Conference Training

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Why Does DOC Require Conferences To Be Pre-approved?

- OMB Memorandum M-12-12 (May 11, 2012), *Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations*, requires Deputy Secretaries (or their equivalents) to review planned conference spending where net expenses are $100,000 or greater
- Good Stewardship of Taxpayer Dollars

What Is A Conference?

- A meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves federally funded attendee travel (non-local)
- Is sponsored or hosted by anyone – the Department, another federal entity, a non-federal entity, or any combination of such.
- More limited definition for conferences under $75,000 on next slide.

When Is "Training" Considered A Conference?

- The term "conference" also applies to training activities that are considered to be conferences under 5 CFR 410.404

DOC Definition for Conferences Under $75,000

- Conferences with expenses as a whole less than $75,000 <u>without</u> consideration of fees, revenues, or gifts <u>AND</u>
  - Event is sponsored by a DOC component, <u>AND</u>
  - Agency will expend funds, including travel, <u>AND</u>
  - Brings together a group of government employees <u>AND</u>
  - Includes 2 or more of the following:
    - A brochure
    - A published or distributed agenda
    - Is marketed internally or externally
    - Attendees register for it
    - Is a widely gathered event

What is a Co-Sponsored Conference?

- Per OGC guidance, an agency must have **substantial** involvement in the planning and execution of the conference in order to be promoted or advertised as a co-sponsor.
- If an agency merely provides funds under a contract or financial assistance instrument to an organization, part or all of which is for the purpose of putting on a conference without the substantial involvement of the agency, this guidance does not apply, even if the agency is listed as a supporter (such a listing should not be prominent).

What Are Conference Expenses?

- All direct and indirect conference costs paid by the Government or reimbursed to travelers or others associated with the conference.
- Includes any associated authorized travel and per diem expenses, hire of rooms for official business, audiovisual use, light refreshments, registration fees, ground transportation, and other expenses. Do not include Federal employee time for conference preparation.

Which Conferences Require Department Pre-Approval?

- Any event that could have sensitivity or could attract undesired media attention, e.g., optics issues, **REGARDLESS of amount**
- Any event with total expenses that exceed $75,000 without consideration of fees, revenues or gifts, including co-sponsored events

Which Conferences Require Bureau Pre-Approval?

- All conferences require Bureau pre-approval

Examples of "Optics" Issues

- Conferences held at vacation destinations
- High individual attendee costs
- Cruises on the Potomac on a federal holiday
- Lavish banquets for $189.00 per person
- Excursions such as city tours, snorkeling, yoga classes, ???
- Characters in inflatable costumes
- Conferences held at posh resorts
- Extravagant food, banquets or receptions
- Alcohol
- Music, dancing, billiards, bowling at "luxury lanes"
- "Other" costs
  - Excessive costs for meeting planners
  - Expensive audio visual or printing costs

Which Conferences Must the Secretary Pre-Approve?

- Events with **net** expenses that exceed **$500,000**
  - Include:
    - Direct/indirect conference costs paid by the government
    - Costs of all travel (but not local travel)
  - Exclude:
      - Funds paid under federal grants to grantees
      - Costs to ensure safety of attending government officials
      - Federal Advisory Committee Act Meetings
- Approved by the Bureau Chief of Staff and Deputy Under Secretary prior to submission to Headquarters

Which Conferences Must the Deputy Secretary Pre-Approve?

- Events with total expenses that exceed **$100,000** without consideration of fees, revenues or gifts
  - Include:
    - Direct/indirect conference costs paid by the government
    - Costs of all travel (but not local travel)
  - Exclude:
    - Funds paid under federal grants to grantees
    - Costs to ensure safety of attending government officials
    - Federal Advisory Committee Act Meetings
- Approved by the Bureau Chief of Staff and Deputy Under Secretary prior to submission to Headquarters

Which Conferences Must the CFO/ASA* Pre-Approve?

- Events with total expenses that exceed **$75,000** without consideration of fees, revenues or gifts
  - Include:
    - Direct/indirect conference costs paid by the government
    - Costs of all travel (but not local travel)
  - Exclude:
    - Funds paid under federal grants to grantees
    - Costs to ensure safety of attending government officials
    - Federal Advisory Committee Act Meetings
- Approved by the Bureau Chief Financial Officer prior to submission to Headquarters

*Chief Financial Officer/Assistant Secretary for Administration

Which Conferences Must the Bureaus Pre-Approve?

- **ALL** conferences must be pre-approved by Bureau leadership
- Conferences under $75,000 have pre-approval requirements as specified by Bureau internal policy
- Federal Advisory Committee Act meetings are not included in the definition of a conference
- Events fully funded by grants are not included in the definition of a conference

How to Gain Departmental Approval for an Event

- Notify OAS of any upcoming conference events:
  - Provide the following information via email to OAS Travel Division:
    - Bureau Name, Location, Title and Dates of Event, and Total Estimated Cost
  - Submit by the 20th of the month - reminders are sent out two weeks in advance
  - List all conferences– even those scheduled beyond the current year that you have not previously reported
- **At least** one month prior to the conference start date, submit all event details

What Do You Need to Send to OAS?

1. High level spreadsheet with cost estimates
2. Approval memorandum from Bureau Chief of Staff or DUS
3. Conference Synopsis
4. Conference Details Datasheet
5. A Conference Planning Checklist
6. Copies of Independent Govt Cost Estimates (IGCE) for potential contracts/MOUs associated with this event
7. Explanation of events/activities that could have media interest
8. Estimates of attendee travel and details of how the estimates were derived
9. Website link for the event
10. Any information that might be useful to understand the event

Travel Estimating

- Proposed New Process:
- OAS will provide a matrix of City-Pair Fares from/to major cities in the US with concentrations of DOC employees
- Estimate how many attendees will be coming from that section of the country
- Using the city nearest the conference location, multiply the estimated number of attendees by the applicable conference airfare.

Travel Estimate Example

- Conference is in Jacksonville Florida – closest city in the matrix is Miami
- Estimate 50 attendees from Upper Northwest
- Estimate 40 attendees from lower Midwest
- Look up airfare from Seattle to Miami on matrix and multiply by 50
- Look up airfare from Houston to Miami and multiply by 40

How Can Bureaus Gather Estimates for Event Planning?

GSA's FedRooms Groups and Meetings Tool

www.gsa.gov/portal/category/27090

- Free Tool that allows users to enter requirements and receive quotes from hotels for events
- Enables conference planners to do market research efficiently

GSA Federal Conference Facilities

https://gsa.inl.gov/travel/index.cfm?Fuseaction=fmf.list

- Link to nationwide Federal conference facilities

What Happens Once Information Is Submitted to OAS?

- Travel Management Division (TMD) staff review and validate information submitted.
- TMD staff will work with Bureaus to resolve any issues prior to submitting the packet for approval.
- Once packet has been reviewed and approved by OAS, the package moves to CFO/ASA; and then for events over $100,000, to the Deputy Secretary's staff, and finally to the Acting Secretary.

How Long Does It Take For Approval Once the Conference Package is Complete?

- OAS Review – 1-2 business days
- CFO/ASA Clearance – 3 business days
- Acting Secretary Approval – 5 business days

Quarterly Reporting?

- The FY 2012 Appropriations Act requires the head of an agency to submit quarterly reports to the Office of Inspector General, relating to the costs and contracting procedures for each conference held by the agency for which the cost to the Federal Government is more than $20,000.

- Audits of all conference cost data will be completed as part of the Department's A-123 Process

Questions

Link to the Travel Management Division website:

http://www.osec.doc.gov/ofm/OAP/TMD/default.htm

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