

ARS □ ERS □ NASS □ NIFA

Policy and Procedures

Title: Conference/Training Attendance, Sponsorship, & Reporting

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Distribution: All REE Employees

This Policy and Procedures (P&P) provides the policy and procedures for conference attendance and sponsorship, including obtaining the necessary approvals to conduct the event.

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1. Purpose

This P&P provides information on requirements for requesting permission to attend or sponsor a conference, including post conference reporting requirements for the four Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area agencies: Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Economic Research Service (ERS), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

2. Background

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 event expenses are appropriate, necessary, and managed in a manner that minimizes expense to taxpayers.

Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-12-12

The Office of Management and Budget Memorandum (OMB) M-12-12, dated May 11, 2012 (Exhibit 1), specifically requires Executive Departments to:

- Initiate senior level approval of all conference expenses in excess of \$100,000
- Prohibit expenses in excess of \$500,000 on a single conference
- Report publicly on all conference expenses in excess of \$100,000

Accordingly, events (attended or sponsored/hosted) over \$75,000 must be approved by the Department Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Events in excess of \$100,000 must be approved by the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (CFCA)

Congress passed the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act (CFCA) 2013 Act on March 21, 2013 and the President signed it into law on March 26, 2013. The law includes a Governmentwide general provision in Section 3003 (Exhibit 2) that creates several new requirements related to conference planning and reporting, but does not relieve other mandated conference reporting requirements. Section 3003 requires that:

Each conference the Department of Agriculture (USDA) holds with costs exceeding \$20,000 be reported to the Inspector General within 15 calendar days of the end date of the conference. The Secretary reports on an annual basis to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) the cost and contracting procedures for all conferences exceeding \$100,000. Section 3003 restricts the use of funds available for travel and conference activities unless they are consistent with OMB M-12-12. This language makes it an Anti-deficiency Act (ADA) violation to use any funds for travel and conferences that are inconsistent with OMB M-12-12. USDA changed its definition of a conference to be in line with the definition used in the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) and provided in OMB M-12-12.

Agriculture Travel Regulation

Conference and training activities exceeding \$450,000 are prohibited and require a waiver from the Secretary per OMB M-12-12. A cushion is built into the process to ensure that actual costs do not exceed estimated costs and thereby mistakenly violate OMB M-12-12 (e.g., a conference with net expenses projected to be \$450,000 actually has net expenses of \$500,000).

Funding travel for a Non-Federal Employee to an ARS Meeting or Conference.

5 U.S.C. § 5703, states that "an employee serving intermittently in the Government service as an expert or consultant, serving without pay or at \$1, may be allowed travel or transportation expenses, under this subchapter, while away from his home or regular place of business and at the place of employment or service."

This statute permits agencies to invite individuals to a meeting or conference at government expense if the individuals are legitimately performing a direct service to the government, such as making a presentation or advising in an area of their expertise.

Paying for the travel and subsistence of invitational travelers must still serve a legitimate authorized purpose of the agency for which funds have been appropriated, such as to provide technical assistance as authorized by program statute. Federal Travel Regulations would apply and travel authorizations would need to be issued to such individuals.

3. Policy

All conferences and/or training for which a REE agency is providing direct funding (e.g. contracting or arranging facilities, travel costs, etc.) must be approved at the appropriate level prior to contracting and/or attendance.

3.1 Determine Event Type

The FTR requires that all official travel include a standard data element to identify a trips purpose. The designated Trip Purpose Identifiers are

- Conference/Other Than Training - Travel performed in connection with a prearranged meeting, retreat, convention, seminar, or symposium for consultation or exchange of information or discussion. Agencies have to distinguish between conference and training attendance and use the appropriate identifier (see Training below). Examples: To participate in a planned program as a speaker/panelist or other form of presentation, host, planner, or others designated to oversee the conference or attendance with no formal role, or as an exhibitor.
- Training - 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.”

- Mission (Operational) - 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, strategic planning, inspections, audits, investigations, and examinations.

A number of factors must be considered when classifying an event. Event sponsors/hosts should use Exhibit 3 to assist with that determination.

3.2 Pre-Approval Exceptions

In some cases conference attendance or sponsorship may be exempt from pre-approval requirements. Specifically, any conference, training, seminar, or meeting regarding 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 is considered “training” and is not subject to OMB M-12-12 or CFCA Section 3003. Attendance or sponsorship of these types of trainings does NOT require approval as described in Section 3.3; however, they may be reportable as described in Section 3.4.

3.2.1 CONFERENCE/TRAINING ATTENDANCE APPROVAL EXCEPTION

In order to qualify for this exception the travel authorization must list the event name and clearly explain that conference attendance is required for professional development and/or meeting performance goals as shown in Exhibit 4.

3.2.2 CONFERENCE/TRAINING SPONSORSHIP APPROVAL EXCEPTION

Any REE agency planning to sponsor/host a conference or training event under this exception must notify the Agency Head's office via memorandum. The memorandum should be forwarded to the Agency Travel Office (ERS, NASS) or ARS Travel Policy and Systems Branch (TPSB) (ARS, NIFA). Memorandums for ARS should also include a summary sheet. The Agency Travel Office will review the memorandum then forward to the Agency Head's Office and advise the sponsor if any additional action is required.

The memorandum should include a description of the event and explanation regarding how the conference/training will improve individual and organizational performance and assist in achieving the agency's mission and performance goals. The memorandum should include the following attachments:

- Tentative attendee worksheet, including invited participants from other agencies or outside sources (Exhibit 6)
- A completed Location Cost Comparison Worksheet (Exhibit 7), no cost comparison is required if more than 50 percent of the participants are from the location of the

- conference
- Tentative agenda

3.3 Conference Approval Requirements

Except as described in Section 3.2 of this P&P, all conference attendance and conference sponsorship requires prior approval. The net event cost determines the level of approval required. For approval purposes net costs include per diem, transportation (including but not limited to air, rail, POV, rental car, shuttles, etc.), contracting costs, and conference registration fees. Event sponsors/hosts should use Exhibit 5 to assist with determining event approval requirements.

Net Conference Cost	Approving Official
> \$450,000	Secretary Of Agriculture
\$75,000 < \$450,000	Deputy Secretary of Agriculture
\$40,000 < \$75,000	REE Undersecretary
\$10,000 < \$40,000	As appropriate: ARS Administrator ERS Administrator NASS Administrator NIFA Director
<\$10,000	No Additional approval required

3.3.1 CONFERENCE SPONSORSHIP APPROVAL REQUESTS

Requests must be submitted to the Agency Travel Office at least 120 days prior to the event start date and include:

- Do NOT sign any contracts or agreements until final approval has been obtained from the Approving Official.
- Tentative attendee worksheet, including invited participants from other agencies or outside sources (Exhibit 6)
- A completed Location Cost Comparison Worksheet (Exhibit 7), no cost comparison is required if more than 50 percent of the participants are from the location of the conference
- A completed USDA Conference Approval Template (Exhibit 8), including a unique accounting code to track cost for all hosted conferences over \$7,000.
 - ARS- Contact the Business Service Center Budget and Fiscal Officer.
 - ERS- Contact the ERS Budget Office.
 - NASS- Contact the Budget & Administration Services Office.
 - NIFA- Contact the NIFA Budget Office.
- Tentative agenda

3.3.1.1 Agency-specific procedures

- **ARS**
The sponsoring/hosting group should direct requests for approval to the Chief, TPSB. A cover letter signed by the appropriate Area Director, Administrative and Financial Management Division Director, Office of Administrator Staff Office Director, or Director, National Agricultural Library, must accompany the request. TPSB will coordinate the appropriate approval. If the conference approval is granted, it will be the sponsoring/hosting organization's servicing budget offices' (SBO) responsibility to set up a unique Funded Program and Shorthand Code in the official accounting system, Financial Management Modernization Initiative (FMMI), using the format below.

