

NASA Conference Tracking System



NCTS

User Guide

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1. Introduction

In recent years, Congress placed various requirements on NASA regarding conference-related expenditures and attendance. These included a \$5 million cap on expenditures associated with attendance at non-scientific/technical conferences in Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, and reports to Congress and the NASA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) on NASA's expenditures on conference attendance and conference sponsorship in FY 2008 and 2009. Congress also prohibited the Agency from sending more than 50 employees to any one foreign conference. While Congress has not repeated the cap or the formal reporting requirements in FY 2010, NASA continues to prepare reports on NASA-sponsored conference costs for internal management review. Congress's prohibition on sending more than 50 employees to a single foreign conference remains in force.

To accomplish the monitoring and reporting needed to meet Congress's requirements, NASA created the NASA Conference Tracking System (NCTS) to standardize monitoring and reporting of conference-related cost and attendance data across various systems Agency-wide. The web-enabled database, accessible by all NASA employees, assigns a unique Identifier (number/name) to each conference, facilitating tracking of associated costs and oversight of the foreign conference registration process.

2. Reportable Conferences and Use of NCTS

Initially, NCTS was used for all events meeting the definition of "conference" in NASA Interim Directive 9312.3 Now, NCTS is used only for events that meet that definition AND that are either "foreign" or "NASA-Sponsored."

The only Reportable Conferences – i.e., the only events for which you should use NCTS at all -- are events that meet NID 9312.3's definition of "conference"(see NID Section 4) AND that are either:

- ***Foreign Conferences (see NID Section 5), or***
- ***NASA-Sponsored Conferences (see NID Section 6).***

Do not use NCTS at all for events not meeting the above description.

The purpose of NCTS now is to enable NASA to adhere to the 50-person limit on NASA attendees at any one foreign conference, and to facilitate reporting of costs and other characteristics of NASA-sponsored conferences. For any other type of conference (i.e. domestic and/or non-NASA-sponsored conferences), simply make travel arrangements as you normally do; no special conference-related requirements apply and you should not use NCTS. (However, if your travel includes attending a conference (even if neither foreign nor NASA-sponsored), choose "conference" in the FedTraveler trip purpose pull-down menu.)

3. System Users and Functionality

The following are the three major categories of NCTS users:

“General Users:” Reportable Conference Attendees and Travel Preparers – The largest group of users are all NASA employees that attend reportable conferences, and their travel preparers. They use NCTS to obtain the unique conference identifier that must appear on all travel documents pertaining to reportable (i.e., NASA-sponsored or foreign) conferences. For foreign conferences, they also use NCTS to obtain “approval” that they are included within the 50-person limit for NASA attendance at a foreign conference.

General users search for reportable conferences that have already been entered; if they do not find the reportable conference in question, then depending on local Center procedures, they either ask their Center travel coordinator to enter the conference into NCTS or they enter it themselves (using an online input form as explained later in this guide) for possible inclusion in the database, subject to NCTS Moderator approval.

Travel Approvers – With regard to NCTS, travel approvers have the unique responsibility for registering prospective attendees of foreign conferences to a list maintained in NCTS. NCTS tracks the number of prospective attendees to ensure it never exceeds the Congressionally-imposed limit of 50 NASA employees at any one foreign conference. NCTS notifies travel approvers whether the prospective attendees the travel approver registered are within this limit. Travel approvers must ensure that the prospective foreign conference attendees whose names they submit are officially approved (via e-mail notice from NCTS) before allowing the completion and approval of their travel authorizations.

NCTS Moderator –manages the day-to-day operation of NCTS, approving the addition of conferences to the database, monitoring registration lists for foreign conferences under the guidance of the Office of External Relations (OER), and resolving any system- or process-related problems for users.

This user manual explains procedures for general users and travel approvers. Moderator procedures are discussed elsewhere.

General users can perform the following functions:

- **Record Search** – searching the NCTS database to find, for example, a particular conference by name, all conferences listed that will take place in a particular city, or all conferences occurring during a particular time period. Users search via a web-based form. Search results on any given results page are sortable by field.
- **Record Detail Review** – once a record is found, details of the conference are presented on a single page.

