

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Metrologists United** is a dedicated group of NISTers working to organize a chapter of AFGE to represent all eligible federal staff at NIST. You can visit our website at <https://metrologists-united.org/>.

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## What is AFGE?

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is the largest union of federal employees in the country, with over 800,000 members. AFGE advocates in the courts and Congress for all federal employees — even those who are not yet unionized. They are extremely active in pursuing lawsuits against actions that infringe on federal workers' rights, including recent wins that rescinded the terminations of many probationary employees and provided a framework to challenge future unlawful terminations.

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## Who is eligible to join the union?

*Most non-supervisory NIST personnel are eligible to join.*

You can find your bargaining unit status (BUS) code in **field 37** on your SF-50:

**7777** (or “quad 7”) are currently unrepresented and **eligible**.

**8888** (or “quad 8”) are currently unrepresented but **ineligible**.

This applies to nearly all federal employees assigned to operating units (OUs) on the Gaithersburg, Boulder, and Charleston campuses, including administrators, researchers, maintenance staff, and remote workers. We are pursuing a bargaining unit for every civilian worker at NIST, *regardless of their job title or location*.

Your SF-50 is available in your employee personnel folder at <https://eopf.opm.gov/doc/>.

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## Are union organizers legally protected?

*Yes, federal law protects lawful union organizers from adverse action.*

However, our efforts to unionize will likely be met with resistance. Use good judgement and discretion when discussing union activities with colleagues or while on NIST campuses, especially while we collect signatures for the formal petition.

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## What is the rough timeline for unionizing?

- 1) Gather signatures from at least 30% of eligible personnel with completed “showing of interest” (SOI) cards.
  - a) For NIST, this means approximately 1,200 people across the Gaithersburg, Boulder, and Charleston campuses, as well as remote workers.
  - b) You must fill out every field on your card by hand with your personal contact information, including your phone number and address.
  - c) Return your completed SOI card to the organizer who gave it to you, or send a picture/scan of it to [nist.afge@proton.me](mailto:nist.afge@proton.me). We will reply with a confirmation email and secure all signed cards until the petition is submitted to AFGE.

- 2) Submit the signed SOI cards to AFGE to formally petition to unionize.
    - a) The Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) will investigate the legitimate eligibility of everyone who submitted an SOI card and may potentially hold hearings to make these determinations.
    - b) At this time, the agency will be able to see the names and positions of those who signed.
    - c) However, changes to job terms or conditions for staff who sign SOI cards for the proposed bargaining unit are illegal until the election takes place.
  - 3) Wait approximately 4-6 months to schedule a vote.
    - a) All eligible employees can vote, and ballots can be completed by mail, online, or by phone for up to 2 weeks.
    - b) We only need 50% + 1 of those who vote in order to formalize the union. For example, if only 10 eligible employees vote, we only need 6 to formalize.
    - c) All eligible employees will still be allowed to join the union, whether they voted or not.
  - 4) Once the union is formed, we will establish a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) with NIST, which can cover everything from telework agreements to the cost of food in vending machines.
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## Are we allowed to strike?

*No, federal workers are not allowed to strike.*

We may not strike under the FLRA and per agreements we signed when we onboarded. However, we can mobilize personnel, file lawsuits, and negotiate our collective bargaining agreement with NIST once we form the union. Unlike in the private-sector, our negotiations are guaranteed under law to be carried out in good faith. Reasonable negotiations cannot be dismissed, or else the agency can be sued under FLRA provisions.

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## What are the costs and benefits?

If you choose to join the union after it is formalized, there is a small recurring cost that pays for AFGE's staff and legal efforts (e.g., if you make \$50,000 a year, your monthly dues will be approximately \$20). Paying dues gives you the right to vote on bargaining items and access more affordable legal representation, but all employees will still benefit from the collective bargaining agreement negotiated by the union. You can read more about AFGE's union benefits at <https://www.afge.org/member-benefits/>.

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## How can I help?

*Fill out and submit your SOI card, and talk to your friends and coworkers!*

Even if you're not eligible to join a formal union, you can still be part of our movement by spreading the word, sharing flyers, and handing out SOI cards to others. This is a truly grassroots effort, and we need everyone we can get.

### Key rules to remember:

- We are not allowed to conduct unionizing efforts during "duty time", so only talk about this when you're off-duty, such as when you're on break (e.g., lunch, in the restroom, in the lobby areas of each building, etc.) or before and after work.
- Only share flyers in non-work spaces (e.g., break rooms, bathrooms, the parking lot, walks around campus), or text or email them to your friends using personal devices. Do not keep or hang union

materials in government spaces (e.g., offices, desks, copy rooms). You may, however, wear union pins, badges, and shirts.


- Do not send or receive union information with .gov email addresses or any work resources (e.g., printers, computers, paper, work phones). However, you may email someone's .gov address to request their personal contact info.
- Use your best judgment when deciding who to talk to. Speak in person or stick to encrypted services, like Signal and Proton.

Reach out to the team at [nist.afge@proton.me](mailto:nist.afge@proton.me) if you are interested in taking a more active role in organizing by distributing information, reaching out to prospective members, or helping out with logistics.

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## Showing of Interest Card

- 1) Print out the SoI card.
- 2) Complete every field in pen with your personal information, including your phone number and address. Including your non-government email address will allow us to contact you if there is an issue with your card.
  - Optional: "Yes, I am interested in assisting with this election."
- 3) Submit your card to an organizer:
  - In person or
  - As an image/scan to [nist.afge@proton.me](mailto:nist.afge@proton.me) or via a private message in Signal

		<h1>SHOWING OF INTEREST</h1>	
I, the undersigned employee hereby call for an exclusive recognition election to be conducted by the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) for the purpose of determining whether AFGE shall be our collective bargaining agent.			
_____ Print Name		_____ Telephone	
_____ Address		_____ State	_____ Zip Code
_____ Signature	_____ Email	_____ Date	
<i>I understand this petition is confidential for use by AFGE and does not obligate me to join or pay fees or membership dues to any union or union local.</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I am interested in assisting with this election.			
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO 