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MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
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UNDER SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE
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CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
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DIRECTORS OF THE DEFENSE AGENCIES
DIRECTORS OF THE DOD FIELD ACTIVITIES

SUBJECT: Updated DoD Conference Guidance

DoD participation in conferences and similar events is critical to our ability to share information and break down barriers that block innovation. Given continued constraints on our resources, the Department must remain a responsible steward of the taxpayers' dollars with regard to conference expenditures. In recent years, however, excessive restrictions on conference participation and attendance by DoD personnel have become counterproductive, undermining the professional development for communities such as our science and technology, medical, and education personnel, and making it more difficult for them to come together with others to promote the free exchange of ideas that drive creativity and innovation.

For these reasons, the attached DoD Conference Policy updates guidelines for conference approval so as to make conference participation and attendance by DoD employees easier, not harder. Three major changes have been made from previous guidance:

- First, delegations of waiver and approval authority for conferences is simplified into three categories (over \$500,000; over \$100,000, but up to \$500,000; and up to \$100,000) and delegated to levels consistent with law and Office of Management and Budget guidance. In addition, approval authorities are encouraged to identify and pre-approve recurring conferences subject to appropriate control criteria.

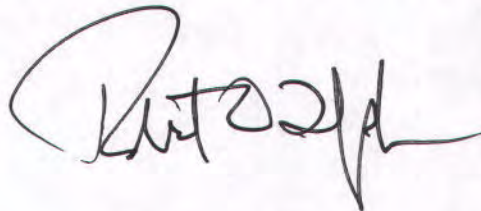


OSD011469-15/CMD015134-15

- Second, the requirement to track attendance at conferences not hosted or sponsored by DoD in advance is eliminated in all cases except where the approving official has reason to believe that a conference will cost more than \$100,000, and approval authority for attendance at such conferences is delegated to the lowest appropriate level as follows: (1) supervisors with Temporary Duty authority for conferences costing less than \$3,000 per attendee and less than \$600 per day per attendee; and (2) supervisors one level up, at a grade of O-5 or GS-14 (or equivalent) for conferences costing \$3,000 or more per attendee or \$600 or more per day per attendee. In each case, the approving authority is responsible for determining that conference attendance is appropriately related to the performance of the DoD attendee's official duties and that the expense of attendance is justified on that basis.
- Lastly, reporting through the DoD Conference Tool is limited to legally directed requirements for public reporting and reporting to Component Inspectors General.

The Secretaries of the Military Departments and Heads of other DoD Components retain the authority to impose more stringent conditions or approval requirements on particular categories of conferences that they have determined to be subject to abuse. However, such conditions or requirements must not unduly burden routine participation by DoD employees in conferences that are appropriately related to the performance of their official duties. Accordingly, before you impose additional conditions or requirements, I ask that you inform me of the conditions or requirements, the categories of conferences to which they will apply, and your reasons for imposing them.

My point of contact for this conference update is the Deputy Chief Management Officer.



Attachment:
As stated



Office of the
**DEPUTY CHIEF
MANAGEMENT OFFICER**

DoD Conference Guidance

Version 3.0

September 23, 2015

Version History

Version	Publication Date	Author	Summary of Changes
2.0	November 4, 2013	Michael Metzger	Updated to reflect approved Deputy Secretary of Defense changes and new legislative requirements.
1.0	September 29, 2012	Michael Metzger	Original

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I. Purpose

This document serves as Department of Defense (DoD)'s official conference policy. This document supersedes and cancels all Deputy Secretary of Defense's memoranda and other previous guidance issued on my behalf. This policy supplements conference provisions in applicable ethics regulations and the Joint Travel Regulations. This guidance is effective September 23, 2015.

II. Background

The Department of Defense has made substantial progress in reviewing and approving conferences consistent with guidance codified in OMB Memorandum, Subject: Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations dated May 11, 2012 and in Pub.L. 113-6, "Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013." Because of successes achieved in responsibly managing conferences, and based on the feedback that existing guidance may be curtailing attendance at professional conferences, this update to the Conference Guidance balances the continuing requirement to exercise responsible stewardship of taxpayer money with the ability of commanders/directors to manage professional development.