- **Add Conference Record** – to add a new conference to the NCTS database, users enter data (such as conference name, dates, city, etc.) on a web-based form at the NCTS website. The form is automatically submitted to the NCTS Moderator who reviews it for completeness and general reasonableness. The Moderator 1) approves the entry as a new database record, OR 2) follows up with the requestor for clarification or additional information, OR 3) declines to add the conference because it is not suitable. For instance, as the database now tracks only reportable (i.e., foreign or NASA-sponsored) conferences, it declines records submitted for non-NASA-sponsored, domestic conferences, even if all fields are filled out properly, because such events are not reportable. The system notifies the requestor of the decision via automatic email. If the conference is added to NCTS, the notification e-mail includes the NCTS Identifier (number/name).

Travel approvers use NCTS to ensure no more than 50 NASA employees are attend any single foreign conference.

- **Attendee Registration for Foreign Conferences:** At the NCTS international conference registration page, the travel approver searches as described above under “Record Search” for the conference that a prospective attendee wishes to attend. If the conference is not listed, the travel approver adds it as described above under “Add Conference Record.” Once the conference is in the database, the travel approver brings up its record via a search and clicks on “Details.”

In the NCTS foreign conference system, the “Details” page provides the usual conference information plus a “Request Approval” button. Clicking this button launches a form on which the travel approver inputs traveler and travel approver contact information. The form is automatically submitted. If the conference is likely to have few NASA attendees, the system immediately notifies the travel approver via email that the traveler is “approved.” If the conference is expected to have a large number of NASA attendees, the system may notify the travel approver via email that the traveler is in “Pending” status while decisions are made among OER officials and other NASA management regarding which persons should attend from NASA. The system ensures that no more than 50 NASA employees may be approved to attend a single foreign conference.

Note that “approval” means the traveler is entered into the system and the ceiling of 50 attendees has not been reached. It does not mean the traveler’s supervisor has approved his or her attendance; the traveler is still responsible for securing that approval.

4. Operating Procedures

This section provides step-by-step instructions for using the functions outlined above.

4.1. Search for a Conference

The search form (Figure 1) is the NCTS main page, <http://ncts.nasa.gov/ncts/user/index.jsp> This link is also available at the NASA Conference Resource Website. You may search any field to search the entire database. To see all conferences, simply click **Search**. To see only records in the database for conferences held within the United States, set the “Country” dropdown box value to “UNITED STATES” and click **Search**. To clear entries, click **Clear**.

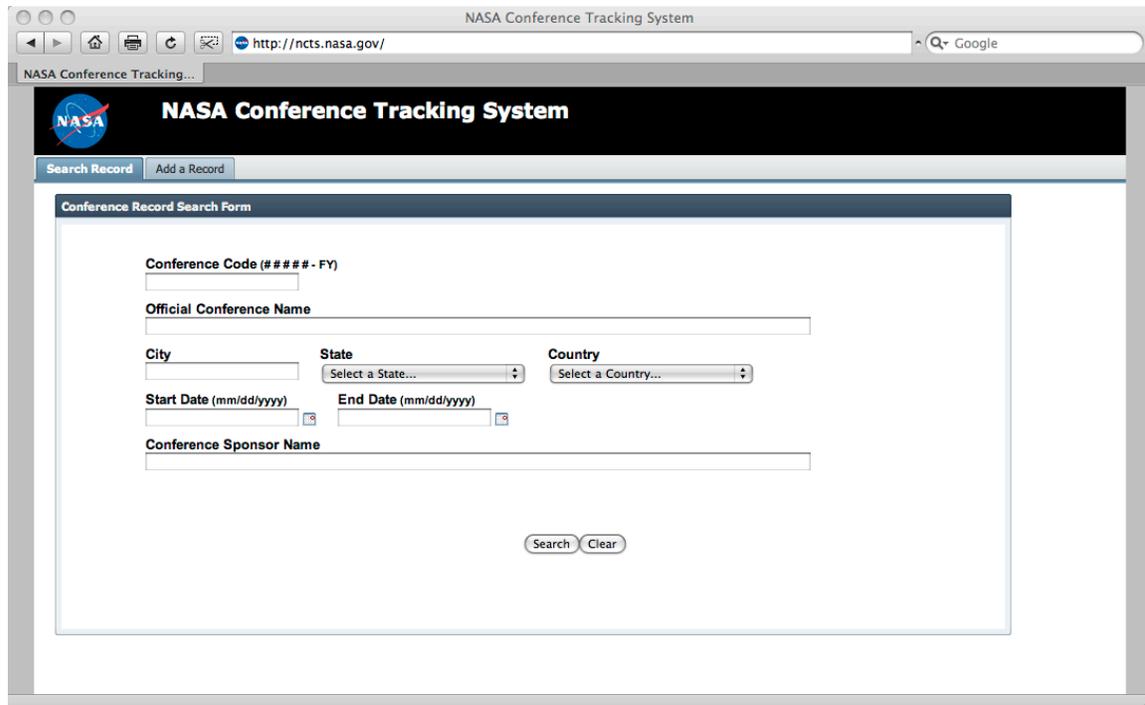
The image shows a screenshot of a web browser displaying the NASA Conference Tracking System search form. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'http://ncts.nasa.gov/'. The page title is 'NASA Conference Tracking System'. The search form is titled 'Conference Record Search Form' and contains several input fields: 'Conference Code (#### - FY)', 'Official Conference Name', 'City', 'State' (a dropdown menu with 'Select a State...' as the current selection), 'Country' (a dropdown menu with 'Select a Country...' as the current selection), 'Start Date (mm/dd/yyyy)', 'End Date (mm/dd/yyyy)', and 'Conference Sponsor Name'. At the bottom of the form are two buttons: 'Search' and 'Clear'.