Funded Program:

AR.CT.XXXX.01.YYYZ

AR=Agricultural Research Service

CT=Conference Travel

XXXX=forth level mode code of sponsoring or hosting organization

01=constant place holder

YYYZ=sequential numbering based on the SBO's internal procedures

Shorthand Code:

301-XXXX-YYY

3 (first digit) =Fiscal year indicator

01 (2nd and 3rd digit) = Fund indicator, i.e. 01 Base, 08 Reimbursable, etc.

XXXX = Forth level mode code, same as the Funded Program

YYY= sequential numbering base on the SBO's internal procedures, same as Funded Program

All expenses, (travel, room rental, equipment rental, etc.) related to the approved conference must be charged to the code established above. Therefore, it will be necessary to get these codes established as early in the process as possible. It will also be the SBO and the sponsoring/hosting organization's responsibility to work out the funding arrangements in terms of fund transfers (if necessary) to establish the financial plans for these conference accounts.

ARS Travel Ceilings

All conference travel will be counted against the sponsoring or hosting organizations travel ceilings. It will be up to the hosting organization to work with area leadership to negotiate adjustments to their specific travel ceiling amounts to compensate for ARS travelers attending from other units, areas, or organizations. All non-ARS attendee travel will count against the sponsoring/hosting organizations travel ceiling.

- **ERS**

Direct requests for approval to the Agency Administrator; a cover letter signed by the Division Director or Director, Administrative and Financial Services, must accompany the request.

Funded Program:

ER.CT.4001.00
ER=Economic Research Service
CT=Conference Travel
4001=Division sponsoring or hosting organization
00=constant place holder

Shorthand Code:

3114001
3 (first digit) =Fiscal year indicator
1 (2nd and 3rd digit) = Fund indicator, i.e. 01 Base, 08 Reimbursable, etc.
1 = Division Identifier
4001 = Division Account Identifier

- NASS

Direct requests for approval to the Agency Administrator; a cover letter signed by the Deputy Administrator for Programs & Products or the Deputy Administrator for Field Operations must accompany the request. It is the sponsoring/hosting organization's SBO responsibility to set up a unique Funded Program and Shorthand Code in the official accounting system, FMML, using the format below.

Funded Program:

NS.CT.XXXX.01
NS=National Agricultural Statistics Service
CT=Conference Travel
XXXX=forth level mode code of sponsoring or hosting organization
01=constant place holder

Shorthand Code:

3.XXX.YYYY
3 (first digit) =Fiscal year indicator
XXX=Division code (3 digit code)
YYYY=Program Code

All expenses, (travel, room rental, equipment rental, etc.) related to the approved conference must be charged to the code established above. Therefore, it will be necessary to get these codes established as early in the process as possible.

- NIFA

The NIFA Institute/Office organizing the conference should send a direct request for approval to the NIFA Budget Office. The NIFA Budget Office will coordinate within the Office of the Director to obtain agency approval. If the conference approval is granted, it will be the sponsoring/hosting Institute/Office's responsibility to request a unique

Shorthand Code in the official accounting system, FMFI, using the format below. The request for the new Shorthand Code should be sent to the National Capital Region Business Service Center (NCRBSC), Budget & Fiscal Office (BFO). The NCRBSC, BFO would then set up the new Shorthand Code in the official accounting system, FMFI, using the format below.

Shorthand Code:

300-XXXX-YYY

3 (first digit) =Fiscal year indicator

00 (2nd and 3rd digit)

The rest of the code would be assigned by the NIFA Budget Office.

All expenses, (travel, room rental, equipment rental, etc.) related to the approved conference must be charged to the code established above. Therefore, it will be necessary to get these codes established as early in the process as possible. It will also be the sponsoring Institute/Office's responsibility to work out the funding arrangements in terms of the financial plans for these conference accounts.

3.3.1.2 Post Event Requirement

Sponsors/hosts of any conference where final costs exceed \$20,000 must forward a completed Agency Individual Conference Reporting Template (Exhibit 9) to TPSB within 10 calendar days of actual conference end date.

3.4 Event Planning

Agencies must carefully plan and manage conference and training activities to mitigate the risk or appearance of inappropriate spending and activities. Conference and training management should be performed in accordance with the FTR, and General Services Administration guidance, OMB directives, and this regulation. Exhibit 10 - REE Conference Planning Guidance should be consulted for any REE Agency sponsored/hosted event.

Agencies should contact TPSB for additional resources and information regarding event planning, particularly determination of most cost effective location.

3.5 Conference Reporting

To ensure that travel authorizations provide sufficient information to generate conference reports, the REE travelers/travel arrangers will enter information into the E-Government Travel Service (ETS) as illustrated in Exhibit 4.

3.5.1 CONTINUOUS REPORTING TO THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Within 15 calendar days of the final date of a hosted conferences' occurrence, where the conference's net expenses to USDA exceed \$20,000, the agency Senior Accountable Travel Official (SATO) shall submit a completed Agency Individual Conference Reporting Template (Exhibit 9) to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), USDA and OIG.

3.5.2 QUARTERLY AND ANNUAL REPORTING

Not later than 30 calendar days from the last day of each fiscal quarter, the SATO shall provide and certify to OCFO a quarterly report of conferences where net expenses exceeded \$7,000. All conference attendance, regardless of whether the event is agency sponsored/hosted or sponsored by an outside entity, must be reported.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 REE Mission Area Under Secretary

The REE Under Secretary has the authority to approve conference attendance and event sponsorship with a net cost of \$75,000 or less and may delegate approval of events with a net cost of \$40,000 or less.

4.2 Agency Head

The Agency Head has the authority to approve conference attendance and event sponsorship with a net cost of \$40,000 or less, if approval has been delegated in writing by the REE Mission Area Under Secretary.

The Agency Head will appoint a SATO. The responsibilities should be fulfilled by a position such as Deputy Administrator for Management, the CFO, Deputy Director of a Staff Office, and/or equivalent positions

4.3 SATO

The SATO will design a records management methodology to maintain all correspondence related to a conference and be able to quickly correlate financial and non-financial records.

The SATO will 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 the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-123 "Management's Responsibility for Internal Control."

The SATO will ensure submission of all reports as required.

4.4 TPSB

TPSB will submit draft ARS and NIFA Quarterly Conference Reports using the ATR prescribed format to OCFO for review and/or correction. TPSB will submit final ARS and NIFA Quarterly Conference Transparency Reports to the SATO for certification and submission to OCFO as required.

TPSB will review ARS and NIFA Agency Individual Conference Reports and submit to SATO

for certification and submission to OCFO as required.

TPSB is responsible for writing and updating REE policy associated with the review and approval process for both conference attendance and conference sponsorship, and post conference reporting policy.