III. Responsibilities

1. Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense

The Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense are accountable for all of the Department's conference related activities. They oversee DoD's conference policies and controls and maintain visibility and accountability for the conduct of conferences hosted by the Department and attended by Department personnel through Component reporting as required by legislation.

2. DoD Deputy Chief Management Officer

The DoD Deputy Chief Management Officer is responsible for DoD's conference oversight regime on behalf of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense, to include maintaining this guidance document and executing the reporting requirements contained in Section V. The Deputy Chief Management Officer is authorized to act on behalf of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary on all conference related matters, pursuant to this guidance.

3. Conference Approval Authorities

In recognition of DoD's unique size and complexity, DoD has structured the approval authorities to eliminate undue delays and impediments to appropriate conference participation and address the concerns of communities of interest, including scientific, acquisition, and medical communities. This structure builds upon the existing foundation of trust and accountability already in place for

senior civilian and military leaders, who have responsibility for billions of taxpayer dollars and hundreds of thousands of our service members lives.

a. Approval Authority for Conferences Costing in Excess of \$100,000

In accordance with OMB guidance, DoD organizations should not incur net expenses to the DoD greater than \$500,000 on a single conference, unless the relevant approval official issues a waiver after determining that exceptional circumstances exist whereby such a conference is the most cost-effective option to achieve a compelling purpose. In accordance with OMB guidance, approval authority for such waivers is delegated to Tier 1 approval officials without further delegation. The grounds for any such waiver must be documented in writing.

For a conference with a total cost more than \$100,000 and but not more than \$500,000, approval authority is delegated to Tier 1 and Tier 2 approval officials without further delegation.

b. Approval Authority for Conferences Costing \$100,000 or less

For a DoD-sponsored or hosted conference with a total cost of \$100,000, or less approval authority is delegated to Tier 1 and Tier 2 approval officials, and to the commander or director of the DoD unit or organization sponsoring or hosting the conference, who may further delegate such authority to one or more officials who are General or Flag Officers or who are members of the Senior Executive Service within the DoD unit or organization.

Approval authority for conferences with a total cost of \$100,000 or less not sponsored or hosted by DoD is delegated to the lowest appropriate level, as follows:

- (1) For conferences costing \$3,000 or more per attendee or \$600 or more per day per civilian employee or military member, approval is delegated to officials who are at the grade of O-5, GS-14, or equivalent, and at least one level above the supervisors with normal TDY/TAD approval authority for such employees or military members, consistent with organizational guidelines.
- (2) For conferences costing less than \$3000 per attendee and less than \$600 per day per civilian employee or military member, and for no-cost conferences, approval authority is delegated to supervisors with normal TDY/TAD approval authority, consistent with organizational guidelines.

For purposes of determining the costs per day, all costs, including travel costs, must be averaged over every day on which a substantive portion of the conference occurs. A “day” does not include days on which only travel occurs and/or the only conference activities are non-substantive, such as welcome receptions and social activities.

c. Threshold Determination for Non-DoD Sponsored or Hosted Conferences

If an approval official has reason to believe that the Department of Defense will incur more than \$100,000 on a conference not sponsored or hosted by DoD, such official shall use reasonable efforts to determine the total cost to the Department for the conference, taking into account previous conference experiences, and shall take steps to ensure that conference attendance is subject to approval in accordance with paragraph (a) or make a determination that the thresholds for such approval have not been triggered.

