USDA

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of the Chief
Financial Officer

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW

Washington, DC
20250

TO: Subcabinet Officials
Agency Heads
Staff Office Directors
Agency Chief Financial Officers
Deputy Administrators for Management
USDA Inspector General

FROM: Jon M. Holladay
Deputy Chief Financial Officer

JUN - 6 2013

SUBJECT: New Requirements for Conference Planning and Reporting

Purpose

The purpose of the memorandum is to provide you guidance to respond to new conference planning and reporting requirements imposed by Section 3003 of the "Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013" (CFCA 2013 Act) and to inform you of new and existing conference planning procedures necessary to ensure proper spending controls and the Department's statutory compliance. Please carefully read the language in Section 3003, which is provided as Attachment I, and ensure that your mission area, agency, or staff office fully complies. Agency heads should also notify Jon Holladay via email by July 8, 2013, of the person selected to serve as your Senior Accountable Travel Official (described below). Changes to the Agriculture Travel Regulation (DM2300-001) will follow this memorandum.

Summary

Congress passed the CFCA 2013 Act on March 21, 2013, and the President signed it into law on March 26, 2013. The law includes a government-wide general provision in Section 3003 that creates several new requirements related to conference planning and reporting, yet does not relieve other mandated conference requirements.

- **New Continuous Reporting Requirement:** Section 3003 requires that each conference the Department of Agriculture (USDA) holds[1] with costs exceeding $20,000 be reported to the Inspector General within 15 calendar days of the end date

1 For purposes of this memo, "holding" is synonymous with "hosting" a conference and implies that USDA manages the preparation and general operations of the event with the use of USDA staff or contractors. Holding a conference differs from "attending" a conference, which refers to USDA staff attending a conference organized by an entity other than USDA. Conference "sponsorship" refers to USDA providing financial or in-kind assistance to an entity other than USDA for the purposes of a conference.

of the conference. Reporting must include the conference date, location and number of employees in attendance.

- **New Annual Reporting Requirement:** Section 3003 requires that the Secretary report on an annual basis to the Inspector General the cost and contracting procedures for all conferences exceeding $100,000. The annual report includes: a detailed statement of the costs to the United States Government; a discussion of the methodology used to determine which costs relate to the conference; and a description of the contracting procedures used to award any contracts associated with the conference.

- **Mandated Compliance with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-12-12:** Section 3003 restricts the use of funds available for obligation during FY 2013 for travel and conference activities unless they are consistent with OMB Memorandum M-12-12 "Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations." This language in effect makes it an Anti-deficiency Act (ADA) violation to use any FY 2013 funds for travel and conferences that are inconsistent with OMB Memorandum M-12-12. Further, this provision requires that USDA change its definition of a conference to be in line with the definition used in the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) and provided in Memorandum M-12-12, as "[a] meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves attendee travel."

Clarifications and Changes to USDA Conference Planning and Reporting Policy

By this memorandum and effective immediately, the following policy and procedural changes are in effect:

1. Definition of a Conference

USDA must change its working definition of a conference from that which was given in Section 14208 of the Food Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) to the definition provided in the FTR[2] and cited in OMB M-12-12. Therefore, USDA will now define a conference as a meeting, retreat, seminar, training activity, or other symposium or event that involves attendee travel. Appendix C to Chapter 301 of the FTR further narrows the definition of a "conference – other than training" to be "*travel performed in connection with a prearranged meeting, retreat, convention, seminar, or symposium for consultation or exchange of information or discussion*". Conferences are not and should be distinguished from "mission (operational)" related travel[3], "special agency mission" travel[4], and training (see "Training Definition" below).

---

[2] 5 CFR 410.404. See 41 CFR 300-3.1.

