**The Pay of a Special Agent – How is it calculated and what can I expect?**

The starting pay for this job will be determined by two factors: your qualifications and the location that you will be working. Based on your qualifications, you will most likely be hired as a Grade 7 or Grade 9 Special Agent.

For those not familiar with this system, it can be confusing. Most federal civil service employees are paid on the “GS” pay scale, which has 15 “Grades.” Within each grade there are ten “Steps.” As a Law Enforcement Officer, you will be paid based on the “GL” Pay Scale, which offers a slightly higher level of pay between Grades 1 and 10. From Grades 10 through 15, the “GS” and “GL” Pay Scales are the same.

These grades and steps can be found on a Pay Scale table that the Office of Personnel Management (known as OPM) publishes. There are also other factors that determine your pay:

* *Locality Pay*

There are numerous different Pay Scale Tables based on where you will be working. Many locations offer a higher rate of pay based on a higher cost of living. If you are not working in one of these areas that has a special “locality pay” adjustment, you will look at the table labeled, “Rest of US”.

* *Law Enforcement Availability Pay (LEAP)*

As a special agent, you will be paid LEAP. The federal government is full of acronyms, and this is one of the first ones that you need to understand. LEAP accounts for a 25% increase over the standard OPM pay scale. This is a special added benefit for federal law enforcement professionals and considers the fact that you may be working long and irregular hours and may be called upon to respond on a moment’s notice as needed.

Because you will be paid 25% extra, you will be expected to work an average of 50 hours per week. This is an average that is calculated on an annual basis. While it may sound like a difficult task, it really is not. Simply put, this is an average. You work as needed to get the job done. Some weeks you work more hours, sometimes less, but the average needs to be 50 hours. For most agents, this is not difficult to obtain.

New special agents typically enter the Service as a Grade 7, Step 1, or Grade 9, Step 1. Whether you are a Grade 7 or Grade 9 will be determined by a variety of factors which include your education level and experience. You will be informed as to which level you qualify for when you receive your tentative offer of employment.

**How do I calculate my starting pay?**

To calculate your pay, you must first locate the appropriate Pay Scale that is published by the Office of Personnel Management.

Here is a link to the current [2021 GL Pay Scale](https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/2021/law-enforcement-officer/).

NOTE: When referencing an OPM Pay Scale, make sure you are referencing a Pay Scale for the current year as these numbers can vary from year-to-year based on raises that Congress may grant. This will be discussed later.

Once you have located the appropriate Pay Scale for the area where you will be working, click on the link. Once the specific chart has downloaded, go to the Grade 7 or Grade 9 line. The first column is for “Step 1.” Take that number and multiply it by 1.25 to account for the 25% LEAP that you will be earning.

Here is an example of how to calculate the starting pay for a special agent working in Chicago, Illinois, using the 2021 Pay Scale:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Grade 7, Step 1 for Chicago, IL |  $ 54,905.00  |
| Add LEAP (25%) |  $ 13,726.25  |
| Total Pay for Chicago, IL |  $ 68,631.25  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Grade 9, Step 1 for Chicago, IL |  $ 61,233.00  |
| Add LEAP (25%) |  $ 15,308.25  |
| Total Pay for Chicago, IL |  $ 76,541.25  |

**Pay Rate Progression**

If you are a fully successful agent, you progress through the Pay Grades quite quickly. For your first few years, if you meet the job’s requirements, your pay will increase to a different Grade each year. Here is an example:

If you are hired as a Grade 7 agent and are fully successful, you will advance to Grade 9, Step 1 after your first year of employment. The year after that, if you are fully successful, you will advance to Grade 11, Step 1. From there, you will advance to a Grade 12, step 1.

The highest pay grade for a special agent is Grade 13. If you are fully successful and have completed the necessary career steps, you will advance to the Grade 13, Step 1 position. At that point, as time goes on, you will start advancing through the “Steps” of the Grade 13 Pay Scale.

Here is an example of a typical progression. For this example, let us assume you will be working as a special agent in Chicago, IL. We first find the appropriate OPM GL Pay Scale. In this case, the numbers are based on the rates for 2021.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | **Base Pay Chicago, IL** | **LEAP** | **Total Pay** |
| Year 1 | Grade 7 | Step 1 | $ 54,905.00  |  $ 13,726.25  |  $ 68,631.25  |
| Year 2 | Grade 9 | Step 1 | $ 61,233.00  |  $ 15,308.25  |  $ 76,541.25  |
| Year 3 | Grade 11 | Step 1 | $ 71,697.00  |  $ 17,924.25  |  $ 89,621.25  |
| Year 4 | Grade 12 | Step 1 | $ 85,935.00  |  $ 21,483.75  |  $ 107,418.75  |
| Year 5 | Grade 13 | Step 1 | $ 102,188.00  |  $ 25,547.00  |  $ 127,735.00  |
| Year 6 | Grade 13 | Step 2 | $ 105,594.00 |  $ 26,398.50  |  $ 131,992.50  |

If you review the Pay Scales, there are significant variations based on Locality. Currently, the Locality with the highest adjusted locality pay is “SAN JOSE-SAN FRANCISCO-OAKLAND, CA.” The lowest falls under the Chart designated as the “REST OF US.” To give a rough example of starting pay using the 2021 Pay Scale Chart, here is the range from low to high:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **"REST OF US"** | **SAN JOSE-SAN FRANCISCO-OAKLAND, CA** |
| Grade 7, Step 1 (with 25% LEAP) |  $ 61,885.00  |  $ 75,490.00  |
| Grade 9, Step 1 (with 25% LEAP) |  $ 69,017.50  |  $ 84,190.00  |

As stated earlier, most fully successful special agents progress to the level of Grade 13 within their first 4 to 5 years of their career. A current range of Grade 13, Step 1 pay is listed below based on the 2021 Pay Scale:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **"REST OF US"** | **SAN JOSE-SAN FRANCISCO-OAKLAND, CA** |
| Grade 13, Step 1 (with 25% LEAP) |  $ 115,178.75  |  $ 140,500.00  |

While Grade 13, Step 10 is the highest grade a special agent can obtain, our agency offers numerous management opportunities that will propel you into Grade 14 and Grade 15 positions (or the equivalent thereof). Those with a mind for career advancement can also aspire to enter our Executive ranks, which offers a pay scale that exceeds the GS and GL pay scales.

**Other Pay Increases**

In addition to advancing through the Pay Scale, Congress can also authorize annual pay increases for federal employees. These amounts vary each year and there is no guarantee that they will be offered. If they do, all Pay Scales are adjusted upwards by that amount.

**Other Pay Incentives**

Throughout your career, you could be awarded annual Performance Awards which are accompanied with a pay bonus based on your rating on your annual evaluation. These amounts vary and are not certain; however, they offer a nice incentive to perform at your highest level.