

**Forest Service Handbook
National Headquarters - Washington Office
Washington, DC**

**Forest Service Handbook 1509.11 - Grants, Cooperative Agreements, and Other Agreements
Handbook**

Chapter 10 - Grants and Agreements Administration

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Approved by: Mary Pletcher Rice, Deputy Chief, Business Operations

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Responsible staff: Business Operations, Washington Office, Office of Grants and Agreements (WO - OG&A), Training and Certification Branch (TCB) and Research and Washington Office (RWO) Programs Policy Branch

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Digest: Following is an explanation of the changes throughout the directive by section.

Section 10.5: Adds five new terms and definitions: Complementary Training, Endorsement, Grants and Agreement Leadership, Maintenance Hours, and Special Endorsements. Revises the definition for the term “Certification” in order that combined with the addition of five new terms the definitions will align with certification policy direction.

Section 11: Changes section title from “Grants and Agreements Specialist Certification” to “Grants Management Specialist Certification” and sets forth direction.

Section 11.1: Changes section title from “Certification Requirements” to “Certification Requirement” and sets forth direction.

Section 11.11: Changes section title from “Non-Certified Individuals” to “Operational Certification” and sets forth direction.

Section 11.12: Changes section title from “Level I Certification” to “Operational Certification (GS-7)” and sets forth direction.

Section 11.13: Changes section title from “Level II Certification” to “Operational Certification (GS-9/GS-11)” and sets forth direction.

Section 11.14: Changes section title from “Non-Operational Certification” to “Operational Certification (GS-12+)” and adds 11.14 - Exhibit 01: Instrument/Authority Table.

Section 11.15: Changes section title from “Certification from other Agencies” to “Non-Operational Certification” and sets forth direction.

Section 11.2: Changes section title from “Revocation of Certification” to “Earning a Specialized Endorsement” and sets forth direction.

Section 11.3: Changes section title from “Transfer of Certification within the Forest Service” to “Maintenance Hours” and sets forth direction.

Section 11.4: Changes section title from “Standards of Competency and Training Requirements” to “Requesting Certification” and adds 11.4 - Exhibit 01: Training Requirements Table.

Section 11.41: Removes obsolete section and direction concerning Level I Training Requirements and removes obsolete 11.41 - Exhibit 01 Training Requirements for Level I GMS.

Section 11.42: Removes obsolete section and direction concerning Level II Training Requirements and removes obsolete 11.42 - Exhibit 01 Training Requirements for Level II GMS.

Section 11.43: Removes obsolete section and direction concerning Non-Operational Certification Training Requirements and removes obsolete 11.43 - Exhibit 01 Training Requirements for Non-Operational GMS.

Section 11.44: Removes obsolete section and direction concerning Other, Desired Training and Competencies for Levels I, II, and Non-Operational Certification and removes obsolete 11.44 - Exhibit 01 Other, Desired Training and Competencies for Levels I and II GMS and Non-Operational Certification.

Section 5: Establishes code, caption, and sets forth direction on “Deactivation of Certification.”

Section 6: Establishes code, caption, and sets forth direction on “Transfer of Certification within the Forest Service.”

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10.5 - Definitions

Agreement. FSM 1580 instruments not considered Federal Financial Assistance (FFA) transactions.

Award. Unless noted otherwise, the term means the awarding document for either a grant or cooperative agreement.

Certification. The process through which employees within the Agency's Grants & Agreements (G&A) organization are verified to meet foundational knowledge, training, and competency-based requirements. This ensures that individuals possess the necessary skills and understanding to perform their roles effectively within the organization.

Complementary Training. Instructional opportunities determined by the employee's leadership that help develop skills and support performance of their roles and responsibilities.

De-obligation. The portion of the Federal awarding agency's obligated funds, not spent by the recipient/cooperator in the pursuit of the grant's/agreement's objectives, which have been administratively recovered by the Federal awarding agency.

Endorsement. The formal authorization granted by the Washington Office, Office of Grants & Agreements (OG&A) to a Grants Management Specialist (1109/GMS) to carry out the full responsibility of managing the specified grant or agreement instrument type and authority. The endorsement encompasses the authority to initiate, oversee, and execute new agreements or modifications, funded or unfunded, including the closeout of the record.

Forest Service Official Record System. An application that displays all files as an e-file record.

Grants and Agreement Leadership. Anyone within the G&A organization that holds the title of Manager, Supervisor, or delegated Supervisor.

Inherently Governmental Function. A function that is so intimately related to the public interest as to mandate performance by Government employees. These functions include those activities that require either the exercise of discretion in applying Government authority or the exercise of value judgments in making decisions for the Government.

Maintenance Hours. Training hours that are directly related to a GMS's roles and responsibilities and recorded in order to retain active certification status.

