# POSITION DESCRIPTION: Usability Specialist

## Technical Information Specialist GS-1412 (13/14)

## I. INTRODUCTION

This position is located in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (OASPA), Office of the Secretary (OS), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

HHS is the United States government's principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans and providing essential human services, especially for those who are least able to help themselves. Electronic communications play a primary role in allowing HHS to accomplish its important mission of disseminating health and human services information to a wide variety of audiences.

The HHS Web Management Team comprises Web design, content development, usability, programming, and operations experts. The Usability Specialist is responsible for identifying HHS website user audiences; assessing user requirements, needs and satisfaction levels; creating user interface designs, prototypes and specifications across multiple platforms; designing and conducting usability tests at various stages of the development process; analyzing the results of these tests and making recommendations to improve design and functionality; developing and publishing usability guidelines to provide developers with tools in the design process; and creating, promoting and supporting a corporate standard for usability excellence throughout the Department.

## II. MAJOR DUTIES

Serves as senior Usability Specialist responsible for planning, overseeing, coordinating, implementing and evaluating usability work on the HHS website. Responsibilities include setting goals and objectives, formulating and implementing a strategic vision, conceiving policies and strategies and managing usability activities. Provides leadership and support in identifying, evaluating, and implementing the most effective processes, methods, and tools for delivering usability. Responsible for assuring that user interfaces to all HHS products and services are understandable, usable, useful and effective.

Leads and manages the translation of usability engineering and user-center design principles to components of HHS and other federal government agencies. Responsibilities include (1) identifying the programs goals, objectives and priorities; (2) overseeing the development of program topics and schedules; (3) coordinating needs assessments and evaluation activities and interprets results to increase the effectiveness of the program; (4) identifying new methods and technologies, including online training, to translate knowledge and ensure that these new efforts are usable and useful.

Conducts data gathering projects to assess user characteristics, requirements, needs, goals, and opportunities related to HHS products. Determines data collection method(s), develops data collection tools (questionnaires, interview questions, etc.), analyzes the data, prepares results, and makes recommendations based on this data.

Assists in developing and overseeing the development of user interface designs, prototypes, and specifications across multiple platforms while working with appropriate content, technical, and marketing staff. Ensures that designs/prototypes reflect user needs and specifications, technical capabilities, and adherence to usability standards and guidelines.

Develops and oversees HHS usability testing efforts and ensures that all HHS user interfaces undergo usability testing prior to release. Plans usability-testing activities for specific product releases and for incremental improvements to existing interfaces. Manages/leads the developing of the testing schedule, test scenarios and other relevant test tools, recruitment of test participants, and coordination of overall testing at medical conferences, other conferences/meetings, and local testing. Reviews testing results and modifies the design/prototype based on these results. Interprets and presents usability testing results to office staff, senior HHS staff and contractors.

Directs HHS evaluation activities to support HHS quality assurance. Works closely with other HHS components to develop comprehensive evaluation plans which include surveys to assess awareness, need and satisfaction; product specific surveys of users of HHS products and services; and, focus groups to support evaluation efforts (e.g., with new or inadequately understood target audiences, or to test reactions to possible changes in products/services). Interprets results from surveys and translates results into specific actions that increases awareness of or remove barriers to HHS products and services. Interprets special reports, guidelines and policies using independent judgment based on expertise in usability engineering methodology and communications.

Provides usability design consultation to HHS staff and contractors to ensure usable information products and services. Develops and publishes usability guidelines for reference throughout the product development process. Communicates these guidelines frequently and effectively across development teams, branches, and other relevant parties across HHS.

Incorporates usability excellence throughout HHS. Presents recommendations to senior staff to support a corporate standard for usability excellence. Communicates findings, recommendations, resources and guidelines to other relevant HHS staff via regular meetings, presentations, listservs, and other appropriate means. Provides project management support for other usability-related activities, including those having HHS-wide impact or scope. When required, provides consultation, review, and analysis of usability/user interface projects under development by other components of HHS and the Federal government. Works with advisory groups to help them understand the usability process and to obtain their feedback in development efforts.

Serves on ad hoc and standing HHS committees, task forces, and special work groups and/or teams either as the leader or team member to study and identify complex and divergent issues essential to HHS management in meeting internal and external requirements relating to electronic business. Speaks authoritatively for HHS as its representative. Prepares executive briefings, summaries, reports, and recommendations on a variety of topics reflecting complex viewpoints and considerations of HHS management.