Figure 1. NCTS Search Form

Once you press **Search**, the search results (Figure 2) appear. The number of returned records is displayed at the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. If additional records are returned, they are displayed on multiple pages, accessible by clicking the forward arrow at the bottom left-hand corner of the screen or by manually entering a page number to advance to a specific page. The results on a page can be sorted (descending or ascending) by any field by clicking on the field name in the header bar.

To customize how many fields are shown on the screen, click the right side of any field name. On the menu that appears, click on “Columns” to see fields to select or de-select. When you click outside of the list, the search results show only the fields selected.

To begin a new search after completing a search, scroll down the search results page. You will see a new search page which functions the same as the main search page.

If your search results don't include the conference you're seeking, it may have never been added. On the other hand, if you use a word or spelling that is not in the record, the search will not return the record. Therefore, if you are searching on the name of the conference, be exact: for example, does the conference title use the term "2nd" or "Second?" If you're not sure about the correct name or spelling, another effective technique is to search on "City," especially if the city is unusual (e.g., Rosemont or Valencia, but not Washington). Similarly, searching on either "Start Date" or "End Date" using a date that you know is within the span of the conference's scheduled dates, will usually bring up a relatively short list of conference that will include the conference you are seeking, if it has already been input to NCTS. If these search techniques do not yield the record you seek, it's probably not yet in the system and you need to request its addition. To do so, see Section 4.3 below.

The screenshot displays the NASA Conference Tracking System interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the NASA logo and the text "NASA Conference Tracking System". Below this, there are tabs for "Search Record" and "Add a Record". The main content area is titled "Search Results" and contains a table with the following data:

	Code/Official Conference Name	City	State	Country	Start Date	End Date	Sponsor Name	Reportable
View Details	10093-09 / 8th In2InThinking For...	Canoga Park	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	04/23/2...	04/28/2...	In2InThinking Ne...	Yes
View Details	10158-09 / NASA/ESA Conference o...	San Francisco	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	07/29/2...	08/01/2...	NASA/ESA	Yes
View Details	10195-10 / 8th USENIX Symposium ...	San Diego	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	12/08/2...	12/10/2...	UNIX Users Grou...	Yes
View Details	10040-10 / 25th Aerospace Testin...	Manhattan Be...	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	10/13/2...	10/15/2...	Aerospace Corpo...	Yes
View Details	10075-09 / Embedded Systems Conf...	San Jose	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	03/30/2...	04/03/2...	United Business M...	Yes
View Details	10179-09 / AIAA SPACE 2009 Confe...	Pasadena	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	09/14/2...	09/17/2...	American Institut...	Yes
View Details	10181-09 / Energy Conversion Con...	San Jose	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	09/20/2...	09/24/2...	Institute of Elec...	Yes
View Details	10186-10 / AIMS Harsh Environmen...	San Diego	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	10/05/2...	10/08/2...	Surface Mount Te...	Yes
View Details	10189-10 / 25th Aerospace Testin...	Manhattan Be...	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	10/13/2...	10/15/2...	Aerospace Corpo...	Yes
View Details	10009-09 / NASA/ESA Conference o...	San Francisco	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	07/29/2...	08/01/2...	NASA/ESA	Yes
View Details	10030-09 / AIAA SPACE 2009 Confe...	Pasadena	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	09/14/2...	09/17/2...	American Institut...	Yes
View Details	10032-09 / Energy Conversion Con...	San Jose	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STAT...	09/20/2...	09/24/2...	Institute of Elec...	Yes