5. Authorities

- 5 U.S.C. §4101 (4)
- Federal Travel Regulation
- OMB, M-12-12, Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations
- Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013
- Departmental Directive 2300-001, Agriculture Travel Regulation

6. Acronyms

The following acronyms are used in this P&P.

ADA	Anti-deficiency Act
ARS	Agricultural Research Service
BSC	Business Service Center
	Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations
CFCA	Act
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
ERS	Economic Research Service
ETS	E-Government Travel Service
FMMI	Financial Management Modernization Initiative
FTR	Federal Travel Regulation
NASS	National Agricultural Statistics Service
NCRBSC	National Capital Region Business Service Center
NIFA	National Institute of Food and Agriculture
OCFO	USDA Office of the Chief Financial Officer
OIG	USDA Office of the Inspector General
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
POV	Privately Owned Vehicle
REE	Research Education and Economics Mission Area
SATO	Senior Accountable Travel Official
SBO	Servicing Budget Office
TPSB	Travel Policy & Systems Branch
USC	United States Code

7. Exhibits

All exhibits are available in electronic format (pdf, xlsx) from TPSB by request.

/s/

ROBERT H. MAGILL
Chief Financial Officer
Research, Education, and Economics

Exhibit 1 - OMB M-12-12



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

May 11, 2012

M-12-12

MEMORANDUM TO THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: JEFFREY D. ZIENTS
ACTING DIRECTOR 

SUBJECT: Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations

The Federal Government has a responsibility to act as a careful steward of taxpayer dollars, ensuring that Federal funds are used for purposes that are appropriate, cost effective, and important to the core mission of executive departments and agencies (agencies). From the beginning of this Administration, the President has been clear that wasteful spending is unacceptable, and that the Federal Government must strive to be more efficient and effective. That is why the President and the Vice President launched the Campaign to Cut Waste and charged agencies with going line-by-line through their budgets to identify areas of unnecessary spending or opportunities for greater efficiency or cost savings.

As part of this effort, on November 9, 2011, the President signed Executive Order 13589 "Promoting Efficient Spending." In that Executive Order, the President directed each agency to reduce its combined costs in a variety of administrative categories by not less than 20 percent in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 from FY 2010 levels. Agencies have since developed plans for achieving these cuts, and the President's FY 2013 Budget identifies \$8 billion in reduced costs as a result of Executive Order 13589.

To achieve these savings, many agencies have identified and implemented creative and innovative practices to reduce costs and improve efficiencies in such areas as travel, conference expenditures, real estate, and fleet management. There are also other practical steps agencies can take to improve operations, increase efficiency, and cut unnecessary spending. Accordingly, this memorandum describes a series of policies and practices related to activities and expenses in these areas, building on measures already in place at various agencies.

Section 1 – Travel

Travel is often necessary for Federal employees to discharge their duties effectively and the travel industry plays an important role in creating jobs and supporting local economies; however, as good stewards of Federal funds, agencies must do all they can to manage their travel budgets efficiently. Accordingly, in FY 2013, each agency shall spend at least 30 percent less on travel

expenses covered by this memorandum than in FY 2010.¹ Agencies must maintain this reduced level of spending each year through FY 2016. For the purposes of this section only, the term “agency” means any agency described in 31 U.S.C. 901(b).

In consultation with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), agencies shall direct all immediate savings achieved through this reduction towards investments that improve the transparency of and accountability for Federal spending and therefore serve taxpayers by further reducing wasteful spending over the long-term. Investments should include activities necessary to provide more robust tracking and public reporting of Federal spending, as well as internal audits and investigations to root out fraud and error in Federal programs and activities.

No later than 90 days from the date of this memorandum, agencies shall report to OMB on the proposed reduction in travel expenses as a result of this requirement. Information provided to OMB should include the amount of the proposed reduction in travel expenses, the amount of FY 2010 travel expenses obligations subject to this section that provides a baseline for measuring the required reductions, and the amount of FY 2010 obligations for travel expenses that are excluded from this baseline. The agency may exclude certain travel expenses from reduction only if the agency head determines that inclusion of such expenses as part of the 30 percent reduction target would undermine such critical government functions as national security, international diplomacy, health and safety inspections, law enforcement, or site visits required for oversight or investigatory purposes.² Excluded travel expenses will not be part of the baseline that agencies use in calculating the 30 percent reduction target or subject to reduction themselves. In determining how to reduce travel expenses, agencies should consult and collaborate with their Inspectors General (IG) on the appropriate ways to reduce travel for oversight and investigatory purposes, while maintaining the independence and capacity of IGs.

In addition, agencies shall include in their FY 2014 budget submission to OMB a description of how they will make these travel reductions sustainable, including the specific process changes and technology investments necessary to reduce their reliance on travel.

In addition, to assist agencies in achieving these reductions in travel expenses, no later than 180 days from the date of this memorandum, the Department of Defense and the General Services Administration (GSA), in consultation with OMB, shall review the Joint Federal Travel Regulations and the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) to ensure that the policies reduce travel costs without impairing the effective accomplishment of agency missions. This review shall, at a minimum, establish or clarify policies that:

- (a) increase Federal employee sharing of rental automobiles and taxis when appropriate;

¹ “Travel expenses” are defined as obligations categorized under budget object class 21.0 (travel and transportation of persons), which is described in OMB Circular A-11 (section 83.6). In some cases, travel expenses may also include travel funded outside of this object class. OMB will provide additional guidance to affected agencies on areas outside of this object class that should be included in the reductions required by this memorandum.

² For example, the Attorney General may determine that some portion of the travel by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents is necessary to investigate specific criminal activity and should be excluded from the baseline of travel expenses from which the 30 percent reduction would be taken. Similarly, the Secretary of Health and Human Services may determine that a portion of the travel by Food and Drug Administration inspectors is necessary to ensure the health of the public and should be excluded from the baseline subject to the 30 percent reduction.

- (b) ensure that Federal employees receive a per diem reimbursement only to the extent costs were incurred and not reimbursed by another party;
- (c) promote the identification and use of non-contract air carriers that, if used, will result in a lower total trip cost to the Government;
- (d) expand and leverage the Government's purchasing power to reduce travel costs associated with hotels and rental cars;
- (e) ensure that, whenever practicable, Federal employees arrange airfare in a manner that results in the lowest price available when traveling on domestic flights, including appropriately timing the purchase of airfare; and
- (f) ensure that agencies have controls in place to collect refunds for unused or partially used airline tickets for Federal employees who have purchased airfare, consistent with existing requirements in the FTR and Federal Management Regulation (FMR).³

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.⁴ Federal agencies and employees must exercise discretion and judgment in ensuring that conference expenses⁵ 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

³ See FTR 301-72.100, 301-72.101, 301-72.300; also see FMR 102-118.

⁴ "Conference" is defined in this memorandum as it is in the FTR, 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." See 41 CFR 300-3.1.

⁵ "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, but do not include funds paid under Federal grants to grantees. Conference expenses include any associated authorized travel and per diem expenses, hire of rooms for official business, audiovisual use, light refreshments, registration fees, ground transportation, and other expenses 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. See 41 CFR 301-74.2. Conference expenses should be net of any fees or revenue received by the agency through the conference and should not include costs to ensure the safety of attending governmental officials.

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 \$100,000. 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 \$100,000. 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 these 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.