## III. FES FACTORS

### 1. Knowledge Required by the Position

Expert knowledge of relevant existing and emerging usability engineering processes, procedures, and tools in order to identify user audiences; assess user requirements, needs and satisfaction levels; creates user interface designs, prototypes and specifications across multiple platforms; design and conduct usability tests at various stages of development process; analyze results of tests and make recommendations to improve design and function; develop and publish usability guidelines to provide developers with tools in the design process; and, create, promote and support a corporate standard for usability excellence throughout HHS.

Broad knowledge of a wide range of IT issues (e.g., accessibility, security), Web development methods, requirements, and procedures used government-wide and within the private sector. This knowledge is at a level sufficient enough to accomplish the variety of tasks in the assigned areas, while being cognizant of established policies within HHS.

Knowledge of the plans, policies, functions, goals and procedures are based on a mastery of the methods and approaches used in the planning, integration, implementation and evaluation of usability engineering and information program activities.

Ability to effectively establish and maintain working relationships with high-level representatives from the Department, other HHS components, and federal and non-federal partners in order to provide guidance and assistance on a wide variety of electronic communications issues and concerns.

Ability to negotiate to obtain understanding or acceptance of policies among an audience opposed or indifferent to them, including high-level officials, their representatives and staff.

### 2. Supervisory Controls

The Web Management Leadership of HHS provides general administrative direction in terms of broadly defined mission or function. The incumbent serves as a technical authority on the usability of HHS products and services. Incumbent serves as principal consultant to the HHS Web Management Leadership and supports other HHS components on all usability engineering methodology related to serving the needs of HHS audiences. Incumbent is responsible for independently planning, developing and implementing a usability approach with a high level of initiative. In collaboration with other Usability experts, represents the HHS to outside organizations. Serves as an advisor to HHS staff on all usability matters. The results of usability activities are considered authoritative. Using own discretion, independently adjusts usability test, plans, to changing priorities or needs in order to ensure information architecture is designed for the user. Appraises the Web Management Leadership about changes as they pertain to the overall direction of programmatic activities.

### 3. Guidelines

Guidelines are general usability engineering methodology and procedures from which the incumbent develops usability strategies, prototypes, designs/specifications and testing for use across multiple platforms. The incumbent develops usability strategies and communication plans based on meetings with program officials, available funding and, issues of importance to the Secretary of HHS. The incumbent exercise considerable judgment in interpreting and adapting existing precedents and using them as a foundation for developing new approaches that coordinate and integrate various aspects of the HHS mission in creating and implementing usability procedures and practices.

### 4. Complexity

Responsibilities include coordinating and implementing a usability program to improve access and use of HHS information products and services by the HHS audiences. Specifically, the incumbent is charged with analyzing current products and services, identifying opportunities for improving the effectiveness of existing efforts, and proposing innovative approaches and efforts, which may depart from traditional means used by government agencies to insure maximal achievement of those goals. This may require the incumbent to set precedents, and establish new relationships.

### 5. Scope and Effect

The primary purpose of the position is to provide support that is inextricably linked with HHS’ goals and mission. The work of the incumbent will impact information dissemination activities within HHS, other Federal agencies, and organizations outside the Federal government.

The incumbent serves as the primary technical expert to the Web Management Leadership advising in the area of usability engineering methodology applied to products and services produced by HHS. The purpose of the work is to develop, implement and evaluate tools, methods and processes to make HHS products/services more usable and useful across user audiences. Incumbent identifies, analyzes and evaluates data collected and prepares results and makes recommendations based on this data, and modifies design/prototype based on results. Develops strategies to enhance the professional image of HHS to increase awareness and use of HHS’ information products and services and to foster collaborative efforts with other related organizational and professional entities to further HHS’ communication goals.

### 6. Personal Contacts

Personal contacts are with employees throughout HHS, ranging from computer developers to senior management and scientific officials. Outside contacts include national and international professional and scientific organizations, Web and other information technology experts, the general public, other Federal officials, contractors, and information dissemination partners. These contacts occur on a regular and recurring basis and may be structured or non-routine and often require significant work both in establishing the contact and developing effective working relationships.

### 7. Purpose of Contacts

Contacts are for the purpose of providing consultation, advice and recommendations, securing cooperation, coordinating efforts, facilitating an open exchange of ideas and concepts, resolving conflicts, promoting HHS products and services, and advising of usability methodologies and/or processes that might be applicable to cancer-related information at the national and international level.

### 8. Physical Demands

The work is mostly sedentary; however, there is some walking, bending, stooping, and carrying of light books and documents.

### 9. Work Environment

The work is performed primarily in an office environment.