

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
Washington, DC 20405

OAS 5785.1
January 28, 2015

GSA ORDER

SUBJECT: Conference and Event Management

1. Purpose. To provide guidance on sponsoring or co-sponsoring conferences, internal management meetings involving travel, and award ceremonies with cost; and attending or participating in any of these events.
2. Background. Executive Order 13589, Promoting Efficient Spending, directed agencies to cut waste in Federal Government spending and identify opportunities to promote efficient and effective spending, including a reduction in conference and travel costs. The development and training of GSA employees is essential to fulfill GSA's mission and to effectively conduct official business. Employees' attendance at training and conferences is authorized by the Government Employees Training Act, 5 U.S.C. 4101 *et seq.*; and allowable employee travel expenses related to such conferences are regulated by the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR).
3. Scope and applicability. This directive provides standards, instructions and procedures governing the management and participation in events that require travel. The provisions apply to all GSA employees except for employees of the Office of Inspector General (OIG), given its independence under the Inspector General Act, as amended (5 U.S.C. App. 3).
4. Cancellation.
 - a. ADM IL 12-01 Policy on Management and Approval of Conferences and Award Ceremonies.
 - b. PFM P 4290.1, GSA Internal Travel Regulations and Control of Official Travel, chapter 1 paragraphs 13.1, and 14; and chapter 14.
5. Nature of revision. This guidance consolidates policy on management and approval of conferences, conference attendance, internal management meetings involving travel, and award ceremonies with cost, as well as submission of annual conference and event management plans.
6. Definitions. Refer to Appendix A for a list of definitions pertaining to conference and management.
7. Responsibilities.
 - a. Administrator. Approve all proposed conferences over \$500,000.

b. Deputy Administrator.

- (1) Approve all proposed conferences over \$100,000; and
- (2) Approve all internal management meetings that require more than six employees to travel or exceed \$10,000 in anticipated costs.

c. Office of Administrative Services.

- (1) Oversee and contract for conference space, related activities, and amenities;
- (2) Review and approve proposed conferences for relevance to GSA's mission;
- (3) Review and approve proposed award ceremonies with cost;
- (4) Review and approve proposed conference attendance when the event exceeds 120 percent of the planned cost or estimated attendance estimates;
- (5) Handle procurement for all internal GSA conferences;
- (6) Provide the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) a report on GSA-sponsored conferences that cost over \$20,000 within 15 calendar days after the conference; and
- (7) Provide the OIG and Office of Communications and Marketing an annual report of all GSA-sponsored conferences during the previous fiscal year that cost over \$100,000 by January 31 of each year.

d. Travel Policy and Charge Card Program Division, Office of Administrative Services.

- (1) Develop and provide conference and event management guidance to GSA employees;
- (2) Serve as the application owner for Event Tracker; and
- (3) Monitor requests in Event Tracker for compliance with GSA policy.

e. Office of Chief Information Officer.

- (1) Provide help desk service for Event Tracker;
- (2) Provide training on Event Tracker; and
- (3) Implement Event Tracker system changes.

- f. Office of Communications and Marketing. Post the annual report of all GSA-sponsored conferences over \$100,000 on GSA's public website;

g. Heads of Services and Staff Offices.

(1) Submit annual conference and event management plans by the last business day in July to the Office of Administrative Services for review and approval by the Chief Administrative Services Officer (CASO) and Deputy Administrator;

(2) Ensure funds are not obligated by any means (e.g., contract, purchase order, purchase card) to support an event prior to approval from OAS, Deputy Administrator, and/or Administrator, as appropriate;

(3) Approve (or delegate approval for) attendee travel to events approved on the annual conference and event management plan in Event Tracker;

(4) Review and approve all events and attendee travel not included on the annual plan before submission to OAS in Event Tracker;

(5) Plan and conduct approved GSA-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences, internal management meetings and award ceremonies in accordance with GSA's policy and mission;

(6) Ensure conference and award ceremony expenditures comply with applicable regulations and policies;

(7) Ensure costs for conferences and award ceremonies are minimized and represent the best value obtained by the Government, and that attendee travel expenses stay within per diem rates;

(8) Designate a central point of contact for their respective organization responsible for monitoring the conference authorization process and serve as the key contact responsible for ensuring that information and required documentation is entered into Event Tracker; and

(9) Ensure that anyone who is planning a conference planners is trained, use the tools identified in this guidance, are familiar with and adhere to the guidance in FTR §301-74, Appendix E to Chapter 301 of the FTR and herein.