3 Appendix C to Chapter 301 of the FTR defines mission (operational) related travel to be "travel to a particular site in order to perform operational or managerial activities. Travel to attend a meeting to discuss general agency operations, review status reports, or discuss topics of general interest. Examples: Employee's day-to-day operational or managerial activities, as defined by the agency, to include, but not be limited to: hearings, site visit, information meeting, inspections, audits, investigations, and examinations."

2. Training That Is Not a Conference

Per Appendix C to Section 301 of the FTR, training that is not included in the official definition of a conference is defined as:

> "travel in conjunction with educational activities to become proficient or qualified in one or more areas of responsibility. 5 USC 4101 (4) states that "training" means the process of providing for and making available to an employee, and placing or enrolling the employee in a planned, prepared, and coordinated program, course, curriculum, subject, system, or routine of instruction or education, in scientific, professional, technical, mechanical, trade, clerical, fiscal, administrative, or other fields which will improve individual and organizational performance and assist in achieving the agency's mission and performance goals. Examples: Internships, Contractor Representative Training, Job required training, Continuing Professional Education or Professional Development Units for certification of professional competency.

5 CFR 410.404 further states:

> "agencies may sponsor an employee's attendance at a conference as a developmental assignment under section 4110 of title 5, United States Code, when; a) The announced purpose of the conference is educational or instructional; b) more than half of the time is scheduled for a planned, organized exchange of information between presenters and audience which meets the definition of training in section 4101; c) The content of the conference is germane to improving individual and/or organization performance; and d) Development benefits will be derived through the employee's attendance."

An employee's travel that meets these four criteria should be considered training and thereby falls outside the official definition of a conference.

---

4 Appendix C to Chapter 301 of the FTR defines special agency mission travel to be: "travel to carry out a special agency mission and/or perform a task outside the agency's normal course of day-to-day business activities that is unique or distinctive. These special missions are defined by the head of agency and are normally not programmed in the agency annual funding authorization. Examples: These agency-defined special missions may include details, security missions, and agency emergency response/recovery such as civil, natural disasters, evacuation, catastrophic events, technical assistance, evaluations or assessments."

3. Conference Pre-Approval Thresholds and Requirements

a) Pre-Approval for Conferences Projected to Cost More than $450,000

OMB Memorandum M-12-12 states that conferences with net expenses exceeding $500,000 are prohibited and require a written waiver from the Secretary when the conference is considered to be an exceptional circumstance and the most cost-effective alternative. In order to ensure that USDA does not violate this M-12-12 requirement and become susceptible to an ADA violation, agencies must seek a Secretarial waiver to host, sponsor, or attend a conference where projected net expenses to USDA exceed $450,000[5]. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) will coordinate the Secretarial waiver process on behalf of the agencies.

b) Approvals for Conference Events Projected to Cost between $75,000 and $450,000

Conferences with net expenses exceeding $75,000[6] require pre-approval by the Deputy Secretary. Agencies should submit proposals for such events to OCFO where the CFO will conduct a review before submitting the proposal to the Deputy Secretary for consideration. Agencies are required to use the Conference Approval Template, Attachment II.

Conference proposals for the USDA Inspector General should be submitted directly to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary for approval.

c) Approvals for Conference Events Costing Less than $75,000

USDA General Officers[7] are authorized to approve conference and training events within their purview that have a total cost of less than $75,000. General Officers may delegate the authority to approve events that have a total cost of less than $40,000 to Agency Heads or Staff Office Directors under their supervision. Further delegations are not permissible. For reporting purposes, supporting

---

5 A $50,000 cushion is built into the process to ensure that actual costs do not exceed estimated costs and thereby mistakenly violate M-12-12 (e.g., a conference with net expenses projected to be $480,000 actually has net expenses of $510,000).

6 OMB M-12-12 uses $100,000; as with the $500,000 threshold, a cushion is built in to ensure that violations do not occur due to possible variation between anticipated and actual net expenses.