Below the table, there is a "Conference Record Search Form" with the following fields:

- Conference Code (#### - FY):
- Official Conference Name:
- City:
- State:
- Country:
- Start Date (mm/dd/yyyy):
- End Date (mm/dd/yyyy):
- Conference Sponsor Name:

At the bottom of the form, there are "Search" and "Clear" buttons.

Figure 2. Search Results

4.2. View Conference Details

To view details for a specific record, simply click the blue “View Details” link next to the record line and the details screen will appear. (See Figure 3 for details screen.)

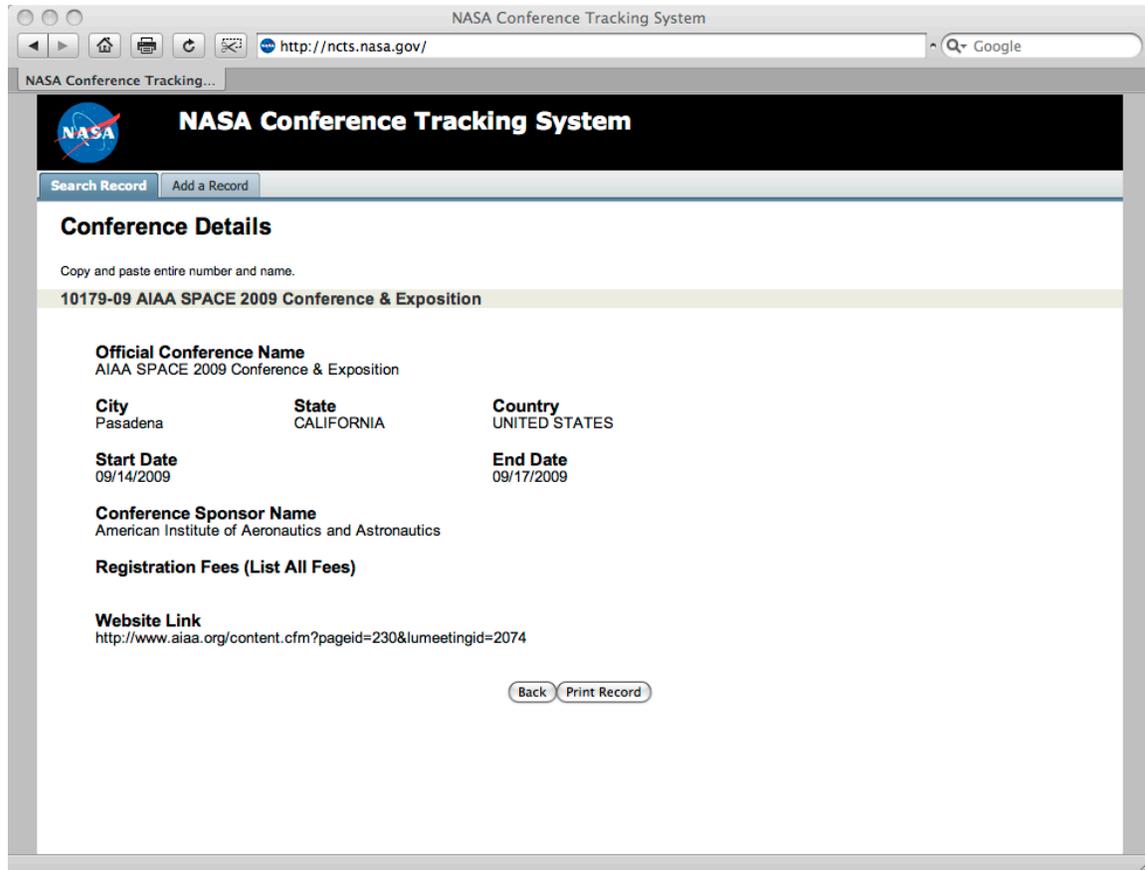


Figure 3. *Conference Record Details*

Notice the shaded conference code and name line at the top. This is the official NCTS identifier that must be added to travel documents for reportable conferences. Always use both the number and the name, in that order.