Section 3 – Real Property

Agencies must also move aggressively to dispose of excess properties held by the Federal Government and make more efficient use of the Government's real estate assets. Agencies are already streamlining operations and using existing properties to meet the directive in the June 10, 2010 Presidential Memorandum ([Disposing of Unneeded Federal Real Estate—Increasing Sales Proceeds, Cutting Operating Costs, and Improving Energy Efficiency](#)) to produce no less than \$3 billion in civilian real property cost savings by the end of FY 2012.

As of the date of this memorandum, agencies shall not increase the size of their civilian real estate inventory, subject to exceptions as described below. Acquisition of new Federal building space (where approval of such acquisition occurs following the date of this memorandum) that increases an agency's total square footage of civilian property must be offset through consolidation, co-location, or disposal of space from the inventory of that agency. In identifying consolidations, co-locations, or disposals of property to offset acquisition of new Federal building space, an agency may include civilian buildings from its own inventory that were, in accordance with the June 10, 2010 Presidential Memorandum, reported as excess to the GSA or otherwise disposed of.

Additional guidance will be provided for carrying out this section, including defining those properties to which this section applies and when a property may be identified as an offset, as well as establishing a process to identify exceptions to this section's requirements where appropriate, such as to comply with legal requirements, to reduce costs, to protect national security, or to allow for the effective accomplishment of agency missions.

Section 4 – Fleet Management

In furtherance of the May 24, 2011 Presidential Memorandum ([Federal Fleet Performance](#)), and to optimize the management of Government-owned vehicles, agencies shall use existing GSA fleet services, or initiate a replacement and renewal schedule that is consistent with the requirements of the FMR⁶, whereby standard sedans operate on a replacement schedule of at least three years or until the vehicle has been driven in excess of 60,000 miles (whichever comes first), unless material defects prevent the vehicle from operating in a safe manner or if replacement would save the agency money over the life of the vehicle. GSA shall periodically review such policies for opportunities to further improve efficiency.

⁶ See FMR 102-34.270.

Within 90 days of the date of issuance of this memorandum, OMB, in consultation with GSA, will provide agencies with additional guidance on carrying out the provisions in Sections 3 and 4 of this memorandum.

Questions regarding the policies and practices outlined in this memorandum should be directed to the Office of Federal Financial Management at OMB (202-395-3993).

Exhibit 2 - CFCA Section 3003

SEC. 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—

- (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.

Exhibit 3 - Event Type Decision Tree

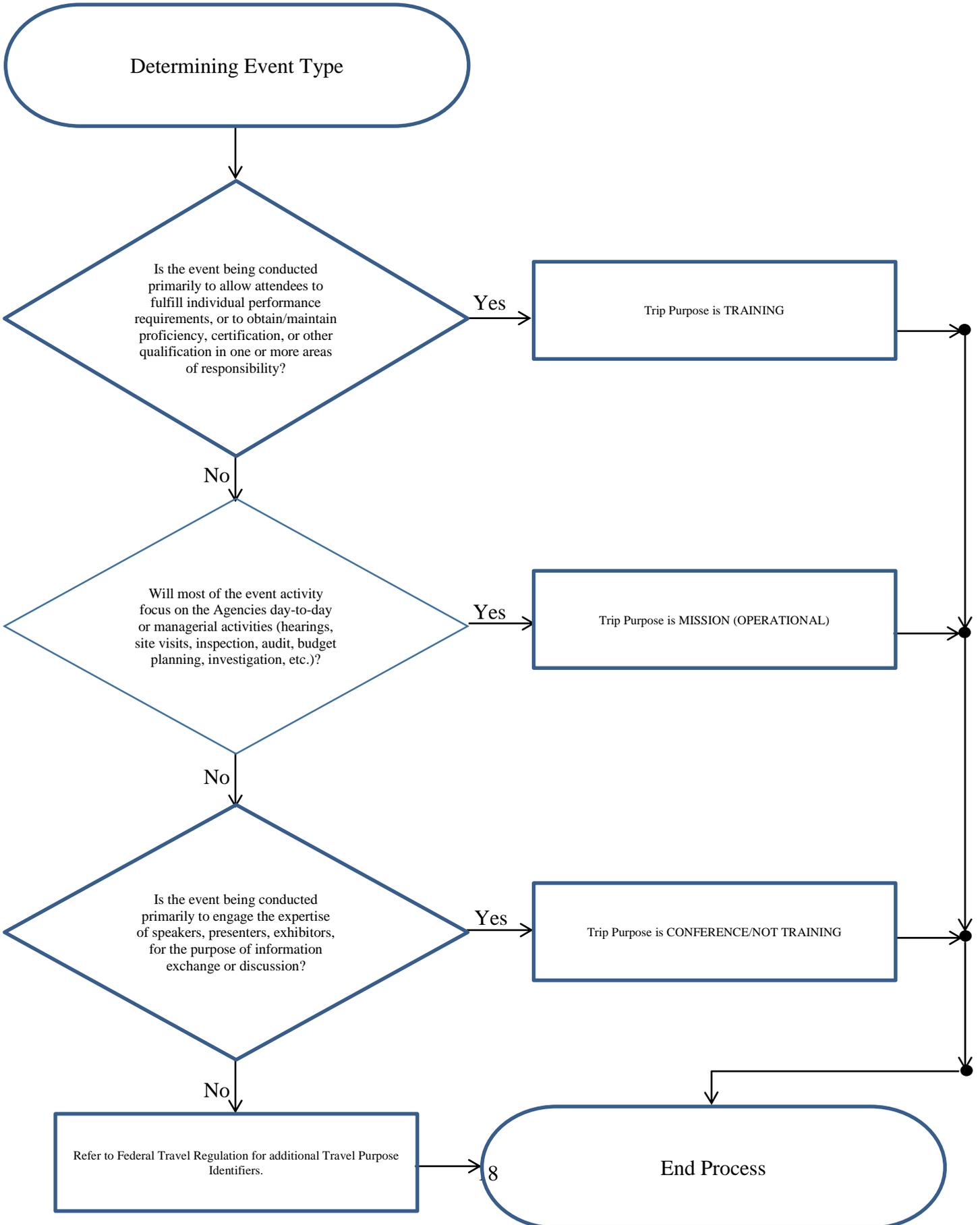


Exhibit 4 - ConcurGov Data Entry



ENTERING REQUIRED CONFERENCE/TRAINING INFORMATION

The actual conference/training name must be entered in the ConcurGov “Trip Name”. The trip name field is available on the “General” tab and is indicated by the letter “A” in the figure below. The Trip Document Detail field is also available on the “General” tab as indicated by the letter “B” in the figure below.

The screenshot shows the 'General' tab of the ConcurGov interface. The 'Document Information' section is active, and the 'Trip Information' sub-tab is selected. The 'Trip Name' field is highlighted with a red box and labeled 'A'. The 'Document Detail' field is highlighted with a black box and labeled 'B'. Other fields include Document Type, Document Name, Document Date, Currency, Type Code, and Purpose.