7 Per 7 CFR Part 2 Subpart A §2.4., General Officers are the following: The Deputy Secretary, the Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services; the Under Secretary for Rural Development; the Under Secretary for Food Safety; the Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services; the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment; the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics; the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs; the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations; the Assistant Secretary for Administration; the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights; the General Counsel; the Inspector General; the Chief Financial Officer; the Chief Information Officer; the Judicial Officer; the Director, Office of Budget and Program Analysis; the Chief Economist; the Director, National Appeals Division; and the Director of Communications.

documentation related to these events must be retained for a minimum of 6 years and 3 months after the date of the event by the requesting office.

d) Conference Evaluation Criteria

Before submitting a proposal, the conference must meet the following evaluation criteria:

i. The conference will help further the agency's or the Department's mission;

ii. The information cannot be effectively shared through other means such as a teleconference or the Internet;

iii. The number of employees attending is justified;

iv. The location is appropriate and justified, and a prudent person would not think it a waste of their tax dollars (the request must indicate whether the conference will take place at a non-USDA government facility, commercial facility, or a combination of facilities);

v. The meeting location is near where most attendees are stationed; and if not, the detailed cost analysis is must include cost comparisons to locations near the majority of attendees;

vi. The conference or training event is a "must-do" considering the limited budget of the agency; and

vii. Vendors providing supplies or services for the conference were selected through a competitive contracting process - conference requests involving a sole source contract or no contract must include additional justification.

4. Senior Accountable Travel Officials

a) Senior Accountable Travel Official Description

Each USDA agency is required to have a Senior Accountable Travel Official to ensure timely and accurate reporting to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and OCFO. Agency Heads and Staff Office Directors shall appoint a Senior Accountable Travel Official and provide the official's name to me by July 8, 2013. The responsibilities should be fulfilled by the position such as the Deputy Administrator for Management, the Chief Financial Officer, Deputy Director of a Staff Office, and/or equivalent positions.

b) Senior Accountable Travel Official Duties

The Senior Accountable Travel Official shall design a records management methodology to maintain all correspondence related to a conference and be able to quickly correlate financial and non-financial records. A copy of the documented methodology and procedures shall be filed with OCFO upon creation and when subsequently modified. An initial methodology shall be implemented within 30 days from issuance of this guidance.

The Senior Accountable Travel Official shall also design and document the internal controls and cost tracking procedures to ensure accurate and timely reporting. The internal controls shall be tested annually to assess control design and operating effectiveness and the reports required by this section shall be considered key financial reports under Appendix A, "Internal Control over Financial Reporting" of OMB Circular A-123 "Management's Responsibility for Internal Control." At a minimum, a unique accounting classification code element shall be established to uniformly track all direct costs associated with each approved conference that an agency sponsors or hosts with net expenses to USDA projected to exceed $7,000. The initial documentation of the control structure is due 30 days from the date of this memorandum. The first test of controls shall be executed not later than 60 days after this memorandum.

General Officers and Agency Heads may assign other responsibilities related to conference oversight to the Senior Accountable Travel Official as they deem necessary.

5. Reporting Requirements

a) Continuous Reporting to OIG

Within 15 calendar days of the final date of a conferences' occurrence, where the conference's estimated net expenses to USDA exceed the $20,000 reporting threshold, the agency Senior Accountable Travel Official shall provide OCFO and OIG the date, location, and number of employees attending the conference. This provision applies only to conferences that USDA hosts.

b) Quarterly and Annual Reporting

No later than 30 calendar days from the last day of each fiscal quarter, the Senior Accountable Travel Official shall provide and certify to OCFO a quarterly report of conferences where net expenses exceeded $7,000. This reporting requirement applies to conferences that USDA hosts, sponsors, and attends; and OCFO will use the quarterly certified data to prepare annual reports that meet the requirements for the two annual reports that are outlined in Section 14208 of the 2008 Farm Bill and OMB M-12-12. Agencies will be provided an opportunity to review their portion of the annual submissions before they are published.