8. Signature.

/S/
CYNTHIA A. METZLER
Chief Administrative Services Officer
Office of Administrative Services

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Conference and Event Management

1. Policy. Award ceremonies with costs over \$100, conferences, conference attendance, and internal management meetings involving travel require prior review and approval as described in this policy. Periodic gatherings are a vital means of communication within GSA. However, if a less expensive method, for example, a teleconference, will effectively deal with the subject matter, GSA employees will use that method. The cost of conducting such gatherings should be minimized and attendance limited to those necessary to accomplish the purpose of the event.

2. Site selection.

a. When there is a broad range of subjects requiring extensive group interaction over a period of days, the most effective approach may be to meet in one location. Planners will not exclude from potential consideration any geographical location or facility; however, the location chosen should be one that minimizes total costs. FTR §301-74.4 will be considered when recommending a site to the respective Heads of Services and Staff Offices (HSSO). Also refer to the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) § 13.106-3(a), § 13.203, § 15.404-1, and 8.405-2(d), in regard to determining prices fair and reasonable).

b. Every effort should be made to hold such events within commuting distance of most of the attendees. Additional factors such as convenience to the organization, removal from workplace distractions, administrative fees, availability of facilities (space, equipment, and supplies), speaker fees, employees' time spent at the event and traveling to and from the event should be considered.

c. When determining conference or other event dates, consider that all hotels and meeting facilities have peak periods of high demand, "value" periods of low demand, and "shoulder" periods of variable demand. Meeting around, rather than during, a site's peak season often means a lower available rate.

d. GSA-sponsored conferences must be held in establishments that are compliant with the safety requirements of the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act of 1990. No arrangements or contracts may be entered into with hotels that are not compliant.

e. For events with estimated costs less than the Simplified Acquisition Threshold, the planner must review at least three different conference sites based on the stated evaluation criteria for the event. For events estimated to cost more than the Simplified Acquisition Threshold, FAR requirements for full and open competition must be followed.

3. Per diem.

a. GSA events will be held at sites that are within the locality's standard per diem rate. Any lodging above per diem is considered an "actual expense" authorization and may be allowed on an individual or case-by-case basis only, when approved by the Office of Administrative Services (OAS) based on sufficient justification provided by the HSSO.

b. Normally, an employee on temporary duty is responsible for paying for his/her lodging and meals and submitting requests for reimbursement. Appropriate reductions in per diem must be made for any event in which lodging and/or meals are provided to those in travel status. Meals may not be provided to employees at their official duty stations except as part of a course of training (see below).

4. Use of third party event planners. Third party event planners are to be used in rare circumstances and not for internal activities or internal management meetings. Any expense related to a third party event planner will be included in the proposed plan for the event. Services of third party event planners may be used only after approval by the HSSO and OAS.

5. Entertainment, extraneous items and activities. GSA sponsored events shall not include entertainment or other extraneous and unnecessary items and activities, for example, purchase or rental of costumes or clothing. Planners should exercise sound judgment and prudence regarding necessary expenses to carry out GSA's mission, as well as consider public perception on the use of taxpayer dollars.

6. Use of Government funds. Events must be approved by the HSSO and OAS before any procurement activity takes place, any obligations are made by the agency, or any costs are incurred by GSA. In addition to minimizing costs, the organization conducting the event must also observe limitations on Government funds for allowable items used such as training materials, memento items, and meals and refreshments.

a. Promotional or memento items. Items such as buttons, coins, coffee mugs, T-shirts or other items of clothing, briefcases, stickers, water bottles, and toys must not be paid for with Government funds. Typically, items or tokens given to individuals are considered gifts and are not essential to the GSA mission. Promotional or memento items may be provided to employees only as non-monetary awards given to recognize superior achievements or accomplishments in accordance with applicable awards criteria. The issuance of mementos to all attendees at a conference as keepsakes, souvenirs, or informal appreciation is not permissible. Refer to GSA Order 5090.1A OGC, Purchase of Promotional or Memento Items, for additional guidance on the purchase of such items.

b. Food.

