SUMMARY GUIDANCE FOR CONFERENCE REVIEW AND APPROVAL (v1.1; rev 12-21-12)

I. Conference events that require Department Headquarters Pre-Approval

1. The function is a meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves federally funded attendee travel (non-local) *[training activities that are considered to be conferences under 5 CFR 410.404 are also included in this definition]*, **AND**
2. is sponsored by anyone – Department of Commerce, other Federal entity, or non-Federal entity, **AND**
3. Department expenses as a whole equal or exceed $75,000 without consideration of fees, revenue, or gifts. (This requirement is broader than the requirement directed by the OMB Guidance Memo of May 11, 2012) (See Section III.1 for conferences that the Department co-sponsors or co-hosts). In calculating expenses:
    a. Do include all direct and indirect conference costs paid by the Government
    b. Do include the cost of all travel (but not local travel)
    c. Do not include funds paid under Federal grants to grantees
    d. Do not include costs to ensure the safety of attending government officials.
4. **ALSO** submit information for any event that could have sensitivity or could attract undesired media attention regardless of the amount of federal funds involved in the event.
5. Events with **net** expenses that exceed $500,000 require approval by the Secretary of Commerce.
    a. Bureau level approval by a Deputy Under Secretary and Bureau Chief of Staff[1] is required prior to submission to the Office of the Secretary.
6. Events with expenses that equal or exceed $100,000 without consideration of fees, revenue, or gifts, require approval by the Deputy Secretary of Commerce.
    a. Bureau level approval by a Deputy Under Secretary and Bureau Chief of Staff[2] is required prior to submission to the Office of the Secretary.
7. Events with expenses that equal or exceed $75,000 but are less than $100,000, without consideration of fees, revenue, or gifts, require approval by the DOC CFO/ASA.
8. Bureau level approval by a Bureau CFO is required prior to submission to the Office of the Secretary, CFO/ASA.
9. Due to the fact that ITA inherently has a mission to facilitate interactions and relationship building between businesses and other private sector entities, domestically and internationally for the purpose of promoting exports and trade, it has been determined that trade promotion events, such as International Buyer Program events and trade missions, for which the sole purpose of the event is to facilitate business engagement between private entities to develop export opportunities, are not included in the definition of a conference (however, see subsection a. below).
    a. If a Department of Commerce trade promotion event **net** expenditures exceed $75,000, the event **will still require** review and pre-approval using the same procedures as specified in Section IV even though the event is not a conference.

[1] For the Bureau of the Census, Director and Deputy Director

[2] For the Bureau of the Census, Director and Deputy Director

II. Conference events for which Department expenses as a whole are less than $75,000.

The following factors provide guidance for interpretation and application of the definition of conference as specified in OMB Memo 12-12 dated 5/11/12. If an event for which Department expenses as a whole are less than $75,000 does not satisfy all of the criteria in II.1 through II.6, the event is not a conference.

1. The function is a meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves federally funded attendee travel (non-local) *[training activities that are considered to be conferences under 5 CFR 410.404 are also included in this definition]* **AND**
2. the event is sponsored or co-sponsored by a DOC component **AND**
3. the Agency will expend funds, including travel **AND**
4. Department expenses as a whole are less than $75,000 without consideration of fees, revenue, or gifts **AND**
5. brings together a group of government employees[3] **AND**
6. includes two or more of the following "conference" indicators:
    a. The event has a brochure
    b. The event has a published/distributed agenda
    c. The event is marketed internally **or** externally
    d. Attendees register for it
    e. Is a widely gathered event.[4]
7. FACA meetings are **not** included in the definition of conference.
8. Events that are **fully** funded by a grant are **not** included in the definition of a conference.
9. Events with expenses less than $75,000 without consideration of fees, revenue, or gifts require approval as specified by Bureau internal policy.

III. Conferences where the Department or one of its Bureaus holds itself out to the public as a co-host or co-sponsor are also subject to review:

1. *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 section does not apply, even if the agency is listed as a supporter (such a listing should not be prominent).*

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[3] If the attendance of government employees is incidental to the purpose of the meeting, (e.g., government employees staff the meeting (for example, work the registration table), or to give a speech or lecture) but federal employees do not participate in conference events or activities, then the event would not be a conference. A meeting at which both federal employees and non-federal attendees attend speeches, lectures, break-out sessions, etc., would be considered a conference.