The format and reporting instructions are in Attachment V for reporting FY 2013 conferences. This new format captures the required data elements needed to be compliant with the 2008 Farm Bill requirements as well as the requirements prescribed in OMB M-12-12 and Section 3003 of CFCA 2013 Act. Reports will be retroactive to July 1, 2012, through March 31, 2013, which are **due on July 31, 2013.** The months from April 1, 2013 through June 30, 2013, are **due August 21, 2013.**

6. Conference Expenses

In line with OMB M-12-12, "conference expenses" are defined as all direct and indirect conference costs paid by the Government, whether paid directly by agencies or reimbursed by agencies to travelers or others associated with the conference. Conference expenses include any associated authorized travel and per diem expenses, salary and benefits, hire of rooms for official business, audiovisual use, food and beverage, registration fees, ground transportation, and other expenses as defined by the FTR.

All outlays for conference preparation and planning should be included, but the Federal employee time for conference preparation should not be included. The FTR provides some examples of direct and indirect conference costs included within conference expenses according to 41 CFR 301-74.2. Conference expenses should be net of any fees or revenue received by the agency through the conference.

Projected salary and benefits costs for employees traveling to and attending a conference should be included as an expense for planning, pre-approval, and reporting consideration. Subsequently, these costs should be submitted as a separate item within the conference approval packages to the OCFO for conferences exceeding $75,000. Agencies should also prepare and submit the methodology used to calculate salaries and benefits. These projected salary costs should not be included as an agency determines whether a conference exceeds the $75,000 threshold for further review and clearance.

7. Use of Standard Templates

USDA Agencies are required to use the Conference Approval Template (Attachment II), Agency Individual Conference Reporting Template (Attachment III), and the Conference Transparency Report Template and Definition document (Attachment V). The Conference Reporting and Preapproval Requirements Guide (Attachment IV) should be used as a reference to complete required reporting and conference approval submissions. The Conference Approval Template shall be used for planning and approval of all conferences without regard to any dollar threshold. The approvals shall be compliant with the new thresholds detailed

above. The Agency Individual Conference Reporting Template shall be used to provide standard conference reporting for events costing more than $20,000 to report to OIG with a courtesy copy to OCFO within 15 days of the conferences' conclusion.

Attachment I

Section 3003 of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013

(a) The head of any Executive branch department, agency, board, commission, or office funded by this or any other appropriations Act shall submit annual reports to the Inspector General or senior ethics official for any entity without an Inspector General, regarding the costs and contracting procedures related to each conference held by any such department, agency, board, commission, or office during fiscal year 2013 for which the cost to the United States Government was more than $100,000.

(b) Each report submitted shall include, for each conference described in subsection (a) held during the applicable period—

(1) a description of its purpose;

(2) the number of participants attending;

(3) a detailed statement of the costs to the United States Government, including—

(A) the cost of any food or beverages;

(B) the cost of any audio-visual services;

(C) the cost of employee or contractor travel to and from the conference; and

(D) a discussion of the methodology used to determine which costs relate to the conference; and

(4) a description of the contracting procedures used including—

(A) whether contracts were awarded on a competitive basis; and

(B) a discussion of any cost comparison conducted by the departmental component or office in evaluating potential contractors for the conference.

(c) Within 15 days of the date of a conference held by any Executive branch department, agency, board, commission, or office funded by this or any other appropriations Act during fiscal year 2013 for which the cost to the United States Government was more than $20,000, the head of any such department, agency, board, commission, or office shall notify the Inspector General or senior ethics official for any entity without an Inspector General, of the date, location, and number of employees attending such conference.

(d) A grant or contract funded by amounts appropriated by this or any other appropriations Act to an Executive branch agency may not be used for the purpose of defraying the costs of a conference described in subsection (c) 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.

(e) None of the funds made available in this or any other appropriations Act may be used for travel and conference activities that are not in compliance with Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M–12–12 dated May 11, 2012.