Special Endorsements. A tailored authorization provided by OG&A to a GMS who meets specific criteria, including a minimum proficiency level, requisite training, and a higher degree of on-the-job experience. This endorsement level is required for the management of agreements that are characterized by their inherent complexity, necessitating advanced knowledge, skills, and expertise.

11 - Grants Management Specialist Certification

The OG&A national certification system establishes two primary certification categories -- Operational and Non-Operational -- aimed at standardizing competency levels among GMS and related personnel through a blend of formal training and practical on-the-job experience. The certification process is designed to foster collaboration between certified GMSs, who act as mentors, and their non-certified counterparts throughout the agreement review process. These mentors equip non-certified GMSs with hands-on training tools and impart best practices advice, aiming for the mentee to achieve operational certification. The estimated timeframe to obtain an Operational or Non-Operational certification is within 18 months of onboarding.

To be certified as a GMS, individuals must meet the competency standards outlined in this chapter, which are based on formal training and on-the-job experience. It is important to note that no unit within the organization may impose additional requirements beyond those specified in the national certification policy. Furthermore, career advancement within the organization does not hinge on accumulation of endorsements. It should be clarified that contractors, volunteers, or staff from other agencies are not eligible for this certification. This policy outlines an endorsement-based system to ensure the workforce is adequately trained. If a region or station lacks the capacity to mentor a GMS for certain endorsements, they are encouraged to reach out to other regions, thereby promoting a collaborative and supportive environment across the organization.

11.1 - Certification Requirement

11.11 - Operational Certification

Operational certification is required for 1109 series GMS' at grades GS-7 and above. Operational duties include those roles and responsibilities defined in Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1580. The maximum number of endorsements a GMS can achieve is determined by their grade level. Furthermore, securing an endorsement for a particular instrument type is contingent upon completing the requisite amount of training and experience. In addition to the detailed training below, it is recommended any new GMS attend Grants Management Specialist Orientation (GMSO) upon hire.

To become certified as an Operational GMS, the following minimum criteria must be met:

1. Successful completion of the mandatory training for the specified grade level (see 11.4 - Exhibit 01: Training Requirements Table);
2. Successful completion of the Instrument/Authority endorsement 'review' minimum in at least one area of expertise (see 11.14 - Exhibit 01: Instrument/Authority Table); and
3. Recommendation by the Manager, Supervisor or delegated Supervisor.

11.12 - Operational Certification (GS-7)

An Operationally Certified GMS at the GS-7 level must hold a minimum of one (1) endorsement up to the maximum of five (5) endorsements. Special endorsements are limited to only GS-9 and above.

Requirements for Operational Certification at the GS-7 level:

1. Hold an 1109 job series position;
2. Instrument/Authority endorsement review minimum in at least one area of expertise (see 11.14 - Exhibit 01: Instrument/Authority Table);
3. Four-day Appropriations Law course (should be completed as a pre-requisite to receiving the certification. The application for certification should provide a date of completion for this primary course.);
4. USDA Tier I Grants Workforce Training Program (Grants 101 Modules 1-5); and
5. Recommendation by the Manager, Supervisor, or delegated Supervisor.

11.13 - Operational Certification (GS-9/GS-11)

An Operationally Certified GMS at the GS-9/GS-11 level must hold a minimum of one (1) endorsement up to the maximum of ten (10) endorsements.

Requirements for Operational Certification at the GS-9/GS-11 level:

1. Hold an 1109 job series position;
2. Instrument/Authority endorsement review minimum in at least one area of expertise (see 11.14 - Exhibit 01: Instrument/Authority Table);
3. Four-day Appropriation Law course;
4. Cost Principles and Admin Requirements course (32 hours);
5. USDA Tier I Grants Workforce Training Program (Grants 101 Modules 1-5);
6. 16 hours of GMS Complementary Training; and
7. Recommendation by the Manager, Supervisor, or delegated Supervisor.

11.14 - Operational Certification (GS-12+)

An Operationally Certified GMS at the GS-12+ level must hold a minimum of one (1) endorsement up to the maximum endorsements.

Requirements for Operational Certification at the GS-12 level:

1. Hold an 1109 job series position;
2. Instrument/Authority endorsement review minimum in at least one area of expertise (see 11.14 - Exhibit 01: Instrument/Authority Table);
3. Four-day Appropriation Law;
4. Cost Principles and Admin Requirements course (32 hours);
5. USDA Tier I Grants Workforce Training Program (Grants 101 Modules 1-5);
6. 16 hours of GMS Complementary Training; and
7. Recommendation by the Manager, Supervisor, or delegated Supervisor.