If an approval official knows or reasonably believes that 50 or more DoD employees under his or her authority will attend a conference not sponsored or hosted by DoD, such official shall provide for a cost estimate to determine whether waiver or approval by a Tier 1 and/or Tier 2 approval authority is required under this paragraph. No DoD component shall be required to establish a tracking system to count conference attendance across multiple organizations or units in advance of the event unless the approval official has reason to believe that 50 or more DoD personnel are likely to attend.

d. Tier 1 Approval Officials

For the purposes of this Guidance, Tier 1 Approval Officials are as follows:

- (1) For conferences hosted by the Department of the Army:
 - (a) Secretary of the Army
 - (b) Under Secretary of the Army
- (2) For conferences hosted by the Department of the Navy:
 - (a) Secretary of the Navy
 - (b) Under Secretary of the Navy
- (3) For conferences hosted by the Department of the Air Force:
 - (a) Secretary of the Air Force
 - (b) Under Secretary of the Air Force
- (4) For conferences hosted by the National Guard: Chief, National Guard Bureau
- (5) For conferences hosted by elements of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and by Defense Agencies and DoD field activities within their respective organizations:
 - (a) Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology & Logistics)
 - (b) Under Secretary of Defense (Policy)
 - (c) Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)

- (d) Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness)
- (e) Under Secretary of Defense (Intelligence)
- (6) For conferences hosted by elements of the Office of the Secretary of Defense or by Defense Agencies or DoD field activities that do not report to an Under Secretary, the Deputy Chief Management Officer
- (7) For conferences hosted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Director, Joint Staff
- (8) For conferences hosted by the Combatant Commands: Commanders of the Combatant Commands

e. Tier 2 Approval Officials

For the purposes of this guidance, Tier 2 Approval Officials are as follows:

- (1) For conferences hosted by the Department of the Army:
 - (a) Chief of Staff and Vice Chief of Staff of the Army
 - (b) Commanders of the Army Commands
 - (c) Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army
- (2) For conferences hosted by the Department of the Navy:
 - (a) Chief of Naval Operations
 - (b) Commandant of the Marine Corps
 - (c) Department of Navy/Assistant for Administration
 - (d) Director, Navy Staff
 - (e) Director, Marine Corps Staff/Staff Director, Headquarters Marine Corps
 - (f) Commanders of the Major Commands of the Navy
 - (g) Commanders of the Major Commands of the Marine Corps
- (3) For conferences hosted by the Department of the Air Force
 - (a) Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Air Force
 - (b) The Air Force Surgeon General
 - (c) Commanders and Vice Commanders of the Major Commands of the Air Force
 - (d) Superintendent, United States Air Force Academy
 - (e) Commander, Air Force Research Laboratory
- (4) For conferences hosted by the National Guard
 - (a) Vice Chief, National Guard Bureau
 - (b) Director, Army National Guard
 - (c) Director, Air National Guard

- (5) For conferences hosted by elements of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and by Defense Agencies and DoD Field Activities within their respective organizations:
 - (a) Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics)
 - (b) Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Policy)
 - (c) Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)
 - (d) Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness)
 - (e) Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Intelligence)
 - (f) Assistant Deputy Chief Management Officer
 - (g) Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)
 - (h) Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative Affairs)
 - (i) DoD Chief Information Officer
 - (j) Director, Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation
 - (k) Director, Net Assessment
 - (l) Director, Operational Test & Evaluation
 - (m) DoD General Counsel
 - (n) DoD Inspector General
 - (o) Directors of the Defense Agencies and DoD Field Activities
- (6) For conferences hosted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Vice Director, the Joint Staff
- (7) For conferences hosted by the Combatant Commands: Deputy Commanders of the Combatant Commands

4. Legal Compliance

Approval officials are responsible for ensuring compliance with all applicable laws and policy in making their approvals and therefore should consult with legal counsel, when appropriate.

5. Document Management

Approval officials must maintain electronic records of documentation used in making their decisions for not less than five years or in accordance with DoD Directive 5015.2, whichever is greater. Approval officials for conferences costing in excess of \$100,000 must document their approvals in writing. For each conference with a cost exceeding \$500,000 an approval/waiver memo that is specific to that individual conference (or to multiple instances of that conference, as provided in the January 2015 Controller Alert) must be signed. For those conferences with a total cost below \$500,000, an approval memo may cover more than one conference, but each conference must be individually listed in the memo.

