Union Representation Elections Process and FAQs

On December 14, 2011, representatives of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE) met with the Chair of the Personnel Appeals Board (PAB) to discuss their agreement to hold two elections to determine whether certain GAO employees wish to be exclusively represented by the GAO Employees Organization, IFPTE.

The following employees who were on the GAO payroll as of December 16, 2011 and have not resigned, retired or been removed from employment before February 8, 2012, are eligible to vote in their respective elections:

**APSS Employees:**

All GAO employees assigned to a position currently covered by the Administrative Professional and Support Staff (APSS) System and whose designated pay plans are Administrative and Clerical (AC), Program and Technical Specialist (PT), and Wage Grade (WG), excluding all Communications Analysts (Visual, Written, and Lead). The purpose of the election is to determine whether they want to be exclusively represented by the GAO Employees Organization, IFPTE. Employees in the proposed unit include, but are not limited to, contract specialists, engagement operations staff, human capital specialists, IT specialists, librarians and library technicians, and management and program analysts. The unit does not include confidential employees, supervisors, or management officials, and other employees excluded under the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute.

**Visual and Lead Communications Analysts:**

All GAO employees who are Visual Communications Analysts and Lead Communications Analysts designated as PT-I, PT-II, and PT-III who are covered by the APSS Compensation System, Program and Technical Pay Plan (PT), including all probationary employees and those in the Developmental Programs for these positions to determine whether they want to be included in the existing (Analysts) bargaining unit that was certified on September 27, 2007. The unit does not include confidential employees, supervisors, or management officials, and other employees excluded under the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute.

The elections, which will be conducted under the supervision of the Personnel Appeals Board, will take place simultaneously on February 8, 2012, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the Hearing Room (1N35/1N37) on the first floor at GAO Headquarters. Field office staff and staff on extended travel or leave, who follow the steps to identify themselves to
the Clerk of the Board by January 13, 2012, will have the opportunity to vote by mail. Their ballots will be mailed by the PAB on January 18, 2012, and must be completed and received by the PAB no later than February 8, 2012 in order to be counted. Any employee eligible to vote by mail who does not receive a ballot at his/her home address by January 25 should contact the Clerk of the Board on or before January 27 (202.512.6137 or email to pab@gao.gov). Headquarters staff who will be on approved leave, travel status or telework on February 8 may vote by absentee ballot in the Hearing Room (1N35/1N37) on the first floor of the GAO Headquarters building, on any one of the following days and times: Tuesday, January 24 and Tuesday, February 7 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and Thursday, January 26 and Thursday, February 2 from 12:00 (noon) to 2:00 p.m.

Upon entering the Hearing Room, employees will proceed to the designated table in the front of the room where they will be asked to state their names and show either GAO identification or other valid government-issued photo identification. Employees who are casting absentee ballots will also have to produce an appropriate showing of their unavailability to vote on February 8. Employees will be given a ballot to mark either “Yes” or “No” in response to the question whether they wish to be represented for the purpose of exclusive recognition by the GAO Employees Organization, IFPTE. Each employee will mark a ballot in a private voting booth, fold the unsigned ballot, and place it in a secure ballot box.

Shortly after the last ballot is cast on February 8, Board staff will co-mingle the absentee ballots and the mail ballots with the ballots cast that day for each of the two elections. The counting of the ballots will then begin and the tally will be announced to the observers and representatives from each party at the conclusion of the count for each election.

Attached please find responses to some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to help in understanding the process.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Who will conduct the elections?

The Executive Director of the Personnel Appeals Board (PAB) is supervising the conduct of the elections. Members of the Board’s staff, former PAB members, and temporary staff with election experience will be handling the election process itself. They will all be identified as “PAB Agents” at the polling place. The PAB will certify the results of each election.

Who is eligible to vote in the elections?

The following employees who were on the GAO payroll as of December 16, 2011 and have not resigned, retired or been removed from employment before February 8, 2012, are eligible to vote in their respective elections:

**APSS employees:**

All GAO employees assigned to a position currently covered by the Administrative Professional and Support Staff (APSS) System and whose designated pay plans are Administrative and Clerical (AC), Program and Technical Specialist (PT), and Wage Grade (WG), *excluding* all Communications Analysts (Visual, Written, and Lead). The purpose of the election is to determine whether they want to be exclusively represented by the GAO Employees Organization, IFPTE. Employees in the proposed unit include, but are not limited to, contract specialists, engagement operations staff, human capital specialists, IT specialists, librarians and library technicians, and management and program analysts. The unit does not include confidential employees, supervisors, or management officials, and other employees excluded under the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute.