(1) The furnishing of beverages and similar refreshments are considered in the nature of entertainment and are not payable from appropriated funds in the absence of specific statutory authority. This rule also applies to free meals provided to Government employees at their official duty stations. One exception to this rule is the purchase of food and beverages incident to the conduct of training. For this exception to apply, the training must meet the definition in 5 U.S.C. 4101(4). In addition, justification must be made that the interchange during the serving of meals or "coffee breaks" is an important and necessary element of the design of the training, and that the discontinuity that would otherwise occur would be detrimental to the goals of the training. The funds, however, may not be used to provide these amenities to non-Government employees unless they are speakers or other active participants whose expenses can be considered a part of the cost of providing training.

(2) Light refreshments, including beverages and snacks, may be provided in connection with an awards ceremony that meets the requirements of the Government Employee Incentive Awards Act and other applicable award criteria. See [Office of General Counsel \(OGC\) Memorandum Use of Agency Funds for Meals and Refreshments](#) for exceptions under which Government funds may be used to purchase food.

c. Entertainment, extraneous items and activities. GSA-sponsored events will not include entertainment or other extraneous and unnecessary items and activities, for example, refreshments (as described above) or the purchase or rental of clothing items. GSA planners should exercise sound judgment and prudence regarding necessary expenses to carry out GSA's mission, as well as consider public perception regarding the use of taxpayer dollars.

d. Training materials. The Government Employees Training Act (U.S.C. 4101-4119) authorizes the funding of such items as pens, pads, and notebooks at training which qualifies as such under the Act. Mere reference to meetings and other events as "training" is not sufficient.

7. Award ceremonies. Award ceremonies may be held as part of a conference or as a separate event. Awards may be monetary or non-monetary, must be given in recognition of a significant achievement by an employee or group of employees and must comply with 9451.1 CPO P, GSA Associate Performance Recognition System (APRS), and 5090.1 OGC. Under no circumstances should events be improperly designated as award ceremonies to justify the purchase of food.

8. Receipt of gifts. GSA employees must comply with the provisions of Subpart B of 5 C.F.R. Part 2635, Gifts from Outside Sources – of the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch. Employees may not solicit or accept gifts from any entity doing business with GSA or use their position to induce or influence another person to provide any benefit, financial or otherwise, to themselves, their friends or their

relatives. Persons who plan conferences or designated representative shall not retain promotional materials such as complimentary rooms or free meals associated with conference planning (FTR §301-74.1(d)). To the maximum extent possible, promotional materials must be used to defray costs of conducting the event. Consult with the Office of General Counsel for further guidance.

9. Printed materials. Information should be provided in electronic format, whenever practicable and permitted by law. The printing and publication of paper documents will be limited and must be consistent with GSA's mission, objectives, and existing policies. It must also represent efficient and effective use of taxpayer funds and not create barriers for the public in obtaining GSA information.

10. Acquisition of conference-related services. OAS is responsible for overseeing and contracting for conference space, related activities and amenities. Officials who are planning an event will consult with the assigned OAS contracting officer regarding specific requirements under the FAR and the General Services Administration Acquisition Manual (GSAM).

11. Submission of events in Event Tracker.

a. Known events/annual plan. HSSOs will submit all known events for the upcoming fiscal year in Event Tracker no later than the last business day in July (see Appendix D). GSA sponsored or co-sponsored conferences, internal management meetings that are expected to require more than six employees to travel or exceed \$10,000 in anticipated cost, and award ceremonies with cost should be entered as part of the annual "plan". Mission-related travel and training that is not part of a conference are excluded from the plan.

b. Events not on the annual plan. Proposed events not submitted and approved in Event Tracker as part of the annual plan must be submitted for review and approval to the OAS through the HSSO. Requests must be reviewed by the HSSO and submitted to OAS at least 30 days before the beginning of the event.

c. Attendee requests. Attendee requests will be submitted in the Event Tracker at least 20 days before the beginning of the event. Late submission of requests may prevent attendance at the event. (See Appendix D)

d. Changes to approved requests. Events with increases of more than 20 percent (rounded up) of the planned participants and/or planned costs must be recalled in Event Tracker, updated as appropriate and re-submitted for approval by OAS and the Deputy Administrator, as applicable.