6. Conference Attendance

Conference attendance by an employee or a military member is subject to a determination by the relevant approving authority that such attendance is appropriately related to the performance of the employee's/military member's official duties and that the expense of attendance is justified on that basis. When making conference approval decisions, approval officials must confirm that physical co-location of DoD personnel in a conference setting is beneficial and cost-effective and consider

alternative means of delivering the relevant information, including usage of remote collaboration tools (e.g., teleconferencing, videoconferencing, webinars, online sharing applications) and other real-time communication methods that would mitigate the need for physical co-location of DoD personnel.

7. Prohibited Conference Expenses

Entertainment-related expenses are expressly prohibited as part of DoD-sponsored or hosted conferences. Illustrative examples of entertainment-related expenses that are prohibited include hiring musicians or other entertainers to perform at conferences, procuring extraneous promotional items, decorations, or other goods and services for participants that are unrelated to the purpose of the conference, procuring tickets to recreational activities outside of the conference setting, or using funds to produce non-substantive audio/visual materials. Common sense and good judgment must be used throughout the conference planning process. If there is any doubt as to the appropriateness of certain expenses, coordinate with appropriate officials, including legal counsel.

8. Grants and Contracts

Grants or contracts funded by appropriated funds may not be used for the purpose of defraying the costs of a conference that is not directly and programmatically related to the purpose for which the grant or contract was awarded, such as a conference held in connection with planning, training, assessment, review, or other routine purposes related to a project funded by the grant or contract.

9. Jointly Hosted Conferences

In the case where more than one DoD unit or organization is sponsoring or hosting a conference jointly, if it appears that the total cost of the conference to the Department will be over \$100,000, those units or organizations should designate one of the units or organizations to obtain approval for the conference through that unit's or organization's appropriate approval official on behalf of the Department.

10. Enhanced Scrutiny

Approval officials should apply enhanced scrutiny to conferences that involve the following circumstances:

a. Spousal Travel

Approval officials must ensure that for conferences where spousal travel is involved, the spousal travel is authorized in accordance with the Joint Travel Regulation.

b. Co-Sponsorship with a non-Federal Entity

Approval officials must ensure that a conference DoD is co-sponsoring with a non-federal entity is planned in accordance with this guidance, to include ensuring that no prohibited conference

expenses are involved, and that the conference circumstances do not create the appearance of government impropriety.

c. Using Conference Planners

It is acceptable to contract with a non-federal entity for help in planning and executing a DoD hosted conference, including through the use of a no-cost contract, as long as proper contracting procedures are followed. However, approval officials must ensure that the conference is planned in accordance with this guidance, to include ensuring that no prohibited conference expenses are involved, and that the conference circumstances do not create the appearance of government impropriety.

11. Approval Timing

Organizations should not finalize conference plans or make any commitments to vendors or hotels that obligate the government to pay funds until the requisite approval from the appropriate approval authority has been obtained. This includes commitments addressing costs if a conference is cancelled or where DoD participation may need to be withdrawn. Further, DoD entities should not enter into a co-sponsorship relationship, no cost contract, or other arrangement with a non-Federal entity until the requisite approval has been obtained. Since this approval will normally occur early in the conference planning stages, the approval official shall exercise continuing oversight of the conferences, as necessary, to ensure that the entire conference is being carried out in a manner that is fully consistent with this guidance.

12. Escalation Circumstances

If, as the date of a DoD-hosted conference approaches, it becomes apparent that its total cost will exceed the estimated cost and breach the next approval threshold, approval must be obtained from the higher level approval official as soon as possible.

13. National Guard Bureau

The Chief, National Guard Bureau is required to follow this guidance.

IV. Determination of a Conference

1. General Definition

"Conference" is defined in the Joint Travel Regulations as, "[a] meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, or event that involves attendee travel. The term 'conference' also applies to training activities that are considered to be conferences under 5 CFR 410.404."