Field Label	Value
Document Type	
Document Name	
Document Date	
TAXID	
A Trip Name	Entomological Society of America Annual Meeting 09/17/2016-09/22/2016
Sponsored Travel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Currency	U.S. Dollar
Type Code	SINGLE TRIP
Purpose	
B Document Detail	Research Entomologist* "Moderator-Weathering and chemical degradation of Static Spinosad ME for fruit fly (Diptera: Tephritidae) control under California weather conditions. Behavioral evidence for the exploitation of a novel host plant on the basis of vision in the melon fly."*Attendance required for both professional development and to meet performance goals*Such collaboration will lead to cooperative, productive research that will result in decreased fruit fly populations. Late submission: invitation received on MM/DD/YYYY.

Trip Name Field Instructions

For conferences specifically, enter the name exactly as it appears on the List of Known Recurring Conferences (Exhibit 11). For events that are not on the list and for ALL training enter the information as follows:

- Enter the full official name of the event.
 - Do not abbreviate words. Example, “International” instead of using “intl” or “Association” instead of using “assn”
 - Do not use acronyms. Example, “California Department of Food and Agriculture” instead of “CDFA”, “American Veterinary Medical Association” instead of “AVMA”
- Enter the official start and end date of event as shown on official training/conference registration, do not include travel or leave dates

EXAMPLES:

Conference

World Cotton Congress*02/18/2017-02/19/2017

Biodiversity for Biofuels and Biodiesel in Arid Lands International Workshop*10/18/2016-10/19/2016

Training

Resiliency Advantage*09/13/2016-09/15/2016

Document Detail Field Instructions

- All Trip Types
 - Enter the official title of the traveler. Please do not enter the name of the traveler, TDY location, dates, or comments concerning leave – that information is already in ConcurGov. Be short but specific.
 - Enter the Name of Presentation, Poster, or Session (if chairing/moderating), if applicable. If not participating in an official capacity, enter “Attending Only”
 - Enter a brief statement explaining how conference attendance relates to professional development and/or meets performance goals. Be short but specific.
 - Remember to spell check the text.
- Foreign Travel also include:
 - Enter a brief description (e.g. one-three sentences) of the benefit to USDA of the trip, and why this traveler’s expertise is needed.
 - *If the trip is being submitted less than six weeks prior to departure, enter the reason for late submission.*
 - Remember to spell check the text.

EXAMPLES:

Training or
Conference

Soil Scientist* "Wildfire as a Mechanism to Reverse Ecohydrologic Thresholds in Juniper-Encroached Shrublands."
Co-presenter on 3 other presentations.*Attendance required to meet performance goals

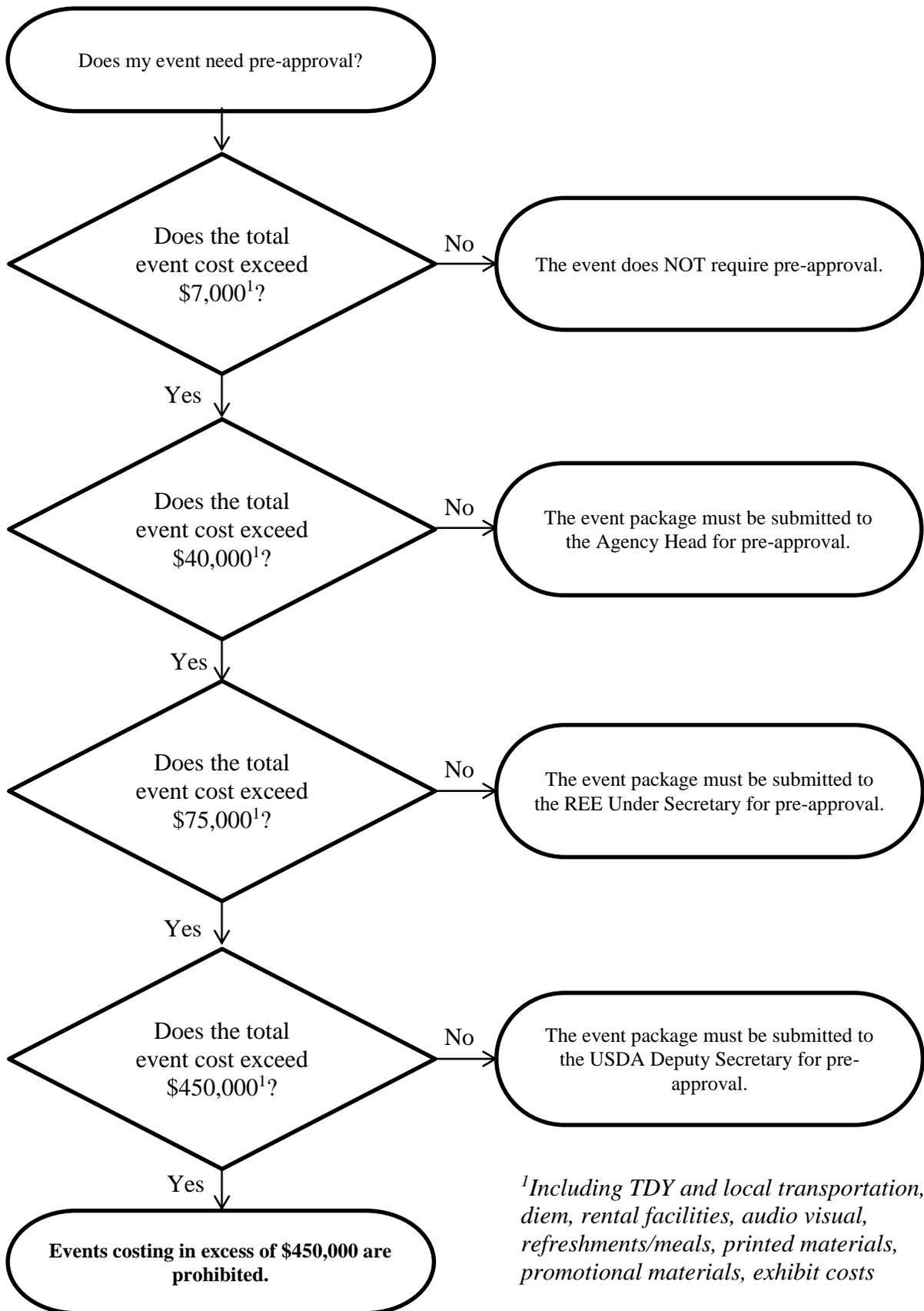
Research Physical Scientist*Attending Only*Attendance required for professional development.

Foreign
Travel

Research Plant Physiologist* Will chair panel discussion on emerging cotton diseases in the Middle East to foster collaborations between researchers.*Such collaboration will lead to cooperative, productive research that will result in increased cotton yields for American growers.*Late submission: invitation received on MM/DD/YYYY.

Research Entomologist* “Moderator-Weathering and chemical degradation of Static Spinosad ME for fruit fly (Diptera: Tephritidae) control under California weather conditions, Behavioral evidence for the exploitation of a novel host plant on the basis of vision in the melon fly” *Attendance required for both professional development and to meet performance goals*Such collaboration will lead to cooperative, productive research that will result in decreased fruit fly populations. Late submission: invitation received on MM/DD/YYYY.

