Questions and Answers

HHS Policy on Use of Appropriated Funds for

Conferences and Meeting Space

(January 16, 2012)

1. **What is the OMB Memorandum M-11-35 “Eliminating Excess Conference Spending and Promoting Efficiency in Government”?**

On September 21, 2011, OMB issued its [memorandum](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-35.pdf) on “Eliminating Excess Conference Spending and Promoting Efficiency in Government” to heads of Executive Departments and Agencies. The purposes of the memorandum were to: (1) provide a status update of the actions taken to date by the Administration’s “Campaign to Cut Waste”; and (2) announce the Campaign’s current initiative to eliminate excessive spending on government sponsored conferences. To assist the Administration with this process, Departments were directed to conduct a thorough review of their current policies and controls governing conference-related activities and expenses to assess if there are measures in place to eliminate wasteful spending on conferences.

The January 3, 2012 policy on the use of appropriated funds for conferences and meeting space implements HHS’ policies and establishes its internal controls on this spending in accordance with the OMB memorandum as well as Executive Order on Promoting Efficient Spending ([EO 13589](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/09/executive-order-promoting-efficient-spending)), which informs agencies to make all appropriate efforts to conduct business and host or sponsor conferences in space controlled by the Federal Government, wherever practicable and cost effective.

1. **Does this policy apply only to “discretionary funds”?**

The policy applies to all new obligations and all funds appropriated by Congress (whether from an annual appropriation, multi-year appropriation, appropriated user fee, mandatory appropriation, gift funds, or reimbursements from such appropriations, etc.).

1. **Does this policy apply to contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements that were awarded prior to January 3, 2012?**

This policy does not apply to any prior contract, grant, or cooperative agreement where funds had already been obligated prior to the policy. The policy would apply to the obligation of any additional funds after January 3, 2012, such as a new task order or option exercise under existing contracts or funded continuation of a grant.

1. **For co-sponsored conferences, do the approval and reporting requirements apply to HHS’ funded amount or the total of all sponsors?**

The requirements apply to the HHS funded amount.

1. **Does this policy apply to conferences sponsored or funded by other departments; agencies or organizations that HHS Federal employees are attending?**

No, the approval and reporting requirements do apply to conferences sponsored or funded by other departments; agencies or organizations that HHS Federal employees are attending.

1. **What steps should an OPDIV/STAFFDIV employee responsible for a meeting or conference take if approval has not been granted before the meeting or conference is due to begin?**

Since this approval is required prior to obligating any new funds, HHS’ agencies must take steps to ensure that it does not obligate funds until approval is received.

1. **How is the term “Conference” defined for the purposes of this policy?**
* A conference is a symposium, seminar, workshop, advisory committee meeting or any other organized and formal meeting, whether conducted face-to-face or via the Internet, where individuals assemble (or meet virtually) to exchange information and views or explore or clarify a defined subject, problem, or area of knowledge, whether or not a published report results from such meeting.
* A meeting where a gathering discusses general matters as part of a normal course of doing business is not considered a conference.
1. **Can you clarify the approval and reporting requirements?**

The following table assists in indicating when approval and reporting requirements apply:

| **Event Description** | **Approval Requirement** | **Reporting Requirement** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Meetings in Federal Space - No HHS Funds Required/Obligated | No | No |
| Meetings in Federal Space - HHS Funds Required/Obligated | No | No |
| Meetings in Non-Federal Space - No HHS Funds Required/Obligated | No | No |
| Meetings in Non-Federal Space - HHS Funds Required/Obligated | Yes | Yes |
| Conferences with no HHS-Funds obligated (other than Federal staff salaries and travel) | No | No |
| Conferences in Federal Space | Yes | Yes |
| Conferences in Non-Federal Space | Yes | Yes |
| Grants where Conferences are the Primary Purpose | Yes | Yes |
| Grants where Conferences are an Ancillary or Minor Part | No | No |

1. **Are Advisory Committee/Council Meetings, Peer Review Meetings, Evaluation Board or Panel Meetings, Boards of Scientific Council, Technical Assistance Meetings, or Grantee or Contract Kickoff Meetings considered conferences or meetings?**

These are considered meetings for the purpose of this policy.

1. **Does this policy apply to formal training?**

This policy does not apply to non-HHS funded conferences that HHS personnel attend as training, such as those that require a registration fee and would be approved using the SF-182, Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training, by the appropriate training official.

1. **Will policy be provided regarding required content, format, etc. of a conference approval request?**

A specific format will not be prescribed. Rather, each OPDIV and STAFFDIV is expected to implement internal policies and practices to: (1) ensure consistency across their organizations regarding the documentation and approval of requests to support a conference or acquire meeting/conference space when it requires the obligation of funds, and (2) meet the semi-annual reporting requirements addressed in the policy.

1. **May we change the format of the semi-annual report by having the data requested in the columns vs. rows, and the data for each conference / meeting space displayed across each row vs. down each column?**

Yes, this is an acceptable approach so long as the data elements shown in Attachment 1-A remain unchanged and in the same order. OPDIVs and STAFFDIVs may also add other data elements for their own internal purposes, but need not include them in the semi-annual reports.