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11.14 - Exhibit 01

Instrument/Authority Table

Instrument/Authority	Minimum new instrument review for endorsement. (Number indicates review of new agreements, unless otherwise indicated.)
Federal Financial Assistance (FFA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic Grant (DG) • Cooperative Agreement (CA) • Fixed Amount Award (FA) • International Agreement (IG) • International Cooperative Agreements (IC) 	10 (Any combination of instruments)
Interagency Agreements (IA)	10 (Demonstrating multiple authorities)
Challenge Cost Share (CS)	10
Participating Agreement (PA)	10 (Demonstrating multiple authorities)
Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act Agreement (AN) ¹	3
Road Agreements (RO)	1 Master and 5 Other Transactions (Road Project Agreement (RPA), Supplemental Project Agreement (SPA), Modification)
Law Enforcement Agreements (LE)	6 Transactions (Master ² , Operating Plans, SPA or Modifications)
Collection Agreements (CO)	10
Joint Venture Agreements (JV/IJ)	10
Cost Reimbursable Agreements (CR)	10
Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (RD)	1
Material Transfer Agreement (MTA)	1
Memorandum of Understanding (MU)	5

¹ For Region 10 only

² LE Master can only be counted as one transaction and the GMS would need five other transactions.

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11.14 - Exhibit 01 - Continued

Instrument/Authority Table

Instrument/Authority	Minimum new instrument review for endorsement. (Number indicates review of new agreements, unless otherwise indicated.)
Special Endorsements (GS-9 and Above Only)	
Stewardship Agreements (SA)	5 total with a minimum of 1 Stand-alone, 1 SPA, and 1 Master
Good Neighbor Agreements (GN)	5 total with a minimum of 1 Stand-alone, 1 SPA, and 1 Master
Tribal Forest Protection Act/ 638 Agreement (TR)	3 total with a minimum of 1 Stand-alone, 1 SPA, and 1 Master
Cooperative Fire Agreements inclusive of Fire Agreement (FI), Fire Operating Plan (FO), and Fire Project Agreement (FP)	Minimal requirements include review of 1 Statewide Master agreement and the associated operating plan and a combination of 5 instrument types reflective of the full suite of fire agreements

11.15 - Non-Operational Certification

Non-Operational Certification is designed for individuals who work at the Forest Service in (or oversee) a Grants and Agreements organization, but who do not hold an operational portfolio. Under this certification status, an employee works in a capacity that supports or leads a G&A organization. Responsibilities of non-operationally certified individuals can include supervision, management, policy, oversight, systems, administration, and training of a G&A organization at either the national or regional level. It is not necessary to be in the 1109 job series to hold this certification. Certified non-operational individuals may only have G&A non-operational roles in the official G&A system. G&A system access is only granted for the transactions within the scope of their purview.

Requirements for a Non-Operational Certification:

1. Hold a position within the G&A organization with no operational duties;
2. Complete an approved four-day Appropriation Law course through an Outside Professional Training (OPT);
3. Complete the USDA Tier I (Grants 101 Modules 1-5) or Tier II Grants Workforce Training Program;
4. Complete 16 hours of OG&A Training; and
5. Recommendation from their Manager, Supervisor, or delegated Supervisor.

Note: Regional Managers are exempt from requirement 5.

11.2 - Earning a Specialized Endorsement

There are four agreement types that require additional training to earn the endorsement to process a record independently as a certified GMS. These endorsements are only available to operational GMS at a GS-9 and above. The additional training requirements are outlined below, by agreement type:

1. Stewardship - GMS must complete at least 24 additional hours of training specific to Stewardship agreements, contracts, and Forest Service Forest Management policy in addition to processing the minimum number of agreements, to be reviewed by another GMS with the Stewardship Agreement endorsement. Training must include at least 8 hours of OG&A-led training specific to Restoration Agreements. Other training topics that can be used to meet this requirement may include but are not limited to; Sales Administration, NEPA, Designation by Prescription, Silviculture, Timber Financial Systems, and as pre-approved by the OG&A.

2. Good Neighbor - GMS must complete at least 24 additional hours of training specific to Good Neighbor agreements and Forest Service Forest Management policy in addition to processing the minimum number of agreements, to be reviewed by another GMS with the Good Neighbor Agreement endorsement. Training must include at least 8 hours of OG&A-led training specific to Restoration Agreements. Other training topics that can be used to meet this requirement may include, but are not limited to; Sales Administration, NEPA, Designation by Prescription, Silviculture, Timber Financial Systems, and as pre-approved by OG&A.
3. Tribal Forest Protection Act/638 Agreements and other Tribal Specific Authorities - GMS must complete at least 24 additional hours of training specific to Tribal agreements, Tribal law, and policy in addition to processing the minimum number of agreements, to be reviewed by another GMS with the Tribal Agreement endorsement. Training must include at least 8 hours of OG&A-led training specific to Tribal Agreements. Other training topics that can be used to meet this requirement may include Indian Trust Law, Native American Forestry Management Practices, Tribal Consultation, Administration, NEPA, Silviculture, among others and as pre-approved by OG&A.
4. Cooperative Fire Agreements (Master Statewide Cooperative Wildland Fire Management and Stafford Act Response Agreement, Statewide Operating Plan, Supplemental Fire Project, and Local Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement, Local Fire Supplemental Project Agreement) - GMS must successfully complete the following 5 courses to ensure proficiency in Fire Agreement types, in addition to processing the minimum number of agreements, to be reviewed by another GMS with Fire Agreement endorsement.