Attachment II

Conference Approval Template

Basic Information

Agency: _____
Office: _____

Accounting Code (A unique element is required to track cost for all conferences above $7,000):

Budget Fiscal Year: _____
Functional Area: _____
Funded Program/Work Breakdown Structure: _____

Funded Program, and Functional Area are elements that can apply to many different funding sources and/or organization/Fund Centers

Select One: conference training

If the event is training is it curriculum based?
Yes No

If the event is training is it considered Continual Professional Education?
Yes No

Name of conference or training: _____
Location of conference or training: _____

Will the Conference or Training be held in a USDA facility?
Yes No

If the Conference or Training will not be held in a USDA facility will it be held in a Federal facility?
Yes No

If the conference or training will not be held in a USDA or other Federal facility, please provide a justification for using an external facility?

Dates of Conference or Training: _____
Recurring Event: Yes No
If yes, frequency: _____

Conference Purpose: Narrative description of the conference objectives and expected outcomes.

Justification (Check all that applies and provide additional information.)

The conference will help further the agency's mission or the Department's strategic plan;
The information cannot be effectively shared through another means such as a teleconference

or the Internet;
The location is appropriate and justified and a prudent person would not think it as a

waste of their tax dollars for this conference in this location;
The number of employees attending is justified;
The meeting location is near where most attendees are stationed. If not, the detailed cost analysis is to include cost comparisons to locations near the majority of attendees. The cost comparison should include all travel costs and employee payroll for travel time. Multiple meetings should be considered to reduce total costs; and
The conference or training event is "must-do" considering the limited budgets of the agency.

Explanation of Why Video Conferencing or Other Alternatives Cannot Be Used

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Attendee Information

Total Attendees: _____
Sponsoring Agency Attendees/Participants: _____
Other USDA Attendees/Participants: _____
Non-USDA Attendees/Participants: _____

Estimated Costs

Total Cost: _____
Employee Travel Expenses -- Local: _____
Employee Travel Expenses -- TDY: _____
Costs – Salary and Benefits: _____
Costs – Speaker Fees: _____
Costs – Audio Visual Services: _____
Costs – Printing and Reproduction: _____
Costs – Rental/Facility Charges: _____
Costs – Refreshments: _____
Costs – Conference Furnished Meals: _____
Costs Not Otherwise Identified: _____

Explain/list of other costs: _____
_____
_____
_____

External Contributions Towards the Cost

Will contributions be accepted from non-federal sources to defray the cost of the conference?
Yes No

If Yes how much will be accepted? _____

If contributions will be accepted has the acceptance decision been discussed with the Office of General Counsel?
Yes No

Contract Details

Potential Vendor(s): _____
Services to be provided: _____
Estimated Cost of Contract: _____
Competition Type: _____
Justification for Other than Full and Open Competition: _____

Promotional Materials:
Please describe any promotional materials to be distributed and justify the usage of promotion materials.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Reviewed by:

Approved by:

Attachment III

Report to OIG on Conferences Held by USDA Agencies and Staff Offices in Excess of $20,000

Agency Individual Conference Reporting Template

Agency or Staff Office Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Conference Title	City	State (or International Country)	Start Date (dd/mm/yy)	End Date (dd/mm/yy)	Total Number of USDA Attendees

The report should be forwarded to the Office of Inspector General's Tracey LaPoint at Tracey.Lapoint.oig.usda.gov and Office of the Chief Financial Officer at USDA.ConferenceRPT@cfo.usda.gov.

