

RPES Panel Decision Options

RPES panels make independent grade-level decisions (*not recommendations*) on ARS research scientist positions. The authority to determine grade levels is specifically delegated to panels by the ARS Administrator. Applying criteria of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG) and ARS policies, panels must reach one of six authorized decisions for each position reviewed. Authorized options are explained below:

RPES Panel Decision Options	
Decision Option/Code	Meaning
<p>Upgrade (UPG)</p> <p>(replaced the former “Promote” option)</p>	<p>Scientist is performing sufficient high-quality research to positively impact the position grade level, or the research and research leadership component of a mixed position. If the position is mixed, it is classified to the highest grade level consistent with mixed position classification principles. If promotion results from the Upgrade, the promotion action is effected ASAP but within 2 pay periods.</p> <p>Except in those rare instances when an incumbent has previously held an RGEG-based grade two or more levels higher than the current grade, position may be upgraded no more than one grade level.</p> <p>Note: Grades of mixed position components derived from any standard other than the RGEG (such as the General Schedule Supervisory Guide) are irrelevant for panel purposes, and are not considered in applying the RGEG.</p>
<p>Remain in Grade (RIG)</p>	<p>Scientist is performing at a level of quality/quantity sufficient to maintain current position grade level.</p> <p>Panel may find evidence of emerging productivity problems which could adversely affect scientist's impact, stature and recognition--perhaps resulting in a Grade/Category Problem decision on a future panel review if not addressed. A "bottom of grade" point score may indicate that the panel has identified emerging productivity problems. Panel report will specify such problems when encountered.</p>
<p>Grade/Category Problem (GCP)</p> <p>(combined and replaced the former “Scored Below Grade” and “Guide Not Applicable” options)</p>	<p>The panel is unable to evaluate the position at or above its current grade level, and concludes that a significant position management or performance problem may exist.</p> <p>Within 30 calendar days of issuance of the panel report, management will: (1) determine the nature and cause of the problem (with input from the servicing Human Resources and Employee Relations Specialists, and/or National Program Leader); (2) determine corrective action needed; (3) prepare a correction plan, to be satisfied no later than 1 year from the date of the GCP decision; and (4) submit the plan to the Associate Administrator for Research Operations and Management (AA-ROM). If the position remains in Category 1, it will not be paneled again until the Area Director certifies to the AA-ROM that corrective action has been successful.</p>

<p>Insufficient Factual Basis (IFB)</p>	<p>Panel does not have sufficient factual information to render a fair evaluation applying RGEG criteria. Case may be overwritten ("science fiction") or underwritten (inadequate clarity), or there may be major unresolved discrepancies between case writeup content and IDR factfinding report. In a few rare instances, facts may be so unclear that the panel cannot determine whether position <i>is</i> covered by the RGEG.</p> <p>Panel report must identify unresolved discrepancies and direct that case be rewritten and submitted for evaluation to next available panel for the scientist's peer group. RPE Staff will issue a formal resubmission notice.</p>
<p>Refer to Supergrade (REF)</p>	<p>When a "regular" panel assigns total of 54 or more points to GM/GS-15 position, position is automatically subject to review by next Supergrade Panel. Only the REF decision itself is recorded, not the points assigned by the referring panel. RPE Staff will issue a formal submission notice.</p>
<p>Split Decision (SPL)</p>	<p>This is the only non-consensus decision option. Panel cannot unanimously agree on proper evaluation of all four factors, or whether RGEG is applicable, and/or contents of final panel report. Majority/minority reports are filed with RPE Staff for resolution by AA-ROM. Retain case materials until notified by RPE Staff to dispose of them.</p>