**Visual and Lead Communications Analysts:**

All GAO employees who are Visual Communications Analysts and Lead Communications Analysts designated as PT-I, PT-II, and PT-III who are covered by the APSS Compensation System, Program and Technical Pay Plan (PT), including all probationary employees and those in the Developmental Programs for these positions to determine whether they want to be included in the existing (Analysts) bargaining unit that was certified on September 27, 2007. The unit does not include confidential employees, supervisors, or management officials, and other employees excluded under the Federal Service Labor-Management Relations Statute.
**When will the elections be held?**

For both elections, eligible GAO staff assigned to Headquarters in Washington, DC can cast their ballots on February 8, 2012 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Ballots for eligible staff who work in field offices and eligible staff on either continuous approved leave or continuous approved travel status will be mailed to employees’ home addresses on January 18, 2012.

**Where will the elections be held?**

The elections will take place in the first floor Hearing Room (1N35/1N37) at GAO Headquarters, 441 G Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**Can I vote during work hours?**

You can vote anytime between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. You do not need to take leave. And you do not need to vote before your tour of duty or wait until lunchtime or after your tour of duty. You may take as long as you need to go to the Hearing Room and complete the voting process.

**Is this a secret process?**

Yes. Whether you vote on February 8 or by absentee ballot, you will mark your ballot in the privacy of a voting booth and deposit the folded, unsigned ballot in a secure ballot box. The ballots will not be read until the election is over. Any ballot that contains a signature or any other identifying mark will be voided which means that your vote will not count.

**What is a voided ballot?**

A voided ballot is one that cannot be counted for the election, e.g., a signed ballot, an unmarked ballot, or one that has been marked both “Yes” and “No.”

**How will field office staff vote?**

Ballots will be mailed on January 18, 2012 to eligible staff assigned to field offices and HQ staff on either continuous approved leave or continuous approved travel status from the period from January 18 through February 8, 2012. Included with the ballot will be specific instructions and materials for mailing your ballot to the PAB mailbox in Washington, DC. You will place your completed ballot in a yellow secret ballot envelope bearing no identifying information. You will place the sealed yellow envelope inside a
prepaid and preaddressed return envelope. You will be asked to sign your name on this outer, numbered envelope. You signature and number will be compared to a master list of voters to confirm your eligibility. In order to be counted, your ballot must be received by the PAB no later than February 8, 2012; so you must mail it in sufficient time.

**Will ballots received by mail be secret? How will they be secured?**

The secrecy and security of mail ballots will be protected. Ballots will be mailed to the PAB U.S. Mail box located at 820 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002. That mailbox will only be accessible to a Board staff member. Each time that the staff member empties the mailbox, she will secure the return envelopes (holding the secret ballot envelopes) in a large manila envelope, sign her name over the envelope seal, date the large outer envelope and lock the envelope in a file cabinet located in a locked file room. Near the close of the election on February 8, the manila envelopes will be transported from the Board’s offices to the first floor Hearing Room in GAO Headquarters. Board staff will open the sealed manila envelopes in the presence of the observers and remove the individual return envelopes. Board staff will divide the return envelopes between the APSS and Visual and Lead Communications Analysts elections. Board staff will then compare the eligibility key number and signature to the master list of names and numbers, and then open the individual return envelopes for each election. All the secret ballot envelopes for each election will be co-mingled before any are opened. When the secret ballot envelopes are opened, Board staff will remove the ballots from the secret ballot envelopes, and co-mingle them with the ballots that were manually cast for that election at Headquarters before the tally begins.

**What if I don’t receive a ballot in the mail?**

If you don’t receive a ballot by January 25, please call the Clerk of the Board at 202.512.6137 or email the Clerk of the Board at pab@gao.gov by January 27.

**What will be on the ballot?**

You will be asked to answer “Yes” or “No” to a single question as to whether you wish to be represented for the purpose of exclusive recognition under the provisions of the Government Accountability Office Personnel Act of 1980 in the proposed unit by the GAO Employees Organization, IFPTE.

**What does IFPTE stand for?**

The full name of the organization is the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, AFL-CIO.
Will I need to show identification in order to vote?

Yes. If you are voting by manual or absentee ballot, you will be required to present either your GAO identification or valid government-issued photo identification, such as a driver’s license.

Other than staff conducting the elections, who will be present in the first floor Hearing Room on the day of the elections?

Each party, GAO and the IFPTE, is entitled to have an equal number of observers in the room, all of whom will be wearing identification tags. No one will follow you to or from the voting booth. No media will be allowed.

Can the observers participate in the election process?

The observers will have the right to challenge voters whom they have good cause to believe are not eligible to vote in the election.

Can I still vote if my eligibility is challenged?