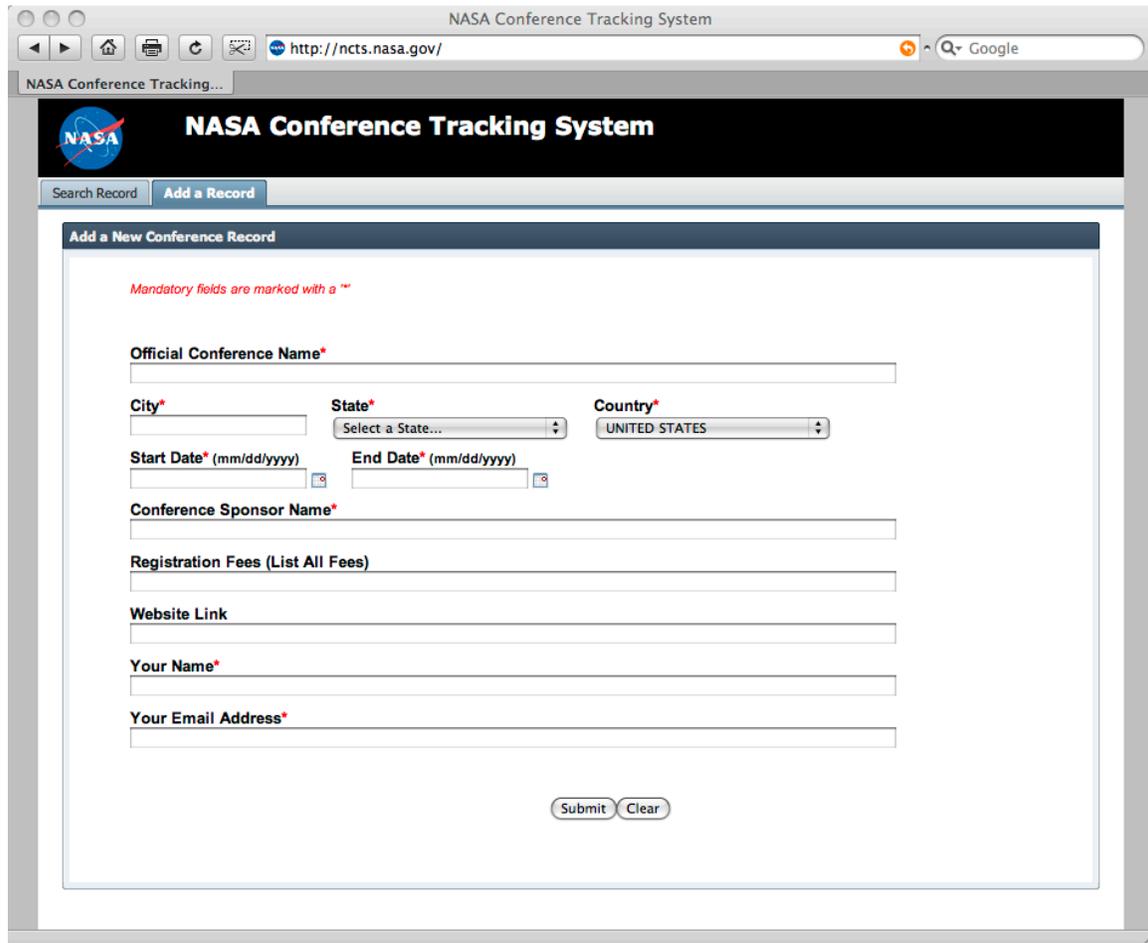
To print the record, click the **Print** button.

To return to the search results page, click the **Back** button.

To add a new record to the database, click on the “Add a Record” tab at the top of the screen. This will launch the “Add a New Conference Record” form.

4.3. Submit a New Conference

Clicking the “Add a Record” tab at the top of the Main Page (<http://ncts.nasa.gov/ncts/user/index.jsp>) will launch the “Add a New Conference Record” form (see Figure 4).