12. Authorization and approval.

a. Conferences to be hosted or co-hosted by GSA.

(1) Conferences to be hosted or co-hosted with the primary purpose of expanding or advancing the services of GSA, GSA customers, or client-related or project related functions may be authorized after a business justification and conference budget are approved by the HSSO and OAS in Event Tracker. Any conference with a cost exceeding \$100,000 must be further approved by the Deputy Administrator and any conference with a cost of \$500,000 or more must be approved by the Administrator.

(2) Registration or booth fees may only be paid after receiving all proper approvals.

b. Non-federal source payments. Payment for travel expenses from a non-federal source is considered a gift to GSA and not to the employees. Policy for accepting these gifts, such as waived or reduced registration fee, transportation or lodging expenses, etc., is contained in [GSA Order OAS 5765.1, GSA Non-Federal Source Travel Policy](#). Requests for acceptance of gifts from non-federal sources must be reviewed and approved in advance by OAS and the Office of General Counsel through the Event Tracker tool prior to submission of a travel authorization in the e-Gov travel system. Employees should consult GSA Order OAS 5765.1 for specific requirements.

c. Conference attendance.

(1) Attendance at a conference, whether hosted by GSA or another entity, must be limited to the minimum number of individuals and the amount of time needed to carry out any required activity.

(2) An employee who wishes to attend or speak at a conference where an official expense to the Government will be incurred (e.g., registration fee, transportation expense, per diem, etc.), must obtain prior approval of the HSSO or designee. HSSO attendance requires approval of the Deputy Administrator. Individual requests are submitted through the Event Tracker. Employees will ensure any funding provided by a non-federal entity is properly annotated in Event Tracker for every request. The employee will indicate non-federal funding in Event Tracker if any portion of the employee's travel expenses, to include transportation, lodging, or registration fees, is paid for, waived, or discounted by a non-federal source.

d. Internal management meetings. Internal management meetings that require more than six employees to travel or exceed \$10,000 in anticipated cost must obtain prior approval of the HSSO, OAS and Deputy Administrator in Event Tracker. Internal management meetings under this threshold may be authorized by the HSSO. Requests to conduct an internal management meeting must include a proposed list of attendees.

13. Documentation. All conference planning and cost documentation, including both pre-conference cost estimates and actual conference costs incurred, must be retained for three years after final payment for contracts at or below the Simplified Acquisition Threshold, or for six years and three months after final payment for contracts over the Simplified Acquisition Threshold. These documents may be inspected by the Office of the General Counsel, the Inspector General, Office of Management and Budget, the Government Accountability Office, and other interested parties including the public, as appropriate under law.

14. Post-conference report. The organization conducting a GSA sponsored or co-sponsored event exceeding \$100,000 will prepare a narrative and actual expense report in the Event Tracker application tool that will be submitted to the respective HSSO and OAS within 60 days after the end of the event.

a. The narrative will:

(1) Provide an overview of the number of attendees and composition of attendees (e.g., GSA employees, other Government attendees, industry, contractors);

(2) Report the outcomes and indicate whether GSA's mission and objectives were achieved (include conference highlights);

(3) State what follow-up activities or actions are required;

(4) Summarize the results of any surveys conducted; and

(5) Provide any other information required by the HSSO.

b. The budget report will include both estimated and actual expenses incurred.

c. Per M-12-12, conferences over \$100,000 also require a report publically posted on GSA's website that describes:

(1) Total conference expenses incurred by the agency for the conference;

(2) Location of the conference;

(3) Date of the conference;

(4) A brief explanation how the conference advanced the mission of the agency;

(5) The total number of individuals whose travel expenses or other conference expenses were paid by the agency; and

(6) A copy of the Administrator's waiver identifying the exceptional circumstances for conferences that exceed the \$500,000 threshold.