Attachment IV

Conference Reporting and Preapproval Requirements

Requirement	The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 Section 14208	Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013, Section 3003		Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations (OMB Memo M-12-12), Section 2		
Purpose	Public Reporting: Spending Transparency	Reporting to USDA IG: Internal Accountability		OSEC Preapproval for Large Conferences		Public Reporting: Spending Transparency
Conference Definition	Farm Bill Definition	Federal Travel Regulation (FTR)	FTR	FTR	FTR	FTR
Hosted and/or Attended?	Hosted, Sponsored, and Attended	Hosted Conferences Only	Hosted Conferences Only	Hosted, Sponsored, and Attended	Hosted, Sponsored, and Attended	Hosted, Sponsored, and Attended
Threshold	Report all conferences (Department aggregated threshold 10K)	$100K	$20K	$100K – USDA will use $75K	$500K – USDA will use $450K	$100K
Frequency	Quarterly reporting per ATR, due Annually (yr end 6/30, due September 30)	FY Annual (due January 31)	15 Days after conference	Per Conference	Per Conference	FY Annual (due January 31)

Requirement	The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 Section 14208	Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013, Section 3003		Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations (OMB Memo M-12-12), Section 2		
Data Fields	• Conference Name • Location • # of USDA employees • Total Cost • Contracting procedures (hosted only)	• Conference Name (subject) • # of participants paid to attend • Total Costs • Food/Beverage Costs • Audio-Visual Costs • Travel Costs • Discussion of cost methodology • Contracting procedures • Cost comparison	• Date • Location • # of USDA employees	• See Attachment II	• See Attachment II	• Sponsored Conferences only • Total Cost • Date • Location • Explanation of mission impact • # of USDA participants paid to attend
Recipient	Congress and the Public, via the Internet	OIG with OCFO cc'd		Deputy Secretary through OCFO	Secretary through OCFO	The Public, via the Internet
Starts	FY 2008	FY 2013		FY 2012		FY 2012

- **The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246), Section 14208 Department of Agriculture Conference Transparency.**

  - (a) REPORT—

- REQUIREMENT— No later than September 30 of each year, the Secretary of Agriculture shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate, a report on conferences sponsored or held by the Department of Agriculture or attended by employees of the Department of Agriculture.

- (2) CONTENTS—Each report under paragraph (1) shall contain—

- (A) for each conference sponsored or held by the Department or attended by employees of the Department—
  - (i) the name of the conference;
  - (ii) the location of the conference;
  - (iii) the number of Department of Agriculture employees attending the conference; and
  - (iv) the costs (including travel expenses) relating to such conference; and

- (B) For each conference sponsored or held by the Department of Agriculture for which the Department awarded a procurement contract, a description of the contracting procedures related to such conference.

- (3) EXCLUSIONS—The requirement in paragraph (1) shall not apply to any conference—
- (A) for which the cost to the Federal Government was less than $10,000; or;
- (B) outside of the United States that is attended by the Secretary or the Secretary's designee as an official representative of the United States government.

  - (b) AVAILABILITY OF REPORT— Each report submitted in accordance with subsection (a) shall be posted in a searchable format on a Department of Agriculture website that is available to the public.

  - (c) DEFINITION OF CONFERENCE—In this section, the term ''conference''—
- means a meeting that—
- (A) is held for consultation, education, awareness, or discussion;
- (B) includes participants from at least one agency of the Department of Agriculture;
- (C) is held in whole or in part at a facility outside of an agency of the Department of Agriculture; and
- (D) involves costs associated with travel and lodging for some participants; and

- (2) does not include any training program that is continuing education or a curriculum-based educational program, provided that such training program is held independent of a conference of a non-governmental organization.

- **Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (HR 933), Section 3003**

  - (a) The head of any Executive branch department, agency, board, commission, or office funded by this or any other appropriations Act shall submit annual reports to the Inspector General or senior ethics official for any entity without an Inspector General, regarding the costs and contracting procedures related to each conference held by any such department, agency, board, commission, or office during fiscal year 2013 for which the cost to the United States Government was more than $100,000.