Prerequisites:

- a. FEMA: IS-700 National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Intro (3.5 hours, virtual);
- b. FEMA: IS-800 National Response Framework (NRF) An Intro (2 hours, virtual);
- c. FEMA: ICS-100 Intro to the Incident Command System (ICS) (2 hours, virtual);
- d. NWCG Incident Business (S-260) online (16 hours, virtual); and
- e. National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG): Glossary of Wildland Fire: (Self Study).

11.3 - Maintenance Hours

All individuals holding a certification under this policy are required to complete a minimum of 40 hours of continuous learning (such as, Grants and Agreements Training and Education

(GATE) sessions, Grants and Agreements Ag Learn courses, Management Concepts International (MCI) Courses, supervisor directed training, and/or anything associated with Grants & Agreements job requirements) every two years, which must be documented in the official training record-keeping system. Refer to section 11.4, Exhibit-01 for Training Requirements. This requirement applies to both operational and non-operational certifications. Maintenance hours are applicable only after an individual has obtained certification. Maintenance and complementary training hours cannot be counted simultaneously.

11.4 - Requesting Certification

Once a GMS has achieved all elements of certification, they should alert their Region/Station leadership team who will review all certification documentation in their official record keeping system training folder. If the Manager or delegated Supervisor determines the employee is ready, a request should be submitted through the Certification SharePoint site by the Manager or delegated Supervisor. The OG&A Certification Coordinator will then access the shared folder and begin their review of file content.

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11.4 - Exhibit 01

Training Requirements Table

Certification Type	Endorsement Maximum	Eligible Grade †	Required Course(s)	Hours	Maintenance Hours
Operational	Five (5) Special Endorsements Restricted	GS-7	Appropriations Law (OPT)	32	40 every two (2) years from the issuance of Operational/Non-Operational Certification
			USDA Tier 1	Approx. 8	
	Ten (10)	GS-9/GS-11	Appropriations Law (OPT)	32	
			Cost Principles (OPT)	16	
			Administrative Requirements (OPT)	16	
			USDA Tier 1	Approx. 8	
			Complementary Training	16 hours	
	Unrestricted	GS-12+	Appropriations Law (OPT)	32	
			Cost Principles (OPT)	16	
			Administrative Requirements	16	
			USDA Tier 1	Approx. 8	
			Complementary Training	16	
Non-Operational	N/A	Unrestricted	Appropriations Law (OPT)	32	
			OG&A Training	12	
			USDA Tier I or II	Approx. 8	

11.5 - Deactivation of Certification

G&A Leadership have the authority to temporarily deactivate a GMS' certification by endorsements or in totality at any time under the following situations:

1. Egregious violations might require immediate deactivation;
2. Violation of code of ethical conduct (5 CFR 2635);
3. Recommendation from Manager or delegated Supervisor;
4. Recommendation from OG&A Leadership;
5. Failure to maintain certification training and requirements; or
6. Separation from the Agency.

When requesting deactivation, the Manager or delegated supervisor must use the Training and Certification Branch Inbox link on the Certification Branch SharePoint. The notification at a minimum should include:

1. Name of GMS;
2. Name of GMS supervisor or contact name for follow-up; and
3. Estimated return date (if the GMS is on a non-GMS detail or temporary promotion).

Upon deactivation Certification Coordinators will notify the GMS, their leadership, and OG&A Systems branch of the deactivation.

Reinstatement of a deactivated certificate is possible when conditions for deactivation are corrected or return from a non-GMS Detail or promotion. The G&A leadership may reinstate certification within 13 months after deactivation.

GMSs that return to an operational role within 13 months can have their certification reactivated at the recommendation of their leadership. GMSs that return to an operational role after a period greater than 13 months must work with their leadership and Certification Coordinator to re-activate their certificate. The level of access in the official grants and agreement system is dependent upon gaining an active certification.

Upon reinstatement, OG&A will notify the GMS their certificate has been reinstated and provide additional instruction to the GMS and their Manager or delegated Supervisor.

11.6 - Transfer of Certification within the Forest Service

When a certified GMS transfers to another Forest Service region or unit, the certification will transfer with the individual. When a GMS changes their role within G&A, a review should be conducted to identify any endorsement and/or training gaps for that new role within the G&A organization.