15. Notification to the Office of Inspector General (OIG).

a. When the actual cost to the Government of a GSA-sponsored conference exceeds \$20,000, OAS must notify the OIG of the date, location, and number of employees attending the conference within 15 calendar days of the ending date of the conference.

b. OAS will provide the OIG an annual report of all GSA-sponsored conferences conducted with costs to the Government that exceed \$100,000. Hosting organizations must ensure that all post-conference narratives and actual costs required in paragraph 15 are completed in the required timeframe to ensure timely reporting to the OIG.

16. Conference attendance training. The GSA developed "Conference Attendance" course is mandatory and must be completed by every GSA employee every two years. It is available through GSA's On Line University. HSSOs should ensure that employees have completed the training prior to attending a conference.

Appendix A. Definition of Terms

Award – a monetary or non-monetary recognition of a significant achievement by an employee or group of employees presented in accordance with the GSA awards policy. See CPO P 9451.1 GSA Associate Performance Recognition System (APRS) for other applicable award criteria.

Conference - a symposium, seminar, workshop or other organized or formal gathering lasting portions of one or more days and involves attendee travel (local or TDY travel) and typically involves matters of topical interest with a published agenda, scheduled speakers and/or discussion panels. The term does not include technical or administrative site visits necessary to conduct routine operational business.

Conference costs – all costs paid by the Government for a conference, whether paid directly by agencies or reimbursed by agencies to travelers or others associated with the conference, e.g., speakers, contractors, etc. Such costs include, but are not limited to, pre-conference planning activities, travel to and from the conference, ground transportation, lodging, meals and incidental costs, meeting room rental, audiovisual costs, registration fees, speaker fees, honoraria, and other conference-related administrative fees, and the cost of employees' time spent at the conference, and traveling to and from the conference.

Internal management meeting – an assembly of persons to discuss general matters as part of a course of doing business, which is held in Federal or non-federal space, and may involve attendee travel.

Mission-related travel – travel to perform activities as part of GSA's day-to-day operations or management. See 5 U.S.C. 4110. Examples include:

- Conduct inspections, audits, and investigations;
- Oversee the management of real property;
- Attend operational exercises and deployment activities;
- Attend working group meetings addressing an operational issue;
- Attend customer, managerial or oversight meetings, planning and performance discussions, hearings and governance sessions;
- Attend interagency or intergovernmental events coordinating policies or operations mutual to the programs or missions of the agency;
- Represent the agency as part of diplomatic relations;
- Attend information meetings on internal agency communications on procurement and grant opportunities; and
- Attend ceremonies (e.g., ground breaking ceremonies) or recruiting events.

Third party event planner – any entity that provides services and/or assistance in determining an appropriate location to host an event, regardless of whether an entity charges a fee for the service.

Training –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 or organizational performance and assist in achieving the agency’s mission and performance goals” (5 U.S.C. 4101). Examples include:

- Education or coursework provided by vendors, technical schools, or institutions of higher learning, which is related to and applicable in the employee's current role, the job-relevance of which is evaluated on a course-by-course basis;
- Internal on-the-job training details;
- Organizational retreats and team-building exercises; and
- Attendance for the purpose of education at a seminar or symposium.

Appendix B. Conference Planning Resources

[Specialized Conference Facilities and Services](#). Commercial services may be necessary for specialized conference facilities that provide complete meeting packages, to include lodging, meeting space, all food and beverage, conference technology services, business center services and other related services. Provisions for these services must be completed using Special Item Number (SIN) 599-6.

[Conference, Events, and Trade Show Planning Services](#). Commercial services may be necessary for event and trade show planning. Provisions for these services, including expert help in advertising, marketing, and related communication fields must be completed using SIN 541 4D.

[Guide to Sustainable Conferences](#). The Office of Government-wide Policy has prepared guidance to lessen the environmental impact of Government-planned, contracted, or sponsored conferences and events.

