, identify better ways to accomplish program tasks and assure consistency of operations, and determine impact of program changes upon existing office operations and procedures.

Substantial knowledge of, and excellent skill in applying, oral and written communication methods and techniques in order to issue verbal or written instructions and guidance to Program Technicians, coordinate and conduct conference calls with Program Technicians, consult with State Office specialists in resolving issues, and provide information to producers or borrowers concerning the provisions of programs and explain program provisions, benefits, and options to clients.

Comprehensive working knowledge of training techniques in order to serve as the training specialist for assigned programs, lead training sessions, and recommend and develop training for new procedures and for refresher courses.

Comprehensive working knowledge of automated farm loan and supporting program applications in order to provide assistance on automation procedures ranging from those related to major software releases to individual error messages.

Factor 2, Supervisory Controls, Level 2-3, 275 points

Works under the supervision of the Farm Loan Manager or other designated supervisor, who defines overall objectives and priorities in collaboration with the appropriate state office specialist and/or District Director. The incumbent works with a high degree of independence, setting assignment priorities, exercising judgment and initiative to research and respond to problems and questions, and referring to their supervisor or higher level employees only those matters which are unusually complex. Assignments outside the incumbent's headquarters office are coordinated with the supervisor and appropriate state office specialist. Completed work is reviewed for effectiveness in achieving intended objectives and soundness of judgment.

Example GS KPT PD (Continued)**Factor 3, Guidelines, Level 3-3, 275 points**

Guidelines consist of established FSA procedures, program policies, precedents, laws, regulations, and ordinances of the local and State government agencies affecting the serviced area. The incumbent exercises judgment in selecting, interpreting, and applying or adapting applicable procedures to issues or problems at hand. Some situations encountered are not specifically covered by guidelines. In such cases, the employee adapts existing guidelines or develops and recommends an approach for resolving the situation. The incumbent is responsible for working with State Office specialists in resolving conflicts or inconsistencies between guidelines and recommending changes to clarify instructions and for issuing clarifying verbal or written instruction and guidance to Program Technicians.

Factor 4, Complexity, Level 4-3, 150 points

The work involves gathering information, identifying and analyzing issues, and resolving problems in the technical administration and delivery of substantive programs as well as technical procedural problems referred by Program Technicians in County Offices or Service Centers. Assignments involve a wide variety of duties that require the incumbent to apply many different and unrelated techniques and methods to a broad range of activities applicable to assigned programs. The incumbent must determine interrelationships and interpret and evaluate applicable regulatory and procedural materials to determine approaches to resolve problems or complete assignments. The incumbent must conduct detailed planning to gather and interpret information and data for assessing problems and issues, determine the most effective approach to meet requirements, identify ways to improve or deliver services to ensure that services meet the program's business objectives, assess situations or processes that are complicated by conflicting or ambiguous data, and participate in analyzing the effects of program changes on procedures. Originality is required in determining, developing, or making correct and accurate interpretation of technical difficulties encountered. Work requires making decisions, devising solutions, and taking actions based on program knowledge.

Factor 5, Scope and Effect, Level 5-3, 150 points

This position provides assistance to multiple County Offices or Service Centers by serving as the initial contact point for Program Technicians within the State resolving technical operational and policy program questions and problems. In addition, the incumbent serves as a program expert for two or more areas related to farm programs, farm loan processing, or loan servicing in the local office. The work contributes to the overall efficiency of multiple office operations, facilitates the work of others, and affects members of the local community. The work affects the accuracy and reliability of the services provided and facilitates the work of higher-level State Office specialists.

Factors 6 & 7, Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts, Level 2B, 75 points

Personal contacts are with individuals within and outside FSA, but primarily with FSA employees within the state jurisdiction. People contacted are engaged in the same mission and are usually located at FSA County Offices, Service Centers, or State Offices. External contacts are with producers or borrowers. The purpose of contacts is to evaluate, explain, and advise on work efforts to resolve operational problems, to provide advice on program-related issues and concerns, and to resolve differences in interpretations and misunderstanding of program issue.

Factor 8, Physical Demands, Level 8-1, 5 points

The work is primarily sedentary. No special physical demands are required to perform the work. Occasional travel to other County Offices or Service Centers may be required.

Example GS KPT PD (Continued)**Factor 9, Work Environment, Level 9-1, 5 points**

The work environment involves the everyday risks or discomforts typical of such places as offices, meeting and conference rooms, and private and commercial vehicles.

TOTAL POINTS = 1685**Grade Conversion: 1605-1850 equates to a GS-08**