Exhibit 5 - Event Approval Decision Tree



¹Including TDY and local transportation, per diem, rental facilities, audio visual, refreshments/meals, printed materials, promotional materials, exhibit costs

Exhibit 7 - Location Cost Comparison Worksheet

Location Cost Comparison Estimated

		(Name) (Dates)		
		Location 1	Location 2	Location 3
CITY & STATE of EVENT				
PER DIEM RATES	Lodging			
	MS&IE			
LOCATION OF EVENT/VENUE				
TYPE OF FACILITY (USDA, Federal, University or Commercial)				
1 AIRFARE:				
TOTAL MISCELLANEOUS EXPENSES:				
2 (Car Rental, Mileage, Shuttle, Taxi, Parking, Tolls, Baggage, etc.)				
TOTAL LOCAL TRAVEL EXPENSES:				
3 (Expenses from local participants, subway, parking, mileage, etc.)				
TOTAL MS&IE:				
4 (Including deductions for meals provided)				
5 TOTAL LODGING:				
6 OTHER TDY EXPENSES: (Hotel Taxes, etc.)				
TOTAL TRAVEL EXPENSES (1-6)		\$0	\$0	\$0
1 SPEAKER FEES				
2 PRINTING & REPRODUCTION				
3 AUDIOVISUAL AIDS TOTAL COST				
4 MEETING ROOM TOTAL COST				
5 FACILITY CHARGES				
6 OTHER COSTS (Rentals)				
7 LIGHT REFRESHMENTS				
8 REGISTRATION FEES				
TOTAL NON-TRAVEL EXPENSES (1-8)		\$0	\$0	\$0
NON-FEDERAL CONTRIBUTIONS				
TOTAL EVENT COST w/o SALARY		\$0	\$0	\$0
TOTAL SALARY & BENEFITS				
TOTAL ATTENDEES				
TOTAL USDA ATTENDEES				
TOTAL NON-USDA ATTENDEES				

Exhibit 8 - Conference Approval Template

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

Exhibit 9 - Agency Individual Conference Reporting Template

Agency or Staff Office Name: _____

Date: _____

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

Exhibit 10 - REE Conference Planning Guidance

REE Conference Planning Guidance

Terms

Conference: A prearranged meeting, retreat, convention, seminar, symposium or event that involves attendee travel and is for the express purpose of consultation or exchange of information or discussion. The term “conference” also applies to training activities that are considered to be conferences under 5 CFR 410.404.

Milestone schedule: Deadlines, which need to be reached in a progressive and orderly manner.

Planner: The person designated to oversee the conference.

Planning committee: Operational group significantly contributing to a conference’s overall success and able to fully reflect the needs of both the agency and the attendees.

Getting Started

Depending on the size, type, and intended effect of the conference, start planning a minimum of one year in advance. Designate a planner and a planning committee.

Planning Committee

Planning committee members should include a contract specialist, travel specialist, and an ethics specialist in addition to persons who can significantly contribute to ensuring the conference successfully reflects the needs of the agency and attendees. Functions typically include, but are not limited to:

- Establishing a set of objectives.
- Developing a theme.
- Making recommendations for location, agenda, dates, and logistics, e.g., schedule, exhibits, speaker.
- Making suggestions as to who should attend.
- Serving as communications link between planners and participants.
- Evaluation and follow-up.

Milestone Schedule

- (a) Develop a milestone schedule, which is essential to conference planning, by working backward from the beginning date of the conference to include each major step. Examples include:
- Planning committee meetings.
 - Preparation of mailing lists.
 - Letters of invitation.
 - Designation of speakers.
 - Confirmation letters to speakers.
 - Confirmation with site selection official.
 - Preparation of agenda.
 - Preparation of specification sheet.
 - Location and date selection.
 - Exhibits.
 - Budget.
 - Printing requirements.
 - Signage.
 - Conference information packages.
 - Scheduling photographer (if planned).
 - Use of agency seal and conference logo.
 - Handicapped requirements.
 - Planning of meals and refreshments, if appropriate.
- (b) Establish completion dates for each major step.
- (c) Update and revise the schedule as needed.

Specification Sheet

A detailed specification sheet is necessary to:

(a) Identify essential elements of a conference which typically include, but are not limited to:

Sleeping rooms and on-site food services. It is generally best to estimate on the low side for the number of sleeping rooms and meals to be prepared. Facilities, unless there is only limited available space, are usually prepared to increase the number of sleeping rooms and meals; however, they discourage—and in some cases penalize—you if the sleeping room and meal guarantees are not met.

Meeting rooms.

Exhibit facilities.

Audio-visual equipment and support services.

Miscellaneous support services.

Sleeping rooms with amenities, e.g., Internet access, data ports, conference call, and voice mail.

(b) Determine costs:

Procurement. Bring contracting officer into the process early. All agreements and decisions should be written and agreed to by the agency-contracting officer before being sent to the facility.

Government per diem rates. The government per diem rate applies to Federal attendees. Application of it to non-Federal attendees is at the discretion of the property and conference negotiator.

Registration fee. Generally, the registration fee covers all direct expenditures of agency funds for planning and organization of a conference, e.g., meeting room accommodations, meals, light refreshments (if appropriate), speaker fees, publications, and materials. Anything directly relating to the conference, except liquor, can be included in the fee. To estimate the registration fee, divide the proposed budget by the estimated number of attendees.

Budgeting

Decide how the conference expenses (other than sleeping room accommodations and individual meals) will be paid, i.e., by the attendee from a training or registration fee, or directly by the agency.

Establish a unique line of accounting to be used for all conference associated charges (travel, meeting space, equipment).

Each conference over \$7,000 should have a unique accounting code.

Conference Site Selection

Minimize total costs, all factors considered.

Geographic Location

In determining where to locate the conference, consider:

Targeted audience.

Total costs, including per diem, transportation, and other.

Accessibility by car or air.

Whether recreational activities are necessary.

The expense of desired facility (significant savings can be achieved in off-season periods).

Types of Facilities

Federal Government. Use Government-owned or Government-provided conference facilities to the maximum extent possible.

Convention centers. Excellent for very large meetings, trade shows and exhibits; usually located near a large number of hotels.

Conference centers. Dedicated meeting facilities; good for smaller meetings when numerous breakout sessions are planned.

Colleges and universities. Many have good meeting facilities and can offer sleeping accommodations when school is not in session.

Hotels. Commercial facilities that may be used to meet all conference needs or just the room night needs.

Date Selection

For availability and economic reasons, the best months are April, May, September, October, and November. You should book the facility as early as possible to increase the chances of getting the date you want. However, pay particular attention to commitments for September or October due to fiscal year budget considerations.

Considerations When Choosing a Site

(a) Is the facility:

- Cost effective (Government Established Per Diem rates honored?)
- Safe (FEMA-approved? Fedrooms Participant)
- On-site security personnel?
- Easily reached from an airport or by car?
- Clean?
- Well run (does the staff seem to be competent and responsive?)
- Laid out in a functional way?
- Large enough to supply the number of sleeping rooms required?
- Set up to provide necessary conference registration equipment?
- Handicapped accessible?

(b) Parking:

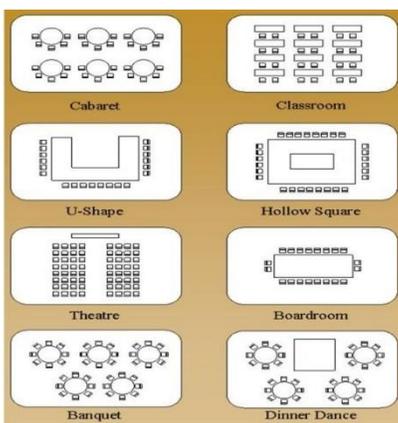
- Will rental cars be authorized or are many GOV and/or POV expected?
- Is it adequate (size, covered/uncovered)?
- How close to the facility is it?
- Is it secure and safe?
- Is the cost separate?

