

Government Attendance at Meetings

Background:

Following reports of lavish spending at a General Services Administration (GSA) conference in Las Vegas in 2010, Congress has held multiple hearings and introduced many different legislative proposals designed to curb government waste. In response to the initial scandal, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in 2012 introduced a new directive on travel and conference spending for all federal agencies (M-12-12). That memo sets funding restrictions for meetings and conferences at 70 percent of Fiscal Year 2010 levels; prohibits expenses in excess of \$500,000 for a government meeting and requires public reporting of all conference expenses in excess of \$100,000; and requires stringent approvals for federal employees seeking to attend outside conferences that are mission-critical for their own agency.

The restrictions on travel and conference spending have resulted in \$3 billion in savings by the federal government. They have also severely curtailed government employee attendance at association meetings and conferences across the country. Not only has this impacted associations' conference registration numbers, it has also cut off an important dialogue between the public and private sector and denied thousands of government workers access to continuing education, skills training and best practices for their profession. Additionally, federal agencies are spending millions of dollars just to comply with the onerous travel and conference paperwork requirements in the OMB directive.

Talking Points:

- Conferences provide skills training, best practices and updates on latest developments that are mutually beneficial to both government employees and their counterparts in the private sector.
- Technologies such as teleconferencing and video conferences often can't take the place of face-to-face meetings.
- At many federal agencies, conference review and approval processes have increased from a period of weeks to as long as 9 months.
- As one example, NIH spent \$14.6 million in 2014 to comply with travel paperwork – more than the agency spends researching Hodgkin's disease.
- The funding restrictions and paperwork requirements in the 2012 OMB memo expire at the end of Fiscal Year 2016. ASAE and the association community support changes to agency guidance that reduce the paperwork requirements for agency travel and attendance at association conferences.

Our Ask:

Federal workers' attendance at mission-related meetings and conferences has been drastically reduced since new rules on travel and conference spending went into effect in 2012. The agency guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is due to sunset at the end of Fiscal Year 2016. We ask that Congress not introduce any further legislation that prevents federal employees from attending mission-related association meetings and engaging in dialogue with their counterparts in the private sector.