  - (b) Each report submitted shall include, for each conference described in subsection (a) held during the applicable period—

- a description of its purpose;

- (2) the number of participants attending;

- (3) a detailed statement of the costs to the United States Government, including—
- (A) the cost of any food or beverages;
- (B) the cost of any audio-visual services;
- (C) the cost of employee or contractor travel to and from the conference; and
- (D) a discussion of the methodology used to determine which costs relate to the conference; and

- (4) a description of the contracting procedures used including—
- (A) whether contracts were awarded on a competitive basis; and
- (B) A discussion of any cost comparison conducted by the departmental component or office in evaluating potential contractors for the conference.

  - (c) Within 15 days of the date of a conference held by any Executive branch department, agency, board, commission, or office funded by this or any other appropriations Act during fiscal year 2013 for which the cost to the United States Government was more than $20,000, the head of any such department, agency, board, commission, or office shall notify the Inspector General or senior ethics official for any entity without an Inspector General, of the date, location, and number of employees attending such conference.

  - (d) A grant or contract funded by amounts appropriated by this or any other appropriations Act to an Executive branch agency may not be used for the purpose of defraying the costs of a conference described in subsection (c) 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.

- (e) None of the funds made available in this or any other appropriations Act may be used for travel and conference activities that are not in compliance with Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M–12–12 dated May 11, 2012.

- **Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations (OMB Memo M-12-12), Section 2**

Section 2 -Conferences

As part of the effort to safeguard Federal funds, agencies should focus on expenses related to conference sponsorship, conference hosting, or attendance of Federal employees at conferences sponsored or hosted by non-Federal entities. Federal agencies and employees must exercise discretion and judgment in ensuring that conference expenses are appropriate, necessary, and managed in a manner that minimizes expense to taxpayers.

On September 21, 2011, OMB issued Memorandum 11-35, "Eliminating Excess Conference Spending and Promoting Efficiency in Government." That memorandum instructed all agencies "to conduct a thorough review of the policies and controls associated with conference-related activities and expenses." In accordance with that memorandum, Deputy Secretaries (or their equivalents) thoroughly reviewed the policies and controls associated with conference-related activities and expenses to mitigate the risk of inappropriate spending.

To expand upon these efforts, this memorandum outlines a series of new policies and practices for conference sponsorship, hosting, and attendance to ensure that Federal funds are used appropriately on these activities, and that agencies continue to reduce spending on conferences where practicable:

- **Initiate senior level review of all planned conferences** - Expanding upon the requirements of OMB Memorandum 11-35, agency Deputy Secretaries (or their equivalents) shall initiate review of planned spending for every upcoming conference that is to be sponsored or hosted by the agency (or by other Federal or non-Federal entities) where net conference expenses by the agency will exceed $100,000. Agencies must ensure that the conference expenses and activities comply with the FTR directives and executive branch policies on conferences as well as the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) requirements on contracting goods and services. Until these reviews are completed, agencies shall suspend incurring obligations for conferences to which the agency has not yet committed.

- **Initiate senior level approval of all future conference expenses in** excess **of $100,000-** Following the review of planned conferences, Deputy Secretaries (or their equivalents) shall continue to approve the spending for all proposed new conferences to be sponsored or hosted by the agency (or by other Federal or non-Federal entities) where the net conference · expenses by the agency will be in excess of $1 00,000. Agencies must ensure that no Federal funds are used for unnecessary or inappropriate purposes and that all conference expenses and activities comply with both the FTR and the FAR requirements on lodging, food and beverages, per diem reimbursement, and contracting of goods and services. In addition, agencies should ensure that conference attendance and expenses are limited to only the levels required to carry out the mission of the conference.

- **Prohibit expenses in excess of $500,000 on a single conference -** An agency shall not incur net expenses greater than $500,000 from its own funds on a single conference, including conferences that are sponsored or hosted by the agency (or by other Federal or non-Federal entities). The agency head may provide a waiver from this policy if he or she determines that exceptional circumstances exist whereby spending in excess of $500,000 on a single conference is the most cost-effective option to achieve a compelling purpose. The grounds for any such waiver must be documented in writing by the agency head.