The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "NASA Conference Tracking System" with the URL <http://ncts.nasa.gov/>. The page features a NASA logo and a navigation bar with "Search Record" and "Add a Record" tabs. The "Add a Record" tab is active, displaying the "Add a New Conference Record" form. The form includes the following fields, all marked with a red asterisk to indicate they are mandatory:

- Official Conference Name*
- City*
- State* (dropdown menu with "Select a State..." text)
- Country* (dropdown menu with "UNITED STATES" text)
- Start Date* (mm/dd/yyyy) with a calendar icon
- End Date* (mm/dd/yyyy) with a calendar icon
- Conference Sponsor Name*
- Registration Fees (List All Fees)
- Website Link
- Your Name*
- Your Email Address*

At the bottom of the form, there are "Submit" and "Clear" buttons. A red note at the top of the form states: "Mandatory fields are marked with a '*'".

Figure 4. Add New Conference Record Form

To request the addition of a new conference in NCTS, enter data for each of the mandatory fields (marked with a red asterisk) EXCEPT “Scientific/Technical,” as this distinction is not needed for current NCTS purposes. Personal contact information is only used for correspondence with the NCTS Moderator (as necessary) and will not be visible to other users. Be sure to input the “official conference name” exactly as it is displayed most prominently on the conference’s website, with exactly the same spelling, so that when subsequent NCTS users search for the conference they will be able to find it. The NCTS Moderator will check to ensure all fields are complete and appear reasonable, but will not exhaustively vet your input; you are responsible for accuracy.

Once all data has been entered, submit it to the NCTS Moderator by clicking **Submit**. The Moderator will review the submission for completeness and reasonableness and ensure it is not a duplicate request before publishing it in NCTS. You will receive an automatic e-mail indicating whether or not the new record request was approved. If the record was added to the database, the new conference Identifier (number-name combination) will be in the e-mail. The new record will be visible to all users. If the Moderator receives two or more requests for the same conference, only one will be published. The rest of the requestors will receive a reference to the new record.

4.4. Submit a Foreign Conference Attendee to Registration List

NASA uses NCTS to avoid sending more than 50 employees to any single foreign conference, per Congressional direction. Travel approvers add the names of prospective foreign conference attendees to NCTS's online registration list to ensure the number of prospective attendees NASA-wide does not exceed 50. Note that having your name input to the list does not mean your supervisor has approved your attendance; you must still secure that approval yourself separately. What it does mean is that you are within the 50-person limit, so you will probably be able to attend as far as the 50-person limit is concerned. For most conferences, it will be clear at the outset that far fewer than 50 NASA employees will register to attend. In these cases, NCTS notifies the travel approver promptly that the traveler is "approved" with regard to the 50-person limit, and may proceed with travel arrangements. For conferences with a larger number of prospective attendees, however, prospective attendee names are placed in a "pending" status in NCTS until the final list of approved attendees is determined.

Important: Only those prospective attendees or their travel coordinators who have received official NCTS confirmation via e-mail may make travel arrangements or incur associated costs. Travel approvers who approve travel requests for foreign conferences without this approval are at risk of committing an Anti-Deficiency Act (ADA) violation.

To add a candidate to the registration list, travel approvers click <http://ncts.nasa.gov/ncts/user/index.jsp?user=ta>. This link, which is also available at the NASA Conference Reporting Website, is different than the link used for the other features discussed in this user manual.

The main page of the foreign conference site looks like the search form discussed in Section 4.1. To input a prospective attendee name, first find the conference the prospective attendee wishes to attend. If the conference is not yet in the database, the travel approver can add it in the same manner as discussed in Section 4.3. If the conference is in the database, click the "View Details" link to open the details page (see Figure 5).