2. Additional Indicia of a Conference

Conferences subject to this guidance are also often referred to by names other than "conference." Other common terms used include conventions, expositions, symposiums, seminars, workshops, or exhibitions. They typically involve topical matters of interest to, and the participation of, multiple agencies and/or non-governmental participants. Indicia of a formal conference often include but are not limited to registration, registration fees, a published substantive agenda, and scheduled speakers or discussion panels.

3. Local Conferences

Events within the local duty location that do not require travel authorization may also qualify as a conference for the purposes of this guidance.

V. Definition of Conference Costs

1. Conference Expenses

The expenses of a conference include all direct and indirect conference costs paid by the Department, in accordance with 41 CFR 301-74.2. For the purposes of this guidance, conference expenses include, but are not limited to:

- a. Authorized travel and per diem expenses for all DoD sponsored attendees, including both government and non-government attendees
- b. Hire of rooms for official business
- c. Audiovisual and other equipment usage
- d. Computer and telephone access fees
- e. Light refreshments or other food and beverage
- f. Printing
- g. Registration, exhibitor, sponsor, or conference fees for all DoD sponsored attendees, including both government and non-government attendees
- h. Ground transportation and/or parking fees
- i. Outlays for conference preparation and planning
- j. Speaker fees
- k. Administrative expenses

2. Expenses Not Included in Calculation of Conference Expenses

For the purposes of this guidance, the following expenses should not be included in the calculation of conference expenses:

- a. Federal employee time for conference preparation and planning
- b. Federal employee time for attendance at the conference or en route
- c. Security costs to ensure the safety of attending governmental officials
- d. While the Department determines a feasible way to accurately capture these costs, contractor attendance costs charged to a contract that is not associated with the hosting or running of the conference

3. Revenue

Revenue is all direct or indirect conference costs collected from or reimbursed For the purpose of this guidance, revenue includes, but is not limited to:

- a. Registration fees collected
- b. Exhibitor fees collected
- c. Sponsor fees collected

4. Total Conference Cost

Total conference costs should be the net value of the conference expenses, less any fees or revenue received by the Department through the conference.

For DoD-sponsored or hosted conferences, the total conference cost must be calculated by the hosting DoD Component and must include funds paid by all DoD Components, not just the host.

VI. Reporting

1. Annual Reporting

In accordance with OMB's memorandum and section 739 of Public Law 113-235, "Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015," the following data will be reported publically on an annual basis for conferences which the Department *hosts*, where the total expenses associated with the conference are in excess of \$100,000. This data will be captured by each DoD Component and reported through the DoD Conference Tool It will be validated by each DoD Component prior to posting.

- a. The name of the conference
- b. The Component hosting the conference
- c. The date(s) of the conference
- d. The location of the conference
- e. The total conference expenses incurred by the agency for the conference, including a breakdown of those costs by:
 - (1) The cost of any food or beverages
 - (2) The cost of any audio-visual services
 - (3) The cost of DoD participants travel and contractor travel costs if paid by DoD
- f. The number of participants attending the conference
- g. A brief description of the conference's purpose
- h. A discussion of the methodology used to determine which costs relate to the conference
- i. A description of the contracting procedures used, including whether contracts were awarded on a competitive basis and a discussion of any cost comparison conducted in evaluating potential contractors for the conference

2. Ongoing Reporting

For DoD-hosted conferences where the total conference expenses associated with each conference are in excess of \$20,000.00, each conference will be entered into the DoD Conference Tool within **15 days** of the conference being held. The report, required by section 739 of Public Law 113-235, will consist of the following:

- a. The name of the conference
- b. The date(s) of the conference
- c. The location of the conference
- d. Number of DoD personnel attending the conference

Access to the DoD Conference Tools can be requested at the following link:

<https://dcmo.osd.mil/Pages/Collaboration%20Request%20V2.aspx>.

3. DoD Inspector General Access to Conference Reporting

To comply with statutory requirements personnel from the DoD Inspector General's office have been granted access to the DoD Conference Tool to view information about conferences that have been completed.