- **Report publicly on all conference expenses in excess of $100,000** – Agencies shall report on conference expenses on a dedicated place on their official website. By January 31 of each year (beginning on January 31, 2013), the agency head shall provide a description of all agency-sponsored conferences from the previous fiscal year where the net expenses for the agency associated with the conference were in excess of $1 00,000. This description shall include:

    - the total conference expenses incurred by the agency for the conference;
    - the location of the conference;
    - the date of the conference;
    - a brief explanation how the conference advanced the mission of the agency and;
    - the total number of individuals whose travel expenses or other conference expenses were paid by the agency.

In addition, for any instances where the net expenses for an agency-sponsored conference exceeded $500,000, the website shall include the agency head's waiver that identified the exceptional circumstances that necessitated exceeding this threshold. Finally, the website shall include information about the net conference expenses for the fiscal year incurred by that agency as well as a general report about conference activities throughout the year.

In reporting this data, agencies shall exclude any information that is considered to be sensitive, is prohibited from public disclosure by statute or regulation, or may jeopardize national security or the health, safety or security of conference attendees, organizers, or other individuals.

Attachment V

CONFERENCE TRANSPARENCY REPORTING

Cycle 2013: July 2012 through June 2013

AGENCY	CONFERENCE NAME	A/S	CURRICULUM BASED EDUCATION (Y/N)	CITY	STATE	START DATE	END DATE	# AGENCY PARTICIPANTS	# NON-USDA PARTICIPANTS PAID BY AGENCY	TRAVEL EXPENSES $	A/V COSTS $	FOOD OR BEVERAGE COSTS $	SALARY COSTS $	OTHER COSTS $	EXPLANATION OF MISSION IMPACT	CONTRACTING	BASIS for CITY SELECTED	FACILITY TYPE

Attachment V

Conference Transparency Report Definitions

Column Heading	Instructions
Agency	Acronym of agency reporting the conference.
Conference Name	Exact name of the conference. Omit "Annual" or year from name. Use OCFO's suggested list of names whenever possible.
A/S	"S" for conferences sponsored by your agency. "A" for conferences attended, but not sponsored by your agency.
Curriculum Based Education (Y/N)	Indicate curriculum based training with a "Y", otherwise put "N".
City	Location and dates of the actual conference location (not the lodging location or video conferencing site). Use OCFO's suggested list of locations/dates whenever possible.
State	
Start	
End	
# Agency Participants	Number of agency employees who attended the conference. Include USDA employees from other agencies authorized and paid by your agency.
# Non-USDA Participants Paid by Agency	Number of non-USDA conference participants whose expenses were fully or partially paid by your agency.
Travel Expenses $	Travel expenses paid by your agency for this conference.
A/V Costs $	Audio visual expenses paid by your agency for this conference
Food or Beverage Costs $	Food costs paid by your agency for this conference. Include any directly procured light refreshments or government provided meals. Exclude M&IE costs that were included in the travel expenses.
Salary Costs $	Salary costs of employees attending the conference. Include both the time at the conference plus en route travel.
Other Costs $	All other costs related to this conference not reported as travel, A/V or food.
Explanation of Mission Impact	For sponsored conferences with a total cost of 100K only, provide a couple of paragraphs explaining the purpose of this conference and how it furthered the mission of your agency.
Contracting	Provide one of the three following answers: "YES. SOLE SOURCE."; "YES. COMPETITIVELY AWARDED." or "NO. EXPENSES ARE FOR TRAVEL, FEES OR BELOW MICROPURCHASE LIMIT."
Basis for city selected	Provide one of the following answers: "Based on a cost analysis of 3 or more cities"; "More than 50% of the attendees work of reside in the selected city"; "Used TRX to determine the least expensive location"; or "Attended, did not select location."
Facility Type	Provide one of the following answers: "USDA facility"; "Federal facility"; "University"; or Commercial Facility".