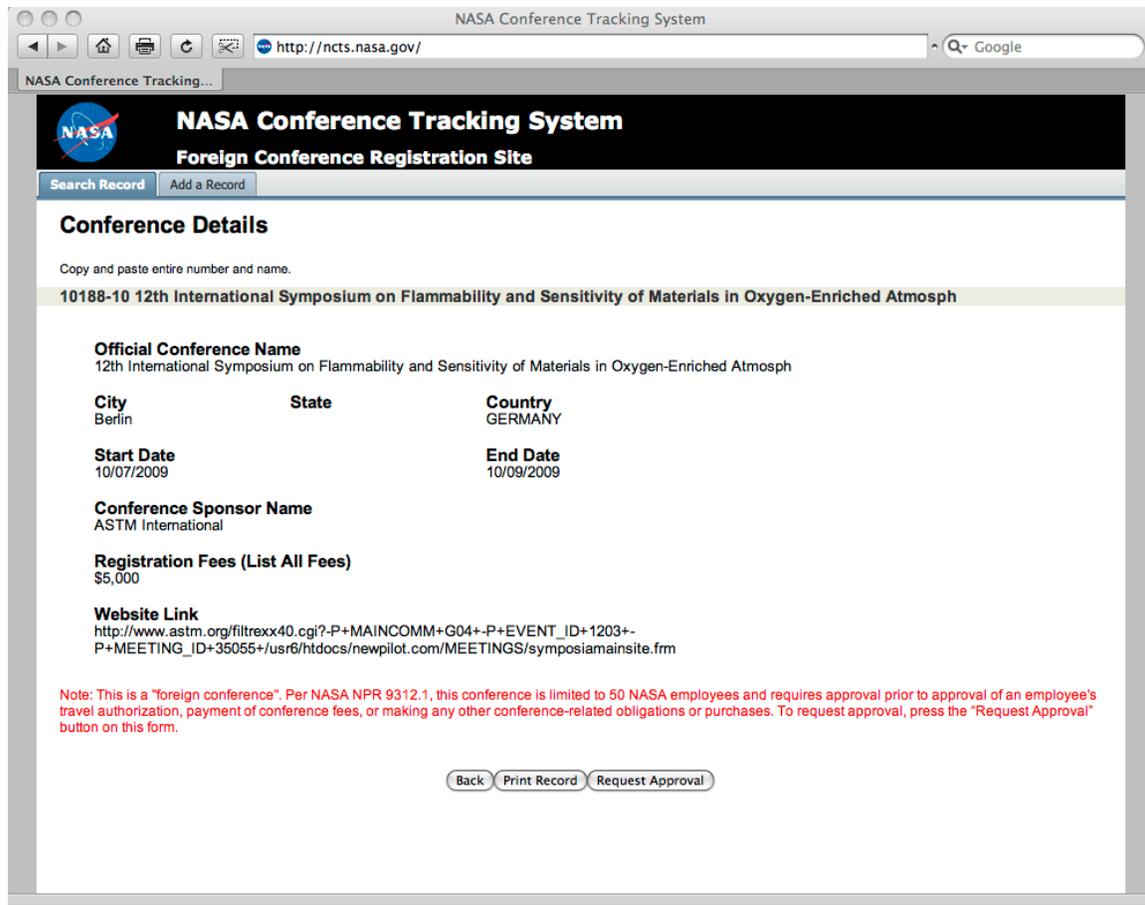


Figure 5. Foreign Conference Details and Approval Request

On the details page, click "Request Approval" to launch a form to add the prospective attendee to the conference registration list (see Figure 6). Complete all fields and click **Submit** button.

NASA Conference Tracking System
Foreign Conference Registration Site

Search Record Add a Record

Request Approval form for International Conference 10188-10 12th International Symposium on Flammability and Sensitivity of Materials in Oxygen-Enriched Atmosph

Mandatory fields are marked with a *

Attendee Name*

Attendee Email*

Attendee Phone Number* (###)-###-####

Business Justification For Attending Conference*

Requestor Name*

Requestor e-Mail Address*

Submit Clear Back

Figure 6. Foreign Conference Registration Form

In most cases, travel approvers will receive immediate approval via e-mail for the prospective attendee to proceed with travel documents and payments. However, for conferences likely to have a large number of NASA attendees, prospective attendees may be placed in “pending” status. When a final determination is made regarding who may attend from NASA, travel approvers for all pending records will be notified via e-mail. Travel approvers should keep all email notifications as evidence NCTS approval was secured before travel documents were approved.

For More Information

Visit the NASA Conference Resource Website:

<http://conference.nasa.gov>

**For Help Using NCTS,
Contact the NCTS Moderator**

NSSC-ContactCenter@nasa.gov