(c) Sleeping rooms:

- Are the rooms tax exempt for certain forms of payment (IBA, CBA, Purchase Order)?
- Will the facility make the reservations, or are will planner/participants be responsible for making the reservations?
- What are the facility's registration rules (check-in time, early arrival, luggage storage)?
- What are departure rules (check-out time, late departure, luggage storage)?

(d) Functionality of meeting rooms:

- Is appropriate space available for number of attendees?
- Are breakout rooms adequate?
 - Do rooms have internet access?
 - Adequate power?
 - Wi-Fi?
 - Appropriate AV equipment?
- What costs are involved (room rate, AV, telephone, fax)?
- Is needed equipment available (i.e., for conference registration, faxes, phones, computers, copiers)? Do not rent equipment unless it is absolutely unrealistic to bring your own.
- Would it be more economical to bring audio-visual equipment?
- Is outside equipment allowed?
- Will tech support be available?
- Are rooms designated for agency use for the duration of the conference?
- Can vendor reassign meeting rooms for other than emergency?
- Can rooms be locked by organizers?
- Are there columns that can block views?
- Are presentations visible/readable/audible from all parts of the room?
- Are ceilings high enough for audio-video equipment?
- What layouts are supported (classroom, theatre/lecture, banquet, cabaret)?



Are there windows? Shades?
Are there manually-controlled thermostats?
Are rooms handicapped accessible?
Where are electrical outlets?
Can the rooms be darkened?
Does the facility want meeting schedules and room layouts in writing in advance of the conference?
If necessary, can the rooms be entered the evening before for an early setup?
Will the facility arrange for room setup if given a layout?
What set-up costs are included?
What are departure rules?
Are restrooms adequate and conveniently located?
Are food and drink allowed?
Will water, pitchers, and glasses be provided at each table?

(e) Exhibits:

If exhibits are planned, is suitable exhibit space available?
Are easels available at no cost?
What are the put-up and takedown times?
What costs are involved?
What about pre-delivery and after-conference arrangements?
If exhibits are shipped, where and how should they be sent?
If you are bringing large exhibits, determine location of loading dock, appropriate entrances and elevators.
Are there additional handling fees?
Check hotel policy on posting, size and appearance of signs.

Food and Drink

Meals

You cannot generally use appropriated funds to pay for meals for employees at their official stations. Employees on TDY travel may be served meals but cannot be reimbursed for those provided at government expense. You should clarify in advance the appropriate per diem reduction(s) of meal(s) allowance(s) for TDY travel. You may pay, or reimburse an employee for meals as necessary expenses incident to an authorized training program (under the Government Employees Training Act (GETA) at 5 U.S.C. 4104(4)), if a determination has been made that essential training will be conducted during the meal. Work closely with the hotel to plan quality menu options (regular, vegetarian, diabetic, kosher) that fit within authorized per diem rates. Clarify and agree in advance to the number of meal guarantees. Ensure that gratuities and service charges are added to the cost of each meal, and determine the method of billing to be used (e.g., signed guarantee, collected meal tickets, or actual quantities consumed). Confirm menus. Ensure that invoices reflect the actual meals provided, meal quantities provided, and cost per meal (regular, 15 meals, \$7.50 per meal).

Breaks and Refreshments

Breaks should last no longer than 30 minutes and take place between meeting sessions. The following should also be considered when planning for refreshments:

Keep in mind that everyone does not drink coffee or tea.
You should clarify and agree in advance that coffee and pastries, if appropriate, are purchased by the gallon and dozen.
Try to avoid a per person charge.
Negotiate the cost into the contract.
Be conservative in your estimates. There are seldom 100 percent of the conference participants attending any one function.
If coffee, soft drinks, and water are not included in the fee, are they available "at cost" to the attendee?

Account Reconciliation

It is important to request that the hotel bill be prepared in a logical and chronological sequence, and that backup data accompany the bill. Generally, the hotel will complete its accounting of the conference within two weeks of the conclusion.

Notification

Announcement and/or Invitations

Announcement of the planned conference should be made as early as possible, even one year in advance; invitation letters, 8 weeks in advance. They should include, but are not limited to:

- Point of contact name and telephone number.
- Registration form, card, or Internet address (include space for identifying handicapped requirements).
- Registration instructions.
- Registration deadline date.
- Detailed area map and driving instructions.
- Information on traffic patterns to avoid rush hour delays.
- Promotional brochures from the facility.
- Layout of facility including telephone numbers.
- Breakdown of costs showing any difference from travel versus training object classes, particularly meal costs, so that proper reimbursement can be made.
- Agenda with a list of speakers and topics.
- Activity schedule for spouses, domestic partners, and guests (all charges or costs attributed to spouses, domestic partners or guests must be borne by the individual attendee (not reimbursable by the Government)).
- Provide a sample travel authorization and voucher.

Confirmations

You should:

- Decide on the speaker(s) and the message you wish to be conveyed and obtain early commitment(s) in writing.
- Confirm conference dates/times/topics/arrival and departure times with speaker(s) and any other special guests at least 30 days in advance.
- Conduct a final planning committee meeting to confirm all plans.
- Confirm photographer's schedule.
- Confirm hotel plans at least one day in advance.
- Confirm menus.

Facility Process

Check-In and -Out

Streamline the process:

- Will the facility need additional personnel?
- Is electronic one-stop processing available?
- Is luggage storage and shuttle service available?
- Arrange parking for any special guests.
- Provide signage.

Registration Process

Registration is generally the attendees' introduction to the conference. Give it special attention by:

- Using directional signs.
- Placing especially attractive or important exhibits nearby.
- Planning for late arrivals.
- Using state-of-the-art processing.

Checking out the registration capabilities of using GSA's electronic SmartPay System.
Providing for handicapped attendees.

Conference Information Package

Each registrant should be given a conference information package. Used regularly during the conference, the conference information package should be accurate, beneficial, and reflect detailed information on a daily/hourly basis. If time allows, you may want to finalize the package and send it to the printer at least 4 weeks in advance of the starting date. The program will be widely used, so you may want to print twice as many copies of the program as you have expected attendees. The information package, for example, may contain:

- A list of everything in the package.
- A "welcome" letter.
- A schedule.
- Workshop agendas.
- Discussion of exhibits.
- Panelists' information.
- Photos and biographies of speakers/special guests.
- Facility layout and list of services available.
- Identify designated smoking areas.
- Special events.
- Message center information.
- Area map.
- Other pertinent material.

Note: Use of agency seal and conference logo may be considered for the conference package. However, the decision to use such items is strictly the judgment of agency officials.

Miscellaneous

Suggested Room Coordination

Plan ahead to setup:

- Staff room to handle core of activities;
- Meal functions;
- Exhibit rooms, and
- Meeting rooms—
 - Theatre or auditorium for lectures;
 - Facing speaker when note taking is important;
 - Square or U-shaped style for discussion/interaction; and
 - Banquet or roundtable for discussion.

Keeping in Touch

Plan for:

- A message center to be set up in a central location for special announcements and telephone messages.
- How to reach whomever at all times—use beepers and walkie-talkies.
- Clear identification of conference staff.
- Accommodation of physically impaired attendees with sign language or other special needs.