[4] widely gathered refers to widely gathered from different organizational units from within a sub-operating unit such as the National Weather Service, organizational units from within a bureau, department and/or other organizations, federal and/or non-federal OR widely gathered can refer to widely gathered from different geographic locations.

2. If the conference expenses as a whole (including expenses funded by a DOC financial assistance instrument), including those of the partner(s), equal or exceed $75,000, without consideration of fees, revenue, gifts, or other offsets, the approvals referenced in Section I above, apply.

IV. Data to be Provided For Events Requiring CFO/ASA, Deputy Secretary or Secretarial Pre-Approval

1. By the 20th of each month submit a list of conferences that will require pre-approval by the CFO/ASA, Deputy Secretary or Secretary.
2. Submit a Request for Pre-Approval once sufficient information is available to submit all required information. It is expected that estimates will be used; please note if a number is an estimate.
3. Contracts must not be awarded until pre-approval is obtained, although the contracting process may be initiated prior to conference approval.
4. For each Pre-Approval package, complete and submit:
    a. Spreadsheet titled "List of Conferences Greater than $75K Requiring CFO/ASA, Deputy Secretary or Secretary Approval. (Attachment 1)
    b. Spreadsheet titled "Conference Details" and attachments to include (please see the spreadsheet for additional documentation requirements):
        i. Planned agenda/schedule
        ii. Statement of work or Request for Proposal for any contracts for a conference planner and/or venue
        iii. MOU, IAA or other agreement, if any
        iv. Independent Government Cost Estimate for each contract and/or agreement
    c. Conference Planning Checklist
    d. Record of the Bureau DUS AND Chief of Staff approval, or CFO/ASA approval, as applicable.
    e. Any other information that would enhance the Approving Official's understanding of the event.

V. Conference Planning

1. Food purchased for conferences or meetings for meals, light refreshments, or beverages, even when purchased using fees, revenue or gifts associated with the conference, must be documented as a necessary expense to accomplish the goals of the meeting (e.g., participation at a lunch is necessary due to speaker presentations
2. Food purchases for meals should be negotiated with the hotel/venue to be as close to the per diem rates for individual meals as set out by the FTR (see FTR Chapter 301, Appendix E) as possible;
3. Food and beverages for snacks shall be limited to coffee, tea, soft drinks, donuts, bagels, fruit, pretzels, cookies, chips or muffins (see FTR §301-74.11).
4. Light snacks; food and beverages provided at receptions shall be minimized to the lowest, reasonable cost, and the number of receptions should be limited to the fewest number required to achieve the mission and goals of the conference.
5. Appropriated funds, other than Representation, Gifts and Bequests or funds authorized under MECEA cannot be used to purchase alcohol.

6. Bureaus and their operating units shall not use appropriated funds, (whether from an annual appropriation, multi-year appropriation, appropriated user fees, mandatory appropriation, gift funds, or reimbursements from such appropriations, etc.) or fees, revenue or gifts associated with the conference, to cover entertainment-related expenses, the cost of amenities, or other unrelated/minimally related events. Examples of such expenses include motivational speakers, musicians or other entertainers, extraneous promotional items, decorations, or other goods and services for participants unrelated to the purpose of the conference, procuring tickets to recreational activities outside of the conference setting, or non-substantive audio/visual materials.
7. Conference planning shall minimize the cost of all aspects of the conference, including the venue, conference planner, audiovisual, printing, and other expenses. The number of government attendees shall be limited to the minimum number of employees necessary to achieve the mission and goals of the conference.
8. The Department of Commerce Conference Planning Policies and Procedures incorporates by reference Federal Travel Regulation §301-74 Conference Planning found as the following web address: http://www.gsa.gov/portal/ext/public/site/FTR/file/Chapter301p074.html/category/21868/#wp1201610

VI. Quarterly Reporting

1. Submit quarterly, on the 15th of the month following the end of the quarter, a report of all conference events that meet the definitions in Sections I, II, and III, with the following exception.
    a. For conference events that meet the definition in Section II, report only those events for which Department expenses, including travel, equal or exceed $20,000. This is a prior established threshold by OFM as required by FY 2012 Appropriation Law.
2. For each submission, complete the spreadsheet in Attachment 1.
3. For each conference over $75K, complete the Conference Details Spreadsheet with actual costs, and other material as required.
4. The quarterly report should include all conferences held during the quarter with ***actual*** costs incurred even if they were pre-approved. This information is required to be provided to the Office of Inspector General for quarterly audit or review.