[Travel Management Information System \(TMIS\)](#). Site city comparison may be obtained using GSA's TMIS group planning tool. TMIS assists in complying with the FTR and can create a cost comparison for up to 10 potential locations using contract air fares, per diem, and car rental for estimations. TMIS requires a login provided upon request by sending an email to travelmis@gsa.gov.

Appendix C. Contracting for Hotel and Meal Accommodations

General

There is no express prohibition on Government contracting officers entering into a contractual arrangement with a commercial enterprise for rooms and/or meals, for employees traveling on official business. However, the amounts contracted may not exceed the amounts available to an employee based on the regulatory limitations on per diem or actual expense rates. As a practical matter, a contractual arrangement should not be used unless there is an advantage to GSA by using this method (elimination of room tax, guarantee for a large block of rooms, etc.).

When making conference, training session, or meeting arrangements, the location chosen should be one which minimizes the travel costs associated with them. Every effort should be made to hold them within commuting distance of a majority of the attendees. Factors to be considered shall include the total cost, overall logistical convenience, removal from workplace distractions, adequate facilities (space, equipment, and supplies), and public perception. Also, authorizing officials should consider the options, in holding conferences in areas with variable season lodging rates, especially during the off-season. The location selected should be justified by an analysis of costs and benefits to determine that the session will accomplish its purpose at reasonable cost to the Government, all factors considered.

[Comptroller General decision B-195133 dated January 19, 1981](#), requires that a hotel properly itemize its billing so that a clear review can be made of all items being billed to the Government to determine if they are properly payable from appropriated funds. A lump sum billing for all services does not meet this requirement. However, an exception to the Comptroller General decision is the use of package contracts. The package contract provides for all subsistence items to be included in one quoted price, without an individual breakout for each room and meal. This exception applies in situations where hotels offer an attractively priced conference package but are unwilling or unable to provide an itemized billing.

Contracting Guidelines

The expense limitations in GSA travel policy apply to all lodgings, meals, and incidental expenses incurred while in travel status, including those listed as part of a contract for a conference, meeting or training session. This constraint applies whether these items have been "prepaid" as part of a registration fee charged by GSA to attend the program or will be included on the participant's travel voucher. These rules apply whether some or all of the participants are from other agencies.

Allowable amounts for lodging, meals, and incidental expenses are normally determined by the per diem rates under the lodgings-plus reimbursement method ([FTR Part 301-11](#)). Current per diem rates within CONUS may be found at www.gsa.gov/perdiem. It is critical to select the correct rate based on city, town, or county where and month when the activity will be held.

Package Contracts for Conference Arrangements

In situations where hotels offer an attractively priced conference package but are unwilling or unable to provide an itemized billing, planners may negotiate a package contract where all subsistence items are included in one quoted price without an individual breakout for each room and meal. However, the hotel must provide a total cost for subsistence items, apart from the cost for meeting rooms, audio/video, and other charges. This will allow a determination to be made that rates do not exceed the established per diem rates for the locality.

Appendix D. Event Tracker Application Requests

Event Requests

The HSSO should designate a coordinator/liaison for entering required information in Event Tracker application. The coordinator/liaison must submit pertinent data to enable management to review a request to conduct or host an event. Depending on the type of event, data elements on a request may include the following items:

- Name and type of the event (e.g., conference, internal management meeting, award ceremony)
- Sponsoring office and point of contact information
- Proposed location and justification for the event;
- Tentative number of GSA employees participating in or attending the event;
- Dates;
- All estimated expenses;
- Purpose or objective of event; and
- Estimated revenue and fees, if any.

Attendee Requests

The following attendee requests must be entered into Event Tracker:

- Attending or speaking at a Conference;
- Attending or speaking at an event where a non-federal source has agreed to pay for all or part of your travel expenses or reduce or waive a registration fee; and

The following attendee requests DO NOT need to be entered into Event Tracker:

- Attendance or speaking at a Conference when NO costs will be incurred;
- Travel for training that is NOT part of a conference;
- Travel to perform essential mission functions (e.g., work with other agencies/customers, litigation, audits, etc.); and
- Travel for technical or administrative site visits.

Note. If a conference registration fee has been waived, the request is considered to have a cost and must be submitted through Event Tracker.