You will be provided a secret ballot envelope, and then you will be permitted to proceed to the voting booth, mark your ballot, fold it and place it in the secret ballot envelope. Instead of putting it into the secure ballot box, you will hand the sealed secret ballot envelope to a PAB agent who will be wearing an identification tag. The agent will place your secret ballot envelope in a challenged ballot envelope and then in a secure box. At the conclusion of the election, the challenged ballots will be reviewed by Board officials and observers. If, after review, it is determined that you are eligible to vote in the election then your ballot will be added to the secret ballot box.

I will be absent on February 8. Can I still vote?

If you will be on approved leave, telework, or travel status on February 8, you are eligible to vote by absentee ballot. You may vote by absentee ballot in the Hearing Room (N35/1N37) on the first floor of the GAO Headquarters building on any one of the following days: January 24 and February 7, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and January 26 and February 2, from 12:00 (noon) to 2:00 p.m. You must bring an appropriate showing of your unavailability on February 8 in order to vote by absentee ballot. Travel papers and documents showing approved leave or telework are acceptable.
I work at Headquarters but will be on extended sick leave (or military or annual leave) from January 18 through February 8. Can I vote?

Individuals who are otherwise qualified to vote in either manual election at Headquarters but who will be on continuous approved travel status or continuous approved leave between January 18 and February 8, 2012 MUST IDENTIFY THEMSELVES to the Clerk of the Personnel Appeals Board before January 13, 2012 and supply support for their status (e.g., email confirmation of leave from supervisor) by fax (202.512.7525), email (pab@gao.gov) or delivery to the Board office (Suite 560, 820 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002). The employee must also provide his/her home mailing address. The Clerk of the Board will provide the list of names to GAO and to the Union; GAO in turn will supply the Board with mailing labels printed for individuals qualifying in this manner for the mail ballot.

I am assigned to Headquarters but will be on extended travel status from January 18 through February 8. How can I vote?

Individuals who are otherwise qualified to vote in either manual election at Headquarters but who will be on continuous approved travel status between January 18 and February 8 MUST IDENTIFY THEMSELVES to the Clerk of the Personnel Appeals Board before January 13, 2012 and supply support for their status (e.g., travel order) by fax (202.512.7525), email (pab@gao.gov) or delivery to the Board office (Suite 560, 820 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002). The employee must also provide his/her home mailing address. The Clerk of the Board will provide the list of names to GAO and to the Union; GAO in turn will supply the Board with mailing labels printed for individuals qualifying in this manner for the mail ballot.

I work in a field office but will be at GAO headquarters on February 8. Can I cast my ballot in Washington?

No. Your ballot will be mailed to you on January 18, 2012 and you should follow the mailing instructions that accompany that ballot.

Will mail ballots be distinguishable from ballots cast manually in Headquarters?

No. All of the ballots for each respective election will be identical. The ballots received by mail will be added to the appropriate secure ballot box containing the ballots cast manually and mixed in with them before any tallying commences.

I am leaving GAO in late January. Will I be able to vote before my departure?

No. If you are not employed by GAO on February 8, 2012, you may not vote.
I will need assistance in order to cast my ballot. Will someone be available?

There will be PAB agents present in the Hearing Room on February 8, from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. and they will be prepared to assist you in casting your ballot and maintaining its confidentiality. It would be helpful to inform PAB officials prior to February 8 if you will need assistance. Assistance will also be available for individuals voting by absentee ballot. If possible please provide advance notice to the PAB. You may contact the Clerk of the Board, at 202.512.5137 or at pab@gao.gov.

What steps are being taken to keep the two elections separate?

There will be distinctive color ballots for the two elections. In addition, the return envelope for mail ballots will be different for the two elections. There will be separate sign-in lists of eligible voters, and separate ballot boxes for regular and challenged ballots for the two elections. On February 8, there will be separate sign-in tables to further divide the process and signs to direct you to the appropriate tables.

Is electioneering permitted at the election site?

No. The Hearing Room is off limits for electioneering of any kind. Please be sure to remove all campaign buttons, stickers, or insignia before entering the Hearing Room.

When will the ballots be counted?

Shortly after the last ballot is cast on February 8, Board staff will begin counting all of the ballots for each election, including absentee ballots and those received in the mail. Observers and representatives for GAO and the Union will be present for the count.

When will the results of the election be available?

The Board’s Executive Director will announce a tally of the ballots to the observers and representatives from GAO and IFPTE upon completion of the counting of all of the ballots for each election. The PAB will certify the election results.

What if I have additional questions about the process?

You may call 202.512.6137 or email (pab@gao.gov) the Clerk of the Board.