Mementos

Appropriations are not available to purchase memento items for distribution to conference attendees as a remembrance of an event. Two notable exceptions to the memento or gift prohibition are under training and awards. Work closely with appropriate agency officials to make final determinations.

Resources

The following resources may be of assistance in planning a conference:

Travel Management Centers;

Interagency Travel Management Committee members (a forum of agency travel policy managers—for member identification, contact your agency’s administrative or financial office);

State chambers of Commerce or Visitors Bureaus;

Local chapters of the Society of Government Meeting Professionals; and

Private industry conference planners.

Conclusion

Process:

Questionnaires, which may provide invaluable feedback about the success of your conference.

Training certificates.

Thank you notes to participants, facility personnel, speakers, printers, photographers, and other special contributors.

Summary to acknowledge the accomplishments, and to convey the information discussed to a wider audience, may be an excellent promotional tool.

Note: Use of pronouns “we”, “you”, and their variants throughout this document refers to the agency.

Exhibit 11 – List of Known Recurring Conferences

Conference Name
8th International Rosacea Genomics Conference
Agriculture and Applied Economics Association Joint Meeting
American Association of Avian Pathologists Meeting
American Association of Cereal Chemists International Meeting
American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians
American Chemical Society National Meeting & Exposition
American Chemical Society National Meeting and Exposition Spring
American Dairy Science Association Meeting
American Dairy Science Association Discover Conference
American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting
American Mosquito Control Association Meeting
American Oil Chemists Society Meeting and Expo
American Peanut Research and Education Society Meeting
American Phytopathological Society Meeting
American Seed Trade Association Corn & Sorghum Seed Research Conference
American Seed Trade Association Soybean Seed Research Conference
American Society for Horticultural Science Conference
American Society for Microbiology General Meeting
American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers International Meeting
American Society of Agronomy Meeting
American Society of Animal Science
American Society of Plant Biologists Meeting
American Society of Sugarbeet Technologists Meeting
American Society of Virology
American Veterinary Medical Association Meeting
Aquaculture America Conference
Bean Improvement Cooperative and North American Pea Improvement Association Conference
Beef Improvement Federation
Beltwide Cotton Conference
Cattle Industry Convention
Crop Science Society of American Meeting
Entomological Society of America Meeting
Experimental Biology Conference
Federal Laboratory Consortium National Meeting
Institute of Food Technologists
Institute for Infectious Animal Diseases Meeting
International Association for Food Protection Meeting
International Chemical Congress of Pacific Basin Societies Meeting
International Conference on Bioinformatics Models, methods and Algorithms
International Congress of Entomology

Conference Name (Continued)
International Congress of Nematology
International Congress on Animal Reproduction
International Congress on Ecology
International Congress on Invertebrate Pathology and Microbial Control
International Congress on Plant Molecular Biology
International Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium
International Plant and Animal Genome Conference
International Research Conference on Huanglongbing
International Research Conference On Methyl Bromide Alternatives And Emissions Reductions
International Society for Animal Genetics Conference
International Society of Chemical Ecology Meeting
International Symposium on Biological Control of Arthropods
International Symposium on Mycotoxins
Irrigation Show and Education Conference
Joint Experiment Station Section – Cooperative Extension Section-National Extension Directors and Administrators Meeting
Molecular and Cellular Biology of the Soybean Conference
National Small Farm Conference
North American Beekeeping Conference and Tradeshow
Pacific Branch American Entomological Society
Phytochemical Society of North America
Pittsburgh Conference on Analytical Chemistry and Applied Spectroscopy
Potato Association of America
Poultry Science Association Meeting
Society for Invertebrate Pathology Meeting
Society for Neuroscience Conference
Society for Nutrition Education Conference
Society for Range Management Meeting
Society of Nematologist/Organization of Nematologists of Tropical America
Soil & Water Conservation Society International Conference
Soil and Water Assessment Tool International Conference
Soil Science Society of America Meeting
The Obesity Society Meeting
United Fresh
United States Animal Health Association Meeting
Weed Science Society of America Meeting
Western Section of the American Society of Animal Science
World Aqua Culture Conference
World Association for the Advancement of Veterinary Parasitology
World Congress of Soil Science
World Congress on Genetics Applied to Livestock Production
World Soybean Research Conference

Exhibit 12 – Lessons Learned

YRL Contract and Conference Approval Timeline and Lessons Learned 04 May 2016

LL = Lesson Learned

1. The idea of a Year of the Research Leader (YRL) began taking shape around August 2014.
2. The YRL conference planning team formed in OCT 2014 along with the details of the YRL planning requirements.
 - a. LL: Conference planning teams should be formed at least 12 months prior to the conference.
 - b. LL: The planning team included members of OA, Field, travel and BSC but the team should also include a rep from contracts and a rep from USDA OCFO (for situation awareness purposes: cost limit, correct forms...etc).
3. The team first searched for an adequate Federal facility.
 - a. USDA maintains a current list of Federal conference facilities, which the team used.
4. The team identified a DoD facility in Orlando, FL, but decided to pass on this option due to perception issues related to a conference in Orlando, FL, which is very resort like/is a major tourist attraction.
5. The YRL planning team looked into various cities based on weather in DEC, transportation cost and availability...and narrowed the list to:
 - a. New Orleans, LA
 - i. No advance team visitation due to familiarity
 - b. Atlanta, GA
 - i. Advance team visited the city
 - c. Charleston, SC
 - i. Advance team visited the city
6. The team determined that Atlanta was the best option based on
 - a. Per diem
 - b. Major airport
 - c. Public transportation
7. In FEB 2015, the team provided the requirements and city information to NCRBSC contracting office.
8. Mike Wiggett took the lead in finalizing the SOW and contract evaluation factors and the contract was awarded in May 2015.
 - a. LL: Attain USDA approval prior to contract award. Contracts can narrow down to the pending award winner and use the proposal data to submit the USDA conference approval package WITHOUT having an awarded contract. The proposal can be asked to be good for 60-90 days. Only sign a contract after the agency has USDA conference approval.
 - b. LL: Contracts under \$150K Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT) are mandated for small business set aside unless market research is done to state not available.
 - c. LL: Ensure the contractor is performing at least 51% of the services sought on the solicitation.
 - d. LL: Contract evaluation factors for conferences need to be tighter...(space, food, services, access to public transit and types of transit...a/v equipment...etc).
 - e. LL: Contract must tailor clauses. Don't use a generic template. APD to send out a memo to the procurement community.

9. *LL: Travel Trax is the official USDA system for travel costs. Only Janelle and Beth in FMAD have access to the system. Working to provide access and training to BSC's.*
10. *LL: Update the conference approval process and share*
11. *LL: Avoid 1st QTR for major conferences*
12. Examine the need to have a prime contractor between ARS and hotels in future similar events. Dealing with hotels directly will give us access to hotels' records. In this case, our ability to verify the number of resold room nights by Omni was limited.
13. Carefully review the prime contractor's proposal. In this case, Adeptness (the prime contractor) signed a contract on our behalf and agreed to pay the damages plus applicable taxes.
14. Analyze different scenarios and include plausible contingencies in future contracts. In this case, nothing was included that limits our ability